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EVERYDAY URBANISM IN LITHUANIAN TOWNS: THE CASE OF OLD COMMUNITY GARDENS IN GRIGIŠKĖS AND PLUNGĖ

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Abstract. This paper examines old community gardens as an example of Everyday Urbanism in two small Lithuanian towns. While academic interest in newly created community gardens in Central and Eastern European countries is growing, old community gardens remain largely absent from academic discourse. To analyse the social and spatial factors essential to their development in Grigiškės and Plungė, scientific literature, statistical data and land use maps from socialist period master plans were used. Additionally, contemporary master plans and other urban planning documents were analysed, alongside interviews, to discuss the current context of old community gardens and explore their potential future trajectories. The results indicate that old community gardens were established during the socialist period, primarily due to the rural backgrounds of new urban residents. These gardens were created informally on vacant land next to blocks of flats, land that has remained undeveloped to this day due to multiple factors throughout the 20th and 21st centuries. Although they are not officially recognised, the future development of old community gardens in Grigiškės and Plungė may differ based on varying attitudes from local government and their specific locations. These gardens exemplify the diverse and informal nature of Everyday Urbanism, highlighting the need for a more flexible approach to their preservation and integration into urban planning.

Keywords: Everyday Urbanism, old community gardens, post-socialist town, urban informality, urban agriculture, community gardening.

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1. Introduction

Urban design and planning have traditionally focused on the physical structure of urban areas, often overlooking the rich social fabric within them (Mehrotra, 2005). Excluding community needs and perspectives from the design and planning process can lead to failed urban development projects, such as underused public spaces (Sinkienė et al., 2018). Despite major socio-economic, socio-cultural shifts in the last three decades in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries and their urban areas (Hlaváček et al., 2016; Kunc et al., 2014), including the democratization of urban planning and design processes (Prilenska et al., 2020), urban planners and policymakers in Lithuania and other Baltic countries, often struggle to effectively involve local residents in planning processes since the urban planning operates in mostly top-down hierarchy (Cirtautas, 2011). The importance of the bottom-up or informal planning is also noted by Jakaitis (2004, 2005). He argues that while civic engagement in Lithuania remains low, due to urban planning system, it is observed that community-based organisations (informal and formal – NGO's) tend to participate more actively in small scale planning. The recent examples from Lithuania (Jankauskaitė-Jurevičienė, 2022; Michelkevičė, 2021), Latvia and Estonia (Prilenska et al., 2020) depict cases in biggest urban areas where active local communities or artists activists influenced (successfully or less successfully) municipal efforts to modernise urban public spaces or develop infrastructural projects.

In response to similar challenges worldwide, associated with modernist planning paradigm (Alawadi et al., 2022; Devlin, 2017), several bottom-up urban planning and design concepts emerged in the latter half of the 20th century: Everyday Urbanism (Chase et al., 1999), Tactical Urbanism (Silva, 2016), DIY Urbanism (Talen, 2014), Guerilla Urbanism (Hou, 2020), Pop-up Urbanism (Fredericks et al., 2018). They all describe small scale bottom-up aims to change built environment, sometimes known as 'informal urbanism' (Mukhija & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2015). However, they differ in their degree of intentionality or 'consciousness' (Crawford, 2023). For instance, activities linked to Tactical Urbanism or DIY Urbanism, such as public art activism, are often deliberately aimed at challenging top-down planning system and are frequently led by community activists (Lavrinec, 2014; Talen, 2014). While Everyday Urbanism also critiques the top-down approach, it emphasises informal daily activities of urban residents

that naturally transform public spaces (Chase et al., 1999) and can be described as vernacular routines of everyday (Devlin, 2017). This inherent adaptability makes Everyday Urbanism particularly applicable to urban areas worldwide, including towns in Lithuania and other CEE countries.

Everyday Urbanism celebrates common, yet overlooked urban public spaces like streets, pavements, parking lots, squares and activities that they host like street vending, garage sales, street festivals and other forms of claiming public spaces. The concept also provides tools that could help to implement Everyday Urbanism in urban planning and design (Chase et al., 1999). This aligns with urban informality research in the Global North, which focuses on informal public activities often associated with disadvantaged, marginalised social groups, such as immigrants, and aims to better integrate these activities into urban planning and design policies (Hou, 2020; Mukhija & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2015).

One of the most prominent subjects of urban informality research in the Global North is community gardens (Devlin, 2017). While research on newly founded community gardens in CEE countries is growing (Poljak Istenič et al., 2023), little is known about old community gardens. In Lithuania, these gardens are sometimes referred to as 'gardens of grandmas' or more generally as *daržai* — vegetable gardens. They were created on vacant land near blocks of flats during the socialist era without any formal agreements, leaving their status unclear within today's urban planning framework. This is illustrated by the sporadic examples in Lithuanian media, where old community gardens are sometimes seen as an illegal land appropriation or aesthetic issue (Inytė, 2021; Motužienė, 2020; Ruibienė, 2023; Vasiliauskaitė-Dančenkovienė, 2020).

Amidst the rise of new bottom-up greening initiatives, such as community gardens led by community-based organizations, discussions about the sustainable urban development, the aim of the research is to bring the Everyday Urbanism in the case of old community gardens in Lithuania (particularly in Grigiškės and Plungė) as one of the instruments for more effective urban planning. Addressing this, the paper is structured around the following objectives: 1) To present the theoretical background of the concept of Everyday Urbanism and its relation to the phenomenon of community gardens, especially in CEE countries; 2) To overview the study areas, and the research methods used in the analysis; 3) Based on the scientific literature, statistical data and land use maps, to investigate the social and spatial factors that contributed to the establishment of community gardens during the socialist period and their continued existence over the decades; 4) To discuss the current status of these community gardens and their future trajectories in study areas, based on current master, other planning and strategic documents and expert interviews. Further recommendations are provided, highlighting their potential as examples of Everyday Urbanism within the urban planning policies of both towns.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Community gardens in CEE countries

A community garden has been described as a plot of land, often obtained through informal or non-legal ways in urban or peri-urban areas, dedicated to the cultivation of edible or decorative plants, where a group of people from the surrounding area is somehow involved in the management of the garden (Adams & Hardman, 2014; Tornaghi, 2019; Veen, 2015). The word 'community' does not always indicate the existing community itself but refers to the group of people who share the responsibility for the gardening work, collectively own the garden, or are involved in some other way (Veen, 2015). While community gardens have been perceived as a relatively new phenomenon in urban gardening research in CEE countries (Bende & Nagy, 2020; Bitušíková, 2016; Cepic et al., 2020; Hencelová et al., 2021; Poljak Istenič et al., 2023) and other Global North countries (Göttl & Penker, 2020; Pikner et al., 2020), various urban agriculture practices have existed since the establishment of the first settlements (Dobele & Zvirbule, 2020).

The perceived newness of community gardening is rooted in the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the first community gardens in the Western world. These gardens emerged in the USA during the 1960s and 1970s and have been growing worldwide ever since (Bende & Nagy, 2020; Ernwein, 2014). Their emergence and expansion are linked to grassroots movements addressing the negative consequences of deindustrialization, social polarization, land deprivation, environmental issues, and neoliberal policies (Bende & Nagy, 2020; Ernwein, 2014; Gulin Zrnić & Rubić, 2018; Poljak Istenič et al., 2023). In CEE countries, community gardens, as understood from a Western perspective, began to appear in the 2010s (Bende & Nagy, 2020; Bitušíková, 2016; Cepic et al., 2020; Hencelová et al., 2021; Poljak Istenič et al., 2023). These gardens are typically initiated and managed by community-based organizations, other NGOs, local activists, self-organised residents, or municipal governments (Bende & Nagy, 2020; Bitušíková, 2016; Hencelová et al., 2021; Gulin Zrnić & Rubić, 2018). Their primary goals include improving access to fresh and organic food, fostering connections with nature, encouraging social interactions among gardeners, strengthening community ties, promoting education, and reclaiming unused urban spaces (Bitušíková, 2016; Cepic et al., 2020; Poljak Istenič et al., 2023; Slavuj Borčić et al., 2016). Gardeners are often younger, hold university degrees and are employed (Bitušíková, 2016; Cepic et al., 2020; Hencelová et al., 2021; Slavuj Borčić et al., 2016).

Alongside these 'new' community gardens, other forms of urban agriculture exist in CEE countries. One of the most established forms is allotment gardens, which were created during the socialist period (Sovová & Krylová, 2019; Šiupšinskas et al., 2016). Interestingly, at the same time as allotment gardens were emerging in CEE countries and community gardens were gaining momentum in the West for other reasons, different nature community

gardens began to spring up in CEE countries as well. These gardens are referred to as 'old community gardens' (Slavuj Borčić et al., 2016), are also known as 'wild gardens' (Gulin Zrnić & Rubić, 2018), 'garden colonies' (Djokić et al., 2018), or 'self-acquired gardens' (Pikner et al., 2020). They started to appear spontaneously on unused land near newly built modernist blocks of flats or in other peripheral areas that remained undeveloped due to economic constraints or restrictions caused by the presence of infrastructural objects (Djokić et al., 2018; Gulin Zrnić & Rubić, 2018; Pikner et al., 2020; Slavuj Borčić et al., 2016). The driving force behind their emergence is closely linked to the rural backgrounds of gardeners, who sought to maintain agricultural traditions and practices (Djokić et al., 2018; Gulin Zrnić & Rubić, 2018; Slavuj Borčić et al., 2016). Additionally, their development can be attributed to frequent food shortages during that period (Poljak Istenič et al., 2023). Having been established 40–50 years ago, these community gardens are now typically managed by the older generation and remain mostly outside the scope of urban planning (Djokić et al., 2018; Gulin Zrnić & Rubić, 2018; Pikner et al., 2020; Slavuj Borčić et al., 2016).

2.2. Everyday Urbanism

The term 'urbanism' has been associated with a specific way of life found exclusively in urban areas. This perception is primarily attributed to Chicago School sociologist Louis Wirth and his famous essay 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' (Wirth, 1938). Based on empirical evidence, Wirth argued that urbanism is a phenomenon driven by social heterogeneity in cities. In line with this view, urbanism is often linked to academic disciplines and fields that study urban life and culture (Rogers, 2020). Today, urbanism is also frequently associated with disciplines related to the management of urban structures and communities. A prominent example is the concept of New Urbanism, which emphasises the role of urban design in promoting social cohesion (Kelbaugh, 2000). As such, urbanism is a broad field that combines multiple disciplines (Crawford, 1999a) and should be viewed more as an approach for analysing and understanding cities (Rogers, 2020). This ambiguity within the concept of urbanism corresponds the broader landscape of postmodern urban conditions, out of which Everyday Urbanism emerged.

In the second part of last century, Los Angeles (LA) and its region began to experience major socio-geographical changes that were fuelled by globalization, economical restructuring, and immigration. This led to an emergence of new urban structures (and centreless urban form in general), culturally, economically heterogenous society, political polarization in LA's region (Dear & Flusty, 1998). While such changes were evident worldwide, LA garnered particular attention, earning it the title 'the capital of the twentieth century' (Soja & Scott, 1986). Around 1980s and 1990s, the so-called LA School emerged, bringing together LA-based geographers and urbanists who theorised the region's urban dynamics. This school became closely associated with postmodern urbanism, a concept reflecting the complexities of contemporary urban areas (Dear & Flusty, 1998).

The concept of Everyday Urbanism reflects this particular interest in Los Angeles at the time and its urban dynamics. The notion was introduced in 1999 by John Chase, Margaret Crawford, and John Kaliski in the book 'Everyday Urbanism' (Chase et al., 1999). The book comprises a series of essays that highlight the richness of informal activities in Los Angeles and other urban areas across the United States, showcasing how these activities transform urban public spaces. It also provides examples and visions that demonstrate the potential integration of everyday life into urban design and planning. This envisioned synergy between everyday life and urban planning forms the foundation of Everyday Urbanism. The authors, dissatisfied with the prevailing urban planning and design framework, described as normative, hierarchical, and inattentive to the social dimension of cities, sought to challenge and rethink this approach. Influenced by French philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre, Guy Debord, and Michel de Certeau, Everyday Urbanism theorists argue that everyday life shapes the city and holds many hidden meanings. Often overlooked by urban planners, everyday life elements still can reclaimed. Echoing to the De Certeau (1984) idea that ordinary residents are mostly invisible and have their special use of urban spaces ('writers of the urban text'), Crawford (1999a) notes 'we have tried optimistically to focus on the other side of the equation — the possibility of reclaiming elements of the quotidian that have been hidden in the nooks and crannies of the urban environment. We have discovered these qualities in overlooked, marginal places, from streets and sidewalks to vacant lots and parks, from suburbia to the inner city'.

How can the vitality of everyday public life be localised within the urban landscape and incorporated or enriched in urban planning and design projects? Crawford (1999a, 2005) proposes three key principles: Everyday space, Refamiliarization, and Dialogism. Everyday space is the main pillar of Everyday Urbanism. According to Crawford (1999a) 'Everyday space delineates the place of the everyday public activity and stands in contrast of the realms of the home, the work and the institution'. On the surface, it seems like a very basic description of the public space. On the other hand, Crawford (1999b) views Everyday space as an in-between space where multiple experiences, meanings accumulate and shift during the time. This belief aligns with other authors (De Certeau, 1984; Soja, 1996) works, who viewed space as a social product which is beyond 'geometrical' or 'geographical' space definitions. These spaces often stand in contrast to official, planned, and frequently underutilised public spaces. For instance, Crawford (1999b) highlights activities such as garage sales and street vending in the Los Angeles area.

Refamiliarization occurs within everyday spaces. Using examples such as garage sales and street vending, Crawford (2005) argues that refamiliarization 'domesticates

urban space, making it more familiar, more like home. So, the urban environment, instead of being a relatively brutal and not very pleasant place, becomes more like the interior'. During garage sales, interior items are displayed outdoors, transforming the front yard into a transitional zone between private and public space (Crawford, 1999b). Similarly, informal street vendors, such as African Americans selling homemade crafts or Latino Americans selling clothing or home-prepared food appropriate marginal and overlooked places like parking lots, vacant plots and pavements by domesticating them (Crawford, 1999b, 2005).

Dialogism, on the other hand, challenges and seeks to replace the strict hierarchy in the design process where experts hold the highest authority. Everyday Urbanism aims to redistribute power from experts to ordinary people, emphasizing that 'design within everyday space must start with an understanding and acceptance of the life that takes place there' (Crawford, 1999a).

Although all the ideas related to Everyday Urbanism help engage with everyday life, the concept itself lacks a comprehensive theoretical framework. Instead, it should be viewed more as a flexible set of ideas and practices, suggesting that cities should be more viewed through an ethnographic lens (Crawford, 2008). This approach does not aim to transform the urban environment through master planning or large-scale projects. Rather, it focuses on small-scale interventions that address how everyday life can be better accommodated within the existing context. As Crawford (2005) states 'it is not intended to replace other urban design practices but to work along with, on top of, or after them. As a result, as a design approach, it is elusive and hard to characterise'. Due to its elusive nature, the concept has faced criticism for being more of a commentary or interpretation of city life rather than a drive for urban transformation (Speaks, 2005). Devlin (2017) argues that Everyday Urbanism lacks the capacity to address the underlying social, economic, and political factors that drive informal activities in cities. Furthermore, Kelbaugh (2000) suggests that Everyday Urbanism is more applicable to cities in the Global South, where economic disadvantage and weak governmental enforcement compel people to adapt to existing conditions. Nevertheless, Everyday Urbanism has become an established term for describing common urban places and activities, indicating its broader applicability worldwide (Crawford, 2008).

2.3. Community gardens as an Everyday space

Old community gardens, established on the peripheral land exemplify Everyday urbanism. First of all, and most importantly, they represent people ability and will to change their environment rather than adhering to official zoning or other urban planning requirements. Hence, relating to the concept of Everyday space, community gardens are viewed as a produced space, which adapt to various context and represent different meanings during the time (Djokić et al., 2018). Djokić et al. (2018) argue that, as they are mostly associated with the continuation of gardening traditions (rural identity) and are seen as places for socialization and recreation, community gardens can also become an important part of people's livelihoods during economic hardships. Not only flexibility, but temporality of the community gardens is also noted, which mostly arises from the uncertainty of the future public land use plans (Pikner et al., 2020). Old community gardens are also seen as Heterotopias (Slavuj Borčić et al., 2016). Heterotopias have been described as counter-sites that are 'represented, contested, and inverted' and distinguish itself from other spaces (Foucault, 1984). Slavuj Borčić et al. (2016) highlight that community gardens acted as pseudo-private spaces and rural idylls during the socialist period, opposing the prevailing paradigm. Now, community gardens can be seen as bottom-up initiatives that challenge neoliberal urban policies. This aligns with Foucault's (1984) second principle of Heterotopia, which states that the function of Heterotopia shifts over time and corresponds with Crawford's (1999b) idea of the Everyday space.

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Study area

Grigiškės and Plungė are both small towns with populations of approximately 10,000 and 17,000, respectively (Valstybės duomenų agentūra, 2021). Grigiškės, located in eastern Lithuania, has a unique administrative structure as it is the only town in Lithuania that lies within another city. It has been part of Vilnius since 2000 and forms one of Vilnius' 21 elderships. Plungė, situated in western Lithuania within the Samogitian cultural region, serves as the administrative centre of the Plungė District Municipality. Grigiškės, influenced by its integration into Lithuania's main urban area, and Plungė, functioning as a centre in semi-rural municipality, provide an opportunity to compare both towns' approaches to old community gardens.

Both towns experienced significant growth during the socialist period, primarily due to the establishment and expansion of industrial enterprises, mostly attracting people from rural areas. Grigiškės, a 'planned town' or 'new town', has origins dating back to the interwar period when a paper and paperboard factory was founded. This factory expanded extensively after World War II, remaining the town's primary industry. Between 1959 and 1989, the population of Grigiškės grew from around 2,500 (Centrinė statistikos valdyba..., 1962) to approximately 11,600 (Statistikos departamentas, 1991), due to an influx of factory workers. To house these workers, a completely new urban structure emerged, characterised by multi-story blocks of flats that continue to be the dominant form of housing for Grigiškės residents today. Plungė, meanwhile, has a much longer history, having been established several centuries ago. However, the most significant expansion also occurred during the socialist period, when its population rose from 8,000 in 1959 (Centrinė statistikos valdyba...,

Figure 1. Old community garden in Plungė (source: authors, based on Nacionalinė žemės tarnyba, 2024; VĮ Registrų centras, 2025)

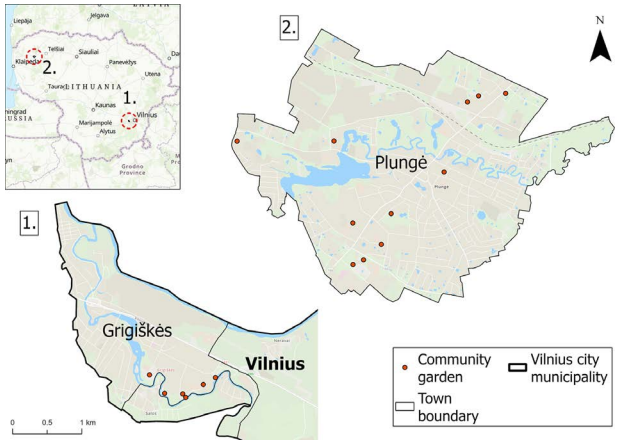


Figure 2. Analysed old community gardens in Grigiškės and Plungė (source: authors, based on VĮ Registrų centras, 2025)

1962) to 22,000 by 1989 (Statistikos departamentas, 1991). This growth was fuelled by the creation or expansion of various industrial enterprises, including factories for artificial leather, linen, construction, and crafts, among others. As in Grigiškės, this period of growth in Plungė led to the development of a new urban layout, shaped by socialist planning principles and designed to accommodate the expanding workforce.

While urban agriculture has been an integral part of towns and cities worldwide for centuries, this paper focuses only on the old community gardens, known as *daržai* in Lithuania, near blocks of flats that began to emerge in the 1960s, as they relate to the concept of Everyday space and Everyday Urbanism in general. This period marks a shift associated with industrialization, which began to separate agriculture from urban life. However, many urban residents continued to maintain their rural traditions through community gardens. Over their decades-long existence, the forms and meanings of these gardens have evolved, yet to this day, they remain unofficial public spaces providing multiple functions to society. The multidimensional nature of old community gardens is also evident in their location on municipal land, which, in most cases, has not been divided into land lots (Figure 1). In Lithuania, this phenomenon is often referred to as a 'space of no one' (Juškevičius et al., 2009), meaning that this public land is often neglected, which contributes to the marginalisation of old community gardens.

Considering these factors, a total of six community gardens were identified and analysed in Grigiškės and eleven in Plungė (Figure 2).

3.2. Methods

Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to gather data for this research. First, old community gardens were identified using orthophoto maps (Nacionalinė žemės tarnyba, 2024), alongside with non-participatory observation, which helped locate the remaining gardens. Non-participatory observation, conducted in the spring of 2023 in Plungė and in the autumn of 2023 and spring of 2024 in Grigiškės, provided insight into the character of these gardens and their spatial relationships with the surrounding areas. Multiple photographs were taken during this phase of the research (Figure 3). To analyse the social and spatial factors essential to the emergence and formation of old community gardens in Grigiškės and Plungė, scientific literature, statistical data and land use maps from the Grigiškės 1986 master plan (Miestų statybos projektavimo..., 1986) and the Plungė 1982 master plan were used (Miestų statybos projektavimo..., 1982).

To examine the current context of old community gardens and explore possible future trajectories, the current master plans of Vilnius (Vilniaus miesto savivaldybė, 2021) and Plungė (Plungės rajono savivaldybės..., 2024), along with other spatial and strategic urban planning documents, were analysed. Additionally, four expert interviews were conducted to gain further understanding. A semi-structured interview was held in Plungė with a specialist from the Architecture and Spatial Planning Department of the municipality, who has deep knowledge of the urban processes and planning context in a small town. In Grigiškės, a joint semi-structured interview was conducted with an elder of the Grigiškės eldership and the leader of a local community-based organization, as they work directly with the communities and the eldership is responsible for the maintenance of public spaces and other smaller tasks transferred from the main Vilnius municipality. Furthermore, two interviews: one structured and one semi-structured, were conducted with the co-leader of a new community garden in Vilnius and a specialist from the Urban Environment Department of Vilnius Municipality, respectively, to gain a broader understanding of the contemporary context of community gardening in Vilnius and Lithuania.

Note: Note the accompanying DIY greenhouses, a diverse mix of edible and ornamental plants – an example of refamiliarization in urban spaces.

Figure 3. Variety of *daržai* in Grigiškės (top) and Plungė (bottom) (source: authors)

4. Development of old community gardens in Grigiškės and Plungė

4.1. Soviet 'turbo-urbanization'

During the Soviet occupation period, urbanization progressed at a rapid pace (Butkus, 2013), sometimes referred to as 'turbo-urbanization' (Drėmaitė, 2018) to emphasise the scale of this transformation. In 1939, only 23 percent of Lithuania's population lived in urban areas (Polkaitė-Petkevičienė & Černiauskas, 2017). By the early 1970s, the country had reached a significant milestone, with half of the population residing in cities, marking Lithuania as an urbanised nation. By 1989, this figure had risen to 67 percent (Statistikos departamentas, 2001).

Urbanization was primarily driven by two major factors: the formation of collective farms in rural areas and large-scale industrialization programs (Račaitytė-Kučiauskienė, 2022). A key moment in this process occurred in 1964 with the approval of the Lithuanian urban and industrial development scheme. This scheme outlined the development of the urban system and the distribution of industrial enterprises (Drėmaitė, 2012). In addition to Lithuania's five largest cities, another five smaller towns were designated as significant industrial and regional centres, alongside other towns planned for industrial growth (Vanagas et al., 2002). This strategy aimed to slow the expansion of Lithuania's major cities by promoting balanced urban development across the country (Drėmaitė, 2012; Vanagas et al., 2002).

Grigiškės, a monofunctional urban-type settlement serving as a satellite to a paper and paperboard factory, and Plungė, a town with multiple industrial enterprises, both required a significant workforce. Between 1959 and 1989, the populations of Grigiškės and Plungė grew substantially, increasing by 4.5 and 2.6 times, respectively (Centrinė statistikos valdyba..., 1962; Statistikos departamentas, 1991). This rapid growth was primarily driven by immigration. For instance, in Grigiškės, the migration balance between 1975 and 1985 was 3,200 people, while in Plungė, the migration balance between 1971 and 1981 was 3,390 (Miestų statybos projektavimo..., 1982; Miestų statybos projektavimo..., 1986). The majority of these immigrants were young, contributing to a positive natural population change.

This forced urbanization aligns with what John Friedmann (2002) described as demographic and economic, but not sociocultural, since most urban residents were originally from rural areas and retained rural lifestyles. In CEE countries, old community and allotment gardens are often linked to the desire to preserve rural traditions (Djokić et al., 2018; Gulin Zrnić & Rubić, 2018; Slavuj Borčić et al.,

2016; Šiupšinskas et al., 2016). Sometimes, it is also linked to frequent shortages of food products (Poljak Istenič et al., 2023). The newly established urban residents were relatively socially homogeneous and more community-oriented, a characteristic also attributed to their rural background (Račaitytė-Kučiauskienė, 2022). It is argued that social homogeneity or social proximity facilitates activities related to Everyday Urbanism (Alawadi et al., 2022). Old community gardens can be seen as a result of this multilayered sociocultural context in which they emerged. Examples from Lithuanian media (Inytė, 2023), including case in Plungė (Naglienė, 2023), show that people often decided to cultivate community gardens together with their neighbours. Despite the fact that each gardener typically has an individual little plot, the origins of these gardens can be seen as deeply community driven.

4.2. Development of urban planning

Social factors play a vital role in facilitating Everyday Urbanism, but physical factors are important, as everyday public activities take place in specific places. Research has shown that old community gardens in other CEE countries have emerged on vacant land that remained undeveloped due to economic constraints or restrictions caused by the presence of infrastructural objects (Djokić et al., 2018; Gulin Zrnić & Rubić, 2018; Pikner et al., 2020; Slavuj Borčić et al., 2016). To better understand the spatial factors that may have influenced the emergence of community gardens, it is essential to examine the Soviet period master plans from Grigiškės and Plungė and why they weren't fully implemented.

In Soviet Lithuania, master plans were designed for a 20 to 30-year period and reflected modernist planning principles, characterised by single-use zoning (Tranavičiūtė, 2020). The last master plan of Grigiškės, officially called the general plan, was drafted in 1986 and followed these principles (Miestų statybos projektavimo..., 1986). The plan envisioned the town's development until 2005, estimating that its population would reach 11,000 by 1990 and around 13,000 by 2005. Intensive development was not planned, and it was even emphasised that 'population increase is very limited due to the physical constraints of surrounding areas. This provides a rare opportunity to create a functioning, completed settlement'.

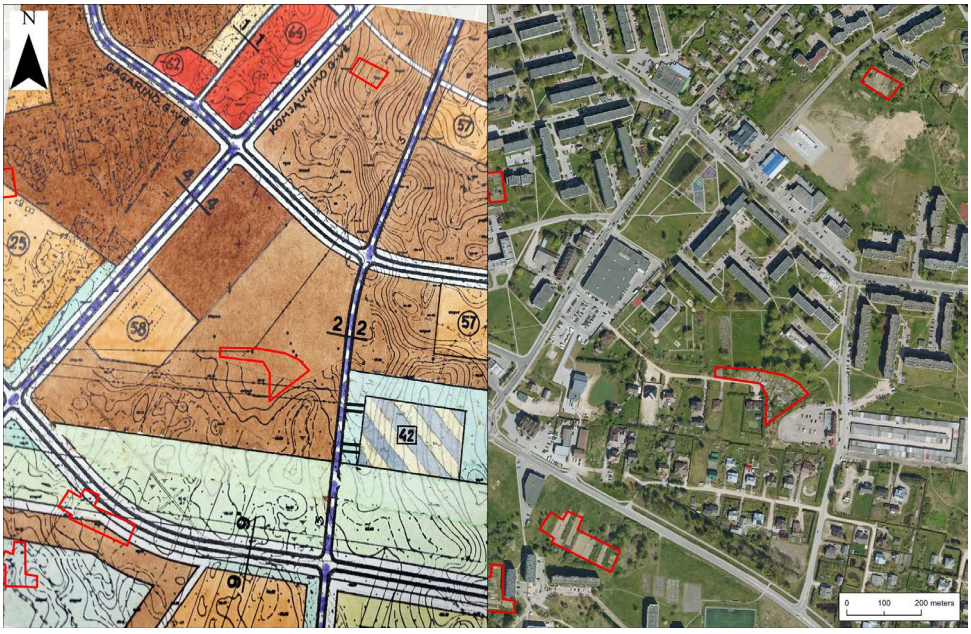
The most significant expansion was planned for the eastern part of Grigiškės, where the existing blocks of flats in the central part were projected to extend eastward, forming a fully developed district with educational institutions and a newly established town centre at its core. The Vokė river valley, where the majority of community gardens are now located (Figure 2), was not intended for construction due to geomorphological processes and environmental risks to the river. Instead, this area was designated as a buffer green space with planned pathways, squares, and parks.

