



## Transfer Report February 2023



### ***Dachas for Future* – the importance of the allotment gardeners in Sillamäe for a fossil-free future**

**Report on two transfer activities in Eastern  
Estonia**

Lilian Pungas & Judith Kiss

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**BMBF junior research group “Mentalities in flux: imaginaries and social structure in modern circular bio-based societies (flumen)”**

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The BMBF junior research group Mentalities in flux (flumen) combines sociological and historical research to explore how people’s mentalities change in post-fossil transformations and how this change is reflected in the employment structure of society.

Today, there is broad agreement that fossil fuels, due to their limited availability and damaging effects for the climate, will need to be phased out within the coming decades. One proposed alternative is the idea of a bioeconomy, in which raw materials and energy are gained from renewable sources of plant and animal origin.

But this implies more than just a shift to renewable resources. In fact, the whole way modern economies are organized will have to change: Fossil-fueled economies rely on a constantly accelerating linear throughput of materials, from extraction through production and distribution to consumption and waste disposal. In contrast, bio-based economies draw on materials and energy sources that regenerate cyclically. Their production cannot be increased at will, but is subject to the natural limitations of these circular flows of matter and energy.

The historical emergence of economies based on linear flows of fossil resources radically transformed human work and was closely linked to basic mindsets, attitudes and shared imaginations compatible with the logic of constant growth. These mentalities differ between social groups, and they will undergo far-reaching change once again in the transformation toward bio-based economies. In short, mentalities evolve in parallel with the transformations of societies’ material and energetic basis – they are: Mentalities in flux.

GEFÖRDERT VOM



## Short biographies

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## *Dachas for Future* – the importance of the allotment gardeners in Sillamäe for a fossil-free future



*Lilian Pungas (Photo: Hanna Lotta Kivi)*

On the 8th and 11th of September 2022, two public transfer events of the BMBF junior research group “Mentalities in Flux (flumen)”, based at Friedrich Schiller University Jena since 2019, took place in Sillamäe, Estonia. These events were organised mainly by Lilian Pungas, a researcher at flumen, and served the purpose of exchange between scholars and a non-scholastic audience.

The event focused on the dacha gardeners of Sillamäe, who, as interviewees, play an essential role in the research work of Lilian Pungas. The researcher approaches dachas as a practice of an agro-ecological circular economy and as a space in which the harsh effects of socio-economic crises can be cushioned. In particular, she is interested in the human-nature relationships and care practices of dacha gardeners, and their significance in times of socio-ecological transformation. From her point of view, the local expertise with transformations that people in East Estonia have already been part of should shape the new transformation processes. Lilian Pungas conducted almost 45 interviews with more than 65 relevant stakeholders, especially with allotment gardeners from dacha cooperatives around Sillamäe and Narva.

Both transfer events were organised by Lilian Pungas together with the Estonian scholars Saara Mildeberg and Annela Samuel from Tallinn University. The events included an information and discussion evening, a thematic exhibition vernissage on the 8th of September, and the Open Gardens’ Day on the 11th of September, which turned into a real celebration.

### **Summary of the transfer activities**

Scholars from Jena and Tallinn reported on their research interest in the Eastern Estonian city of Sillamäe and on the results of their work. During the two events that were attended by local residents, they emphasised the little perceived importance (and not only the academic significance) of the place, the people gardening there, and the differences and similarities to other urban gardening projects in Estonia.

The transfer activities were well received by the local population, who were especially grateful for the exchange with regional and national guests, and the various exhibition formats. The events offered the dacha gardeners the opportunity to discuss the meaning of gardening and noticeable changes among themselves as well as with external visitors. In addition, they reflected upon how their dacha culture is connected to other, also global development processes. Local residents were grateful for the inspiration that the events brought to their rather isolated town and felt like it opened up the community a little more to the outside.

The exchange with outsiders was also important for another reason. In these particularly difficult times, in which Russia's war against Ukraine creates strong tensions between the Estonian population and the Russian-speaking minority, it cannot be taken for granted that Sillamäe's population, composed mainly of Russian speakers, will come together with non-Russian speakers from Estonia or Western European countries. Therefore, the Estonian organisers and the russophone participants deserve the greatest credit for making this dialogue and exchange possible.

### **Why Estonia, why semi-subsistence farming, why Dachniki?**

Eastern Europe is an interesting and important case for the study of food sovereignty, agroecology and semi-subsistence farming, as between 30 and 60 per cent of the local population grows a significant amount of the food they consume, compared to, for example, 6 per cent in Denmark and 5 per cent in the Netherlands (Smith and Jehlička, 2013). Despite the initial stigmatisation of semi-subsistence farming as a mere "survival strategy for the poor", who struggle through economic crises by growing potatoes in their allotments (Seeth et al., 1998;), scholars have increasingly highlighted the wide range of other motives and benefits of this practice in almost all Central and Eastern European countries (Poland - Smith et al., 2015; Hungary - Balázs, 2016; Czech Republic - Sovová et al., 2021; Croatia - Ančić et al., 2019; