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Spaces of Quiet
Sustainability

Central-European Spaces of food self-provisioning and sharing

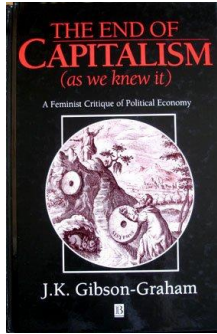
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- **Focus of the talk:**
 - 1. contrasting spaces of food production, distribution, and consumption
 - 2. exploration of subjectivity created and supported by spaces of food self-provisioning
- **Historical-political context: deep and complex crisis of modernity and its underlying logic - capitalism**
 - Application of modern science and reason resulted in long-term economic growth (since late 1800s)
 - At the same time, all positive inventions („revolutions“, such as industrial, green etc.) created negative „externalities“, or risks. (Ulrich Beck: risk society.)
 - Capitalist economy became dependent on economic growth
- **Nowhere is the crisis of capitalism more evident than in the modern, industrial production, distribution, and consumption of food.**
 - Food has become a political arena.

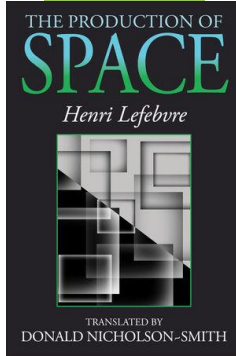
„The end of capitalism (as we knew it)“

- Modern economics (and other social sciences) domesticated a vision of capitalism as the sole provider of material needs. (Gibson-Graham: „capitalocentrism“)
- Such a vision is no longer sustainable
 - Due to risks created by modernity
 - Due limited resources
 - Due social and political conflicts stemming from the increased inequalities.
- The objective is a deconstruction of capitalism and its displacement from the position of the dominant economic and social system
 - Not replacement of the monoculture of capitalism by a new monoculture.
- In this talk: attention to relations between capitalist economy and its surroundings on the example of food.



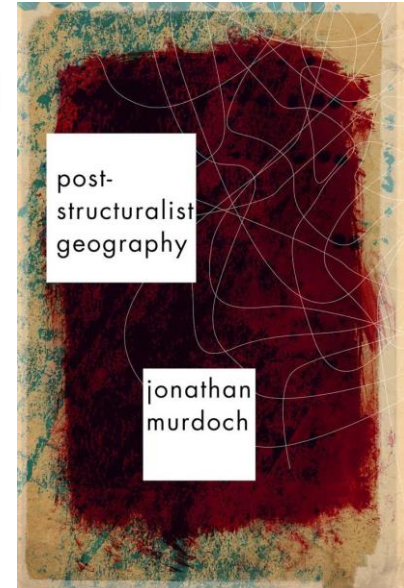
Production of space

- „Spatial turn“ in social sciences: space is no longer a passive arena, or a neutral frame, on which social, economic and political processes simply unfold.
 - Since Lefebvre, Foucault, de Certeau, Soja etc.
- Space is socially produced, through **social practices**:
 - Is dependent on context
 - De Certeau: „space is a practiced place“
 - Gillian Rose: space is brought into being through performativity – through the unfolding actions of people.
 - Space is always in the process of making, never finished (Massey)
- Space of capitalist economy is an example of a „representation of space“ (conceived, modern, scientific).
 - But outside it a variety of „spaces of representation“ (social spaces of lived interactions and meaning) is possible – and really exists.



Spaces of food (Jonathan Murdoch)

- **Space I: Established through modern industrialised production of standardised food**
 - Capitalist space of production, distribution and consumption.
 - Based, and developing, on principles of economic efficiency and profit.
 - Subject of technological and managerial innovations
 - Global
- **Space II: Diverse, non-standardised food spaces**
 - Rooted in local environmental conditions and culture.
 - Based on diverse motivations (both market and non-market).
 - Stemming from traditional practices.
 - Various localised spaces.



Space I: Standardised space



- Industrial food production: highly standardised, tightly controlled and regulated
 - Uniform products
- A network connecting natural resources, farmers, animals, controlling offices, retailers etc.
 - Creating global food network
 - Connecting places into global network of standardised norms and relations
 - Research units of multinational corporations serving as its „centres of calculation“ (Latour: ANT)
 - Bayer (Monsanto), Agrofert...