Unlike in Grigiškės, the master plan of Plungė envisioned a more significant expansion of the town, at least in terms of built-up area (Miestų statybos projektavimo..., 1982). It was estimated that by 1985, the town would have 22,000 inhabitants, increasing to 23,000 by 1990 and around 27,000 by 2005. While the projected population growth was moderate, a large blocks of flats district with administrative, social services buildings was planned in the southern part of the town. Additionally, vast land plots were reserved further south for the future development of another residential district. The southern part is now the place for most community gardens (Figure 2). In contrast, the northern part of the town, where another cluster of community gardens is now located, was planned to remain its status quo, as it was a military zone, including its residential buildings.

Comparing the former master plans of Grigiškės and Plungė, two tendencies emerge: in Grigiškės, most old community gardens were established in the green spaces zone, whereas in Plungė, the majority were created in residential zones. This raises the question of why these master plans were never fully implemented which enabled the emergence of community gardens and their continued existence today. Four main reasons can be identified: 1) Political and socioeconomic transformations; 2) Changes in urban planning; 3) Presence of infrastructural objects; 4) Natural boundaries.

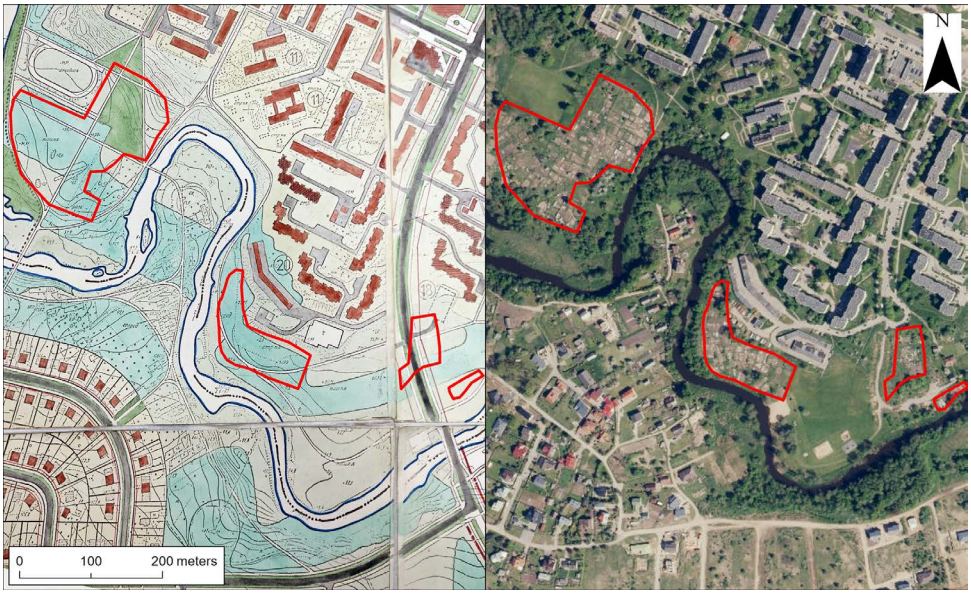
First of all, many projects were not completed or even started due to political and socioeconomic perturbations at the end of the 20th century. Lithuania gained independence from Soviet Union, economic system shifted drastically, country started to face population decline due to migration and negative natural change. Due to this context, many initial plans became irrelevant. Moreover, the new system brought different trends in urban development. For instance, the growing preference for single-family homes contributed to suburbanization (Juškevičius et al., 2009), including the transformation of allotment gardens into urbanised areas (Šiupšinskas et al., 2016). In the first two decades of Lithuania's independence, these shifts were not significantly constrained by master plans. While between 2004 and 2008, many Lithuanian towns, including Plungė, adopted new master plans (Juškevičius & Jauneikaitė, 2008), these plans were unsustainable as they continued to emphasise large-scale expansion despite the prevailing socioeconomic conditions (Juškevičius et al., 2009). The lack of a systemic nationwide urban planning policy was also noted by the interviewed specialist from Plungė. All of these factors likely contributed to the presence of large vacant areas in Plungė's residential districts, where community gardens are now located (Figure 4).

The presence of infrastructural objects may have also contributed to the emergence of community gardens in Plungė. For example, one community garden in a residential district appeared around 1984 because high-voltage transmission lines at the time restricted construction in the area (Figure 4) (Naglienė, 2023). Although these transmission lines were later removed, the community garden remained, likely due to the broader urban and



Note: Note the pale brown shows an already planned residential district, while areas outlined in brown are reserved for future residential development. Transmission lines slated for demolition are also included.

Figure 4. Old community gardens in southern Plungė (source: authors, based on Miestų statybos projektavimo..., 1982; Nacionalinė žemės tarnyba, 2024)



Note: Note the different shades of green – projected various green spaces.

Figure 5. Old community gardens in Grigiškės (source: authors, based on Miestų statybos projektavimo..., 1986; Nacionalinė žemės tarnyba, 2024)

socioeconomic changes mentioned earlier. Similarly, a major intersection of transmission lines is present above the northern community gardens. Another community garden, located in the western part of Plungė, may have emerged due to the presence of sewerage and water distribution infrastructure from the artificial leather factory, which limited construction in that area.

Finally, natural boundaries may have influenced the emergence of community gardens, especially in Grigiškės (Figure 5). The Vokė river valley was never intended for urbanization, allowing the green buffer zone to remain undeveloped and be appropriated by residents. Interestingly, according to the leader of a community-based organization in Grigiškės, the largest old community garden, located in a large meander of the Vokė River, was established around 1970 when workers from the paper and paperboard factory got informal permission to cultivate small vegetable gardens. This brings back to the roots of

Everyday Urbanism, suggesting that the most important factor in the emergence of old community gardens in Grigiškės and Plungė was the initiative of local communities, and their origins are highly complex.

5. Old community gardens in the context of contemporary urban planning

In Lithuania, in terms of urban agriculture, only allotment gardens are regulated by a special law (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2003). Community gardens do not fall under any specific legislation. However, in the law of green spaces, gardens are considered part of urban greenery (Lietuvos Respublikos Seimas, 2007), yet vegetable gardens are not mentioned. In this regard, community gardens are viewed as urban green spaces by the municipalities, and this approach can be seen in real examples.

The interviewed Vilnius city municipality, where community gardening is the most developed, specialist notes that communities can establish community gardens only within green spaces on public land, as outlined in the current Vilnius master plan. According to her, active efforts to promote community gardening began around 2018 when the city joined the URBACT program through the RU:RBAN project. Before this, only a couple of new community gardens existed in Vilnius, established in the 2010s, reflecting trends in other CEE countries (Mincytė et al., 2020). The project focused on promoting urban farming initiatives, leading to the development of a community gardening guide and the approval of official guidelines for community garden projects (Vilniaus miesto savivaldybė, 2019). Currently, Vilnius is participating in another URBACT project, COPE, which focuses on green transitioning, including climate change mitigation, climate neutrality, and the circular economy, while also fostering community engagement in related activities. According to her, community gardening is recognized as one of these activities, and the municipality has observed a growing interest from community-based organizations in establishing community gardens. Most commonly, communities seek to develop raised-bed gardening. Community gardens are also seen as one of the activities that represented Vilnius' European Green Capital 2025 status.

According to the community gardening guide (Vilniaus miesto savivaldybė, 2019), only formal community-based organizations and associations can establish community gardens in the green spaces. Furthermore, the municipality does not provide further financial support. Meanwhile, formal community status can help in the longer term. The interviewed co-leader of a new community garden in Vilnius stated that official status helps to secure financial assistance from the municipality, the national government, or the European Union. For example, in 2019, the association took part in Vilnius municipality's annual community project funding program, and it helped to establish the garden. The formal association status also comes with an additional duty, since the legal entity annually must provide financial report. Both interviewees also mentioned couple of successful private community gardening initiatives which are not restricted by the municipality.

The second-largest city, Kaunas, where another 'official' community garden exists, provides a different example. In the territory of an old military fortification, people have been community gardening for decades. Approximately 10 years ago, a community-based organization led by local activist was established, which, together with the municipality, co-manages the fortification's territory (Šimkutė & Lukošiūnaitė, 2018). This has helped to 'officialise' the community gardens, as they were on a cultural heritage site and their future was uncertain. The organization actively promotes community gardening, establishes new community garden plots, and carries out cultural and educational activities related to the community gardens and fortification, helping to revive the whole complex.

While new community gardens led by active community-based organizations and local activists, with the help of municipalities, are appearing in the main Lithuanian urban areas, the situation and future of old community gardens are unclear. Old community gardens lack formal management, meaning that they do not have representation at the municipal level. Their locations within master plans are also unclear, since they can be located not only in green areas. Case studies from Grigiškės and Plungė further discuss their trajectories.

5.1. Diverging trajectories? Community gardens in Grigiškės and Plungė

While Grigiškės old community gardens do not figure in spatial planning documents or other jurisdiction, Grigiškės eldership administration views community gardening as a valuable activity that positively contributes to residents' leisure, particularly for the older generation, who may not engage in other activities. It is also seen as an expression of creativity, as people often enclose their plots or build small greenhouses using DIY materials (Figure 6). The eldership avoids interfering with community gardening, offering only minimal support through groundskeeping around the gardens, and perceives it as a natural activity that do not interfere with other urban activities. Old community gardens are even emerging as a new aspect of Grigiškės' identity. For instance, the town has begun implementing an art project featuring street murals on multistory residential buildings. One such mural, depicting an elderly woman growing rhododendrons, serves as an introduction to the nearby community gardens. According to the elder, community gardening is a new phenomenon within Vilnius municipality and is expected to receive even more attention in the future. The both interviewees highlighted the activeness of formal and informal community-based organisations (e.g. groups from one block of flats) that participate in elderships or municipal projects to improve their built-up environment. This varies from sports fields to improving accessibility to the river. While community gardens remain out of scope of such efforts, with the

assumption that they are mostly cultivated by the older residents, they could benefit from active communal action in the town in the future. In order to promote community spirit, the importance of communal activities at schools was highlighted by the community-based organisation leader. Similarly, the same sentiment was expressed by the specialist from the Vilnius city municipality, who suggested that community gardens could benefit kindergartens that already have a large and diverse community.

Nevertheless, old community gardens in Vilnius have started to be acknowledged and their presence can still be 'officialised' in alternative ways. For example, an old community garden in Grigiškės has been incorporated into a new public space project (Vilniaus miesto savivaldybė, 2024). The planned space will feature a beach, playground, sports fields, an outdoor stage, and pathways along the river. Instead of being displaced, the old community garden will be preserved and integrated into the design. The existing pathway between the garden and the river will be paved, and stone stairs will be built to provide gardeners with easier access to water. This represents Everyday Urbanism principles as this project can be seen as dialogic, where already existing everyday space was appreciated and enriched with incorporating needs of other social groups. In Grigiškės, as it was in 1986 master plan, most old community gardens are still located in the green spaces zone, ensuring that these areas will remain undeveloped (Vilniaus miesto savivaldybė, 2021). However, many of these gardens occupy public land that is not divided into land lots. Even where land lots exist, they are not always legally designated as green spaces, meaning that future master plans could potentially change their function, though this remains unlikely. To ensure the long-term preservation of these spaces, it is important to formally

Figure 6. A variety of DIY objects in Grigiškės and Plungė old community gardens: a) a swan made from a tire (Plungė); b) an oven door as part of a greenhouse (Grigiškės); c) DIY fences (Grigiškės); d) a greenhouse (Plungė) (source: authors)

designate public land, as demonstrated in the public space project mentioned earlier.