Space II: Diverse localised food spaces

- **Appreciating diversity of local food**
 - Diverse natural conditions, traditional cuisine, local culture
 - In opposition to standardisation (small local breweries vs. „Euro-beer“)
- **Creating diverse types of space**
 - Diverse spatial forms
 - No dominant „centre of calculation“
 - No global network
- **Stressing local culture and acknowledging/supporting connections to local ecosystem**
 - Supporting autonomy of individual actors within the local network
 - Supporting autonomy of individual networks



Practices in food spaces: distraction

- **Distraction:** typical for the global space of standardised food
- Attention of consumers distracted from food itself to other experiences
 - Price
 - Speed of preparation and service
 - Attractive and convenient arrangement of places where food is sold and consumed



Practices in food spaces: engagement

- **Engagement:** typical for diverse localised food spaces
 - Connection to food itself and its quality
 - Connection to spatiality of its production
- **Cultivation of „taste“**
 - Bodily/visceral ability to appreciate various aspects of quality of food
 - Physical as well as cultural experience (awareness of ecological relations of food production)
- Closely related to knowledge of culture and environment of the origin of food (incl. ways of production etc.)
 - And to appreciation of such knowledge.



Values in spaces of food

- Both types of food spaces are in opposition to each other
- However, they are closely connected at the same time
 - Most of us live in and co-create both types of food space
 - In the very different proportions.
- Spaces are shaping subjectivity of its actors
 - Performativity
- Space I is dominated by values of efficiency, rationality, profit, appreciation of central control, power, speed, consumption culture.
- Space II: central role of values of local culture, quality of food, spatial and ecological connections, knowledge of ways of production, responsibility, care.



Examples of localised food spaces

- **New „alternative“ localised food spaces**
 - Community supported agriculture, Farmers markets, Urban/community gardens, Slow food movement...
 - Often connected to social niche (young, urban, middle-class), activist
 - Number of people involved, and amount of food produced, in such spaces is relatively small
 - Extensively researched
- **More traditional localised food spaces: self-provisioning**
 - Home gardens, allotment gardens, weekend cottages...
 - Widespread (in terms of both social structure and geographical extension)
 - Extensive: large percentage of general population involved, significant amount of food produced
 - Quiet (non-activist)
 - Marginalised in food scholarship (until recently)

- What is the proportion of both types of food spaces in everyday food supply?
 - What proportion of food comes from global standardised space, and what proportion from diverse localised spaces?
- How do different practices (distraction – engagement) and different values embedded in food spaces influence subjectivity of participating actors?

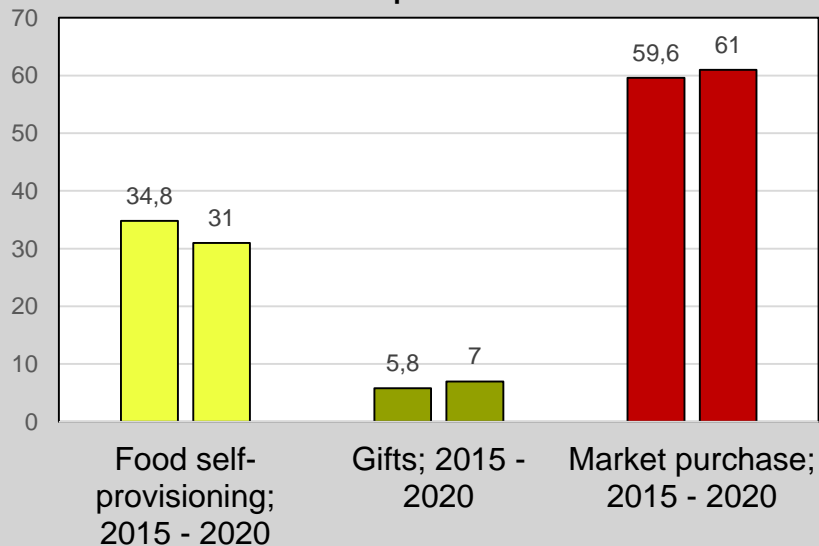


- **Quantitative surveys conducted among food self-provisioners**
 - Defined as households with access to a plot of agricultural land, who use that land for some food production
 - Food production is not the main source of their income (= farmers excluded)
 - Urban/community gardeners included (only 3 % of FSP in Austria and 1 % in Czech Republic)
- **Method: online questioning in the „panel“ of respondents defined on above criteria (CAWI method)**
- **Same method used and same questions asked in Austria and the Czech Republic**
 - Conducted by professional survey agency
 - During March – May 2020
 - Austria: N = 821
 - Czech Republic: N = 1037