Just like in Grigiškės, old community gardens in Plungė are not yet integrated into urban planning. Of the 11 analysed gardens, only two are in the green spaces zone, according to the town's new master plan (Plungės rajono savivaldybės..., 2024), though they occupy public land that has not been divided into parcels. The majority of old community gardens, however, are situated in multi-use residential zones. This could contribute to their decline, as the new master plan has shifted away from large-scale expansion and now prioritises renewal of the town centre, including the developing vacant land nearby. With Lithuania's economic situation improving significantly over the past decade, development projects have surged, leading to the disappearance of some old community gardens in Plungė (see 55°53'57.2"N, 21°49'54.3"E) (Google maps, 2025). A specialist interviewed on the matter also noted that community gardens could be recognised as green spaces, and communities or the administrators of residential buildings could inform the municipality about their plans to establish and maintain them. This would also benefit the municipality, as maintaining public spaces requires significant resources. However, during the preparation of the master plan, residents had the opportunity to propose the creation of legally designated green spaces, but no such requests were submitted. Most public input was focused on allocating more land for built-up areas. In general, the specialist noted a lack of civic engagement, attributing this to the absence of active community leaders and communal spirit in the town. For instance, the Plungė municipality organises an annual funding program for community initiatives, yet participation remains low, unlike in Grigiškės. Officials even have to convince residents to apply.

Community gardens (old and potential new) are seen as possible tools for fostering community engagement, particularly in the context of educational institutions (educational gardens) or group homes (therapeutic gardens). In these cases, even existing old community gardens could be incorporated. At the same time, the relevance of community gardens in a contemporary small town is being questioned. The specialist pointed out a shift in mentality from rural to more urban lifestyles, as well as the aging demographic of gardeners. He even suggested that community gardening is more suited to Vilnius, where communities tend to be more active and progressive.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Old community in Grigiškės and Plungė gardens were originally established informally by socially similar first-generation urban residents during the Soviet period on vacant land that remained undeveloped due to political and socioeconomic transformations, shifts in urban planning, the presence of infrastructure, and natural boundaries. The old community gardens in Grigiškės have a greater chance of remaining part of the urban fabric, as they are perceived as everyday activity on public land by the elder-ship, reflecting the Everyday Urbanism approach and their location within green spaces. Additionally, they may benefit from the growing interest in community gardening in Vilnius, particularly through initiatives led by community-based organizations that are supported by the municipal government. In contrast, community gardening in Plungė faces a higher risk of decline, as most old gardens are situated in multi-use residential zones, and there is little municipal involvement in supporting or integrating them into urban planning. Furthermore, in both towns, the aging population of gardeners must be considered as the significant factor influencing the future of these spaces.

To conclude, old community gardens have been for decades, acting as an unofficial public spaces – everyday spaces, yet their future mostly depends on their specific spatial context, indicating a need for greater flexibility concerning their status in modern urban planning framework.

Examples from other CEE countries also show that old community gardens are often perceived as spontaneous land appropriation and that are not integrated into urban planning policies. 'Spontaneous' urban gardening, frequently linked to urban informality, is sometimes considered outside the scope of urban planning, as it lacks a clear future development plan, has a limited impact on the broader urban population and receives counteraction from the municipality (Certomà, 2016). Partially it aligns with the Everyday Urbanism perspective, which acknowledges that informal activities cannot be entirely separated from top-down governance and the regulations and enforcement mechanisms associated with it (Crawford, 2008). While Everyday Urbanism can help to acknowledge, enrich or locate activities like community gardening in urban areas through principles of Everyday space, Dialogism and Refamiliarization, this raises questions about how such integration can be achieved in practice and the scope of these efforts.

Firstly, this can be made through the community-based organizations or associations that can initiate community gardens with support from local government, as seen in the cases of Vilnius, Kaunas and commonly observed in other CEE countries. While this governance type is still bottom-up, it can be described as semi-institutionalised, as local governments often provide support with specific objectives in mind, such as climate change mitigation or education for schoolchildren, primarily benefiting juridically defined organizations associated with the new community gardens. Additionally, this approach can lead to fully top-down managed community gardens, where the primary goals of community gardening may be forgotten (Gulin Zrnić & Rubić, 2018), standing in contrast to the main principles of Everyday Urbanism.

Old community gardens are often managed by older residents who may lack the proactivity necessary for effective engagement in a bottom-up urban planning context, particularly in small towns where cultural capital

may be less developed compared to larger urban areas (Jankauskaitė-Jurevičienė, 2022; Michelkevičė, 2021; Prilenska et al., 2020). This suggests that alternative ways should be considered to enhance their integration. Research has shown that these gardens can be recognised as part of urban green spaces, aligning with other studies that emphasise the need for such recognition and their inclusion in urban planning documents. Established 40–50 years ago, old community gardens have already become an integral part of the urban fabric in Grigiškės and Plungė, functioning as everyday spaces. This suggests that they do not necessarily require formal associations or other bureaucratic procedures to sustain them. Instead, a more flexible approach should be adopted, ensuring minimal yet essential municipal support through dialogic principles. One practical step can be the official formation and designation of land lots as green spaces where old community gardens already exist or the rezoning of areas within mixed-use zones to make them official green spaces.

This study aimed to shed light on the little-understood and understudied old community gardens. However, a more comprehensive understanding requires further in-depth research. Given the nature of Everyday Urbanism, it is essential to explore the internal dynamics of Lithuania's and other CEE's countries old community gardens, including their contemporary driving forces and internal management hierarchy. Such research could significantly contribute to the management of new community gardens and other green spaces in urban areas worldwide.

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