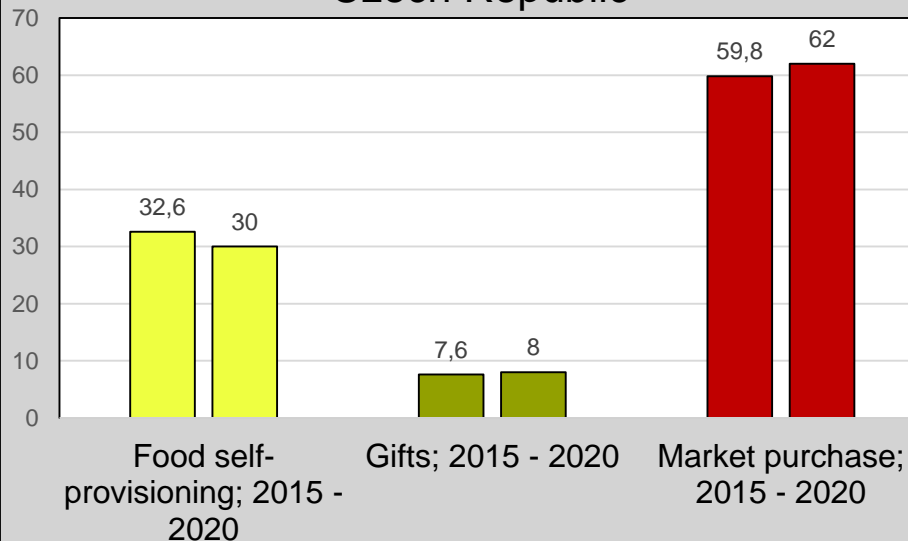
Participation in local spaces of food

- Percentage of households growing some food (farmers excluded), Czech Republic
 - 2015: 39,8 % of Czech households
 - 2020: 41,5 % of Czech households

Vegetables, FSP households, Czech Republic

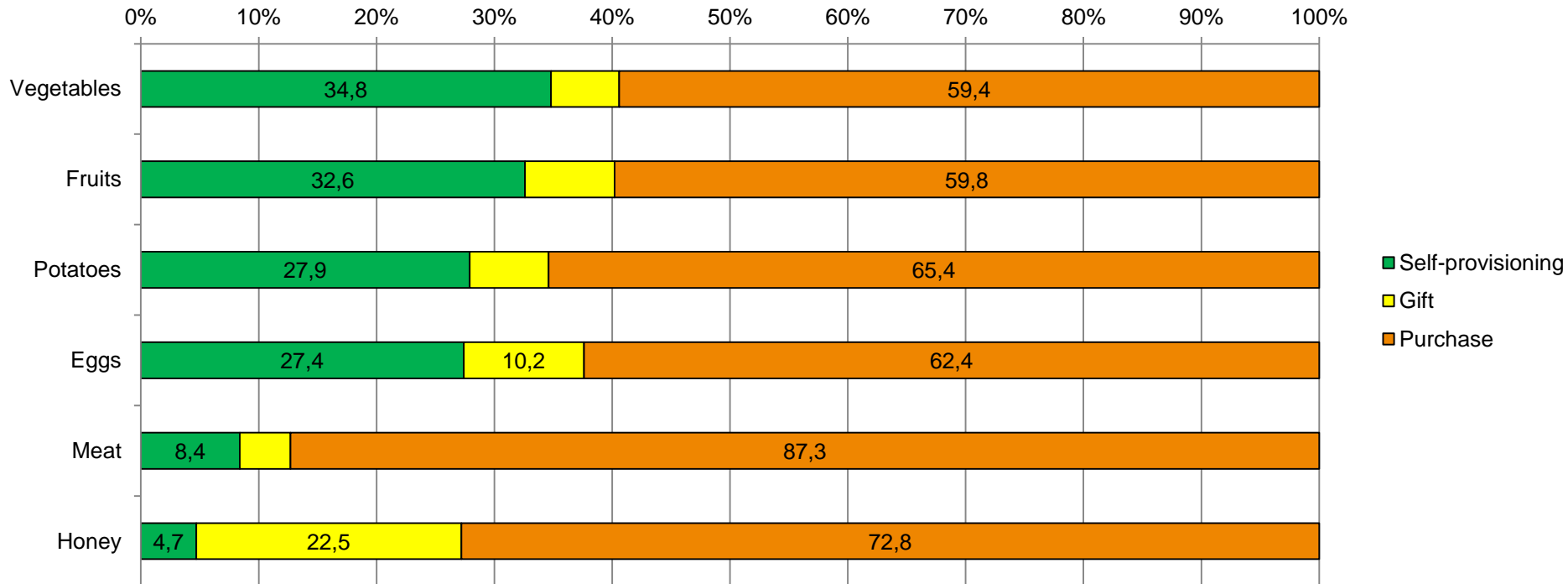


Fruits, FSP households, Czech Republic



Share of FSP on household consumption

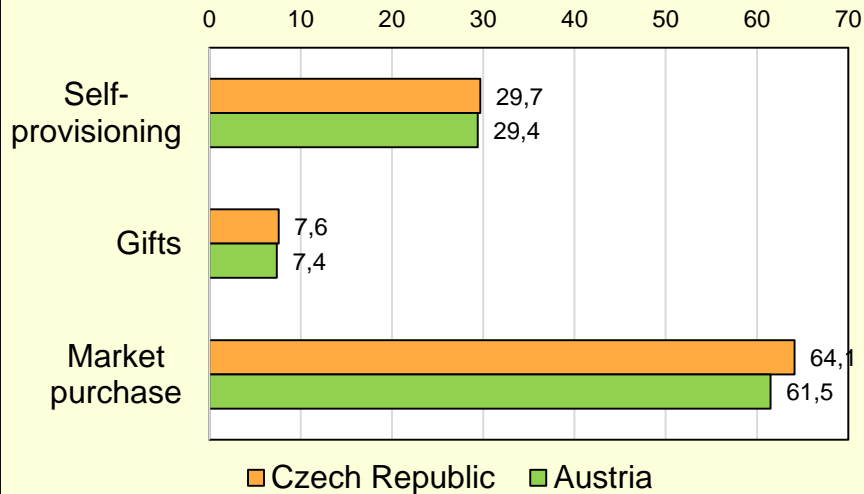
● Sources of selected items of food in FSP households, Czech Republic



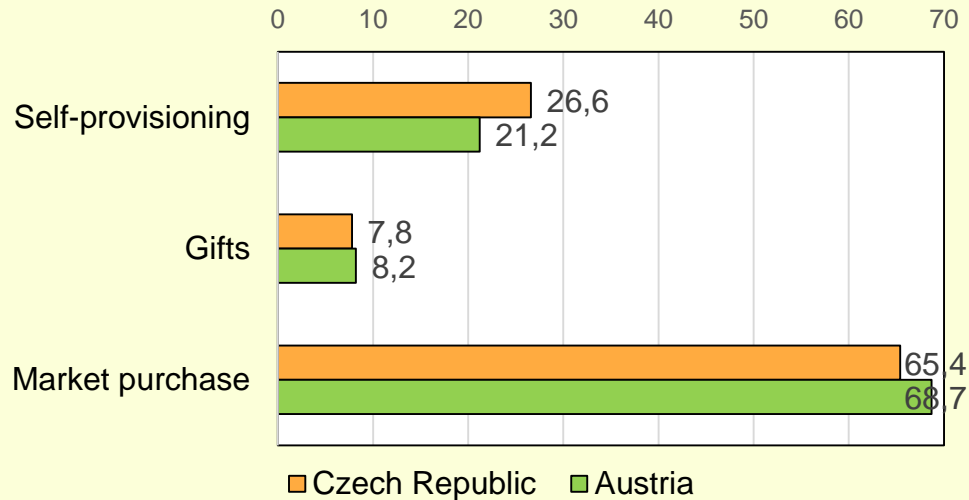
Reasons for food self-provisioning

- Localised food spaces (gardens) cover 1/3 of household consumption of vegetables and fruits
- Standardised spaces (market) cover 2/3 of household consumption
- Such a ratio is relatively stable in the long-term
- Small difference between Austria and the Czech Republic

Vegetables, FSP households, 2020

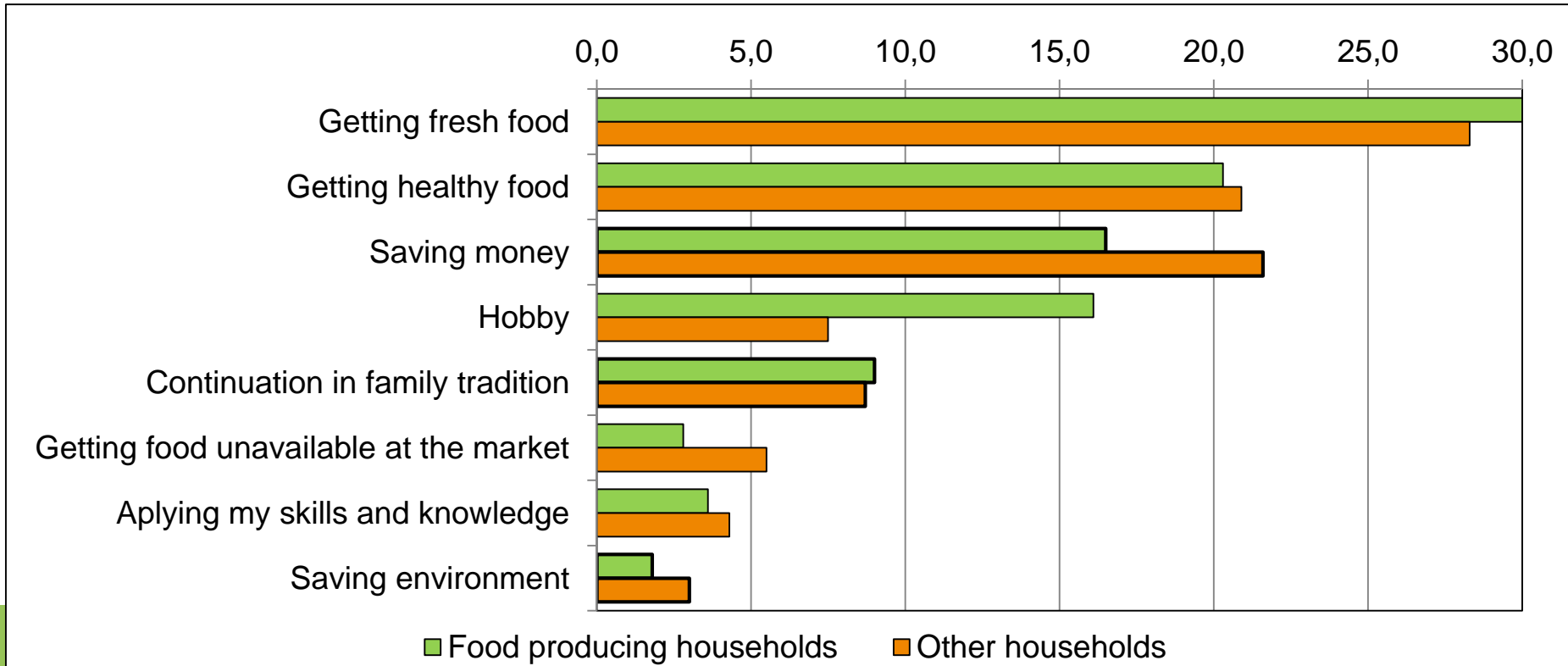


Fruits, FSP households, 2020



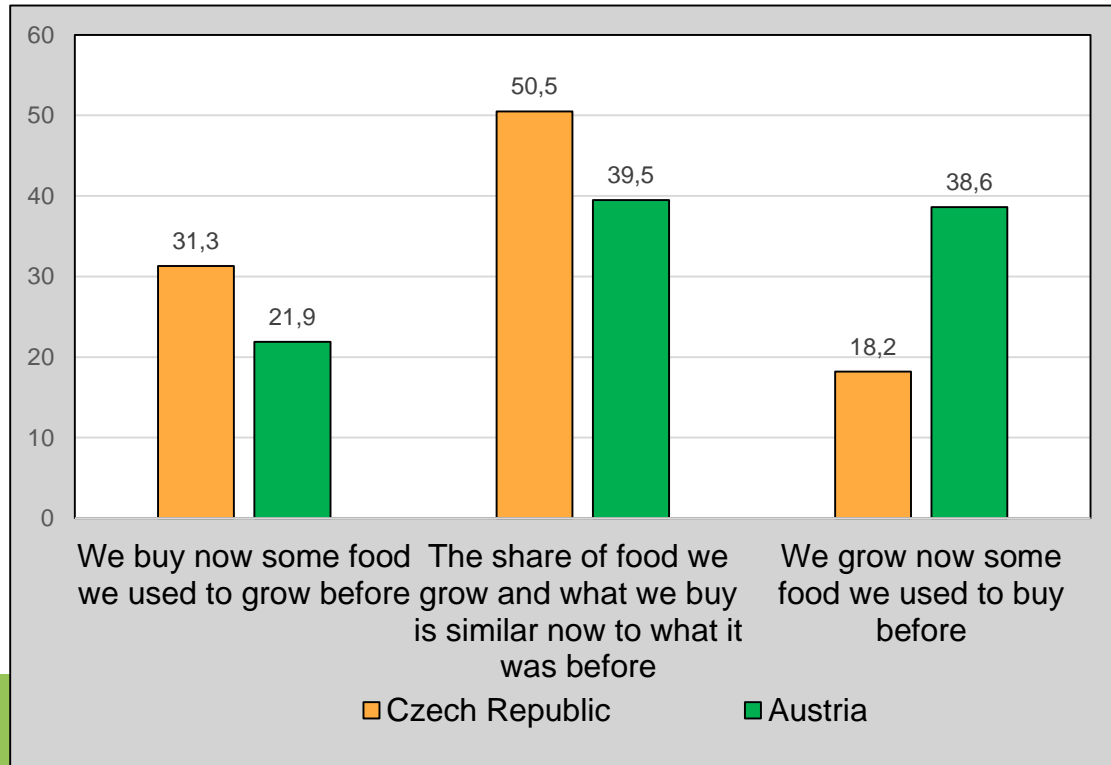
Reasons for food self-provisioning

- Participants were asked to select three most relevant reasons from the list of nine



Who are the „new“ self-provisioners?

- Survey Q: Compare food supply in your household now and 10 years ago
 - Survey participants aged 25+ only (N = 1125)



- Czech Republic: more households moved from localised (garden) food space to standardised (market) space
- Austria: movement in other direction prevailed
- Why?

Who are the „new“ self-provisioners?

- Rather young
 - 47 % of „new“ gardeners in Austria, and 46 % in Czechia, are aged 25 – 44 years
- No significant difference from other groups in terms of income or education
- They live typically in countryside or cities with 100 000+ inhabitants
 - They live less often in towns with population 5 000 to 99 0000 inhabitants
- Major motivation is production of **healthy food** (in both Austria and Czech Republic)
 - While for those moving from garden production to market supply it is fresh food.
- **Values** of „social influence“ and „power“ less important for „new“ self-provisioners (compared to those who move in the direction of market supply of food).

- Traditional food self-provisioning as an example of widespread and diverse localised spaces of food
- Stressing and supporting quality of food, local culture and environment in which they are rooted
 - Through „cultivation of taste“
 - Taste related to ecosystem and local culture (connection between experience and knowledge)
- Creating new types of relations between diverse actors of the food space (attention, mutual support and care more important than profit or competition)
 - Connecting consumers with ecosystems and cultures
 - Giving communities agency and power to shape their food spaces
 - Limiting risks inherent in modern global standardised food production
 - Opening opportunities for choice and for establishment of more-than-capitalist spaces.

- Global standardised food space remains dominant
- However, it is neither the only nor endlessly growing space
 - Economic, social, cultural, and increasingly political significance of diverse food spaces is greater than is their share on food supply in Austrian or Czech households.
 - Putting stress on quality of food, positive health effect, bodily experience and knowledge („cultivation of taste“) helps to transform spaces of food (toward more-than-capitalist spaces)
 - More so in Austria than in the Czech Republic
 - Creating opportunities for transformation of economic and social spaces in a more general sense.



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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION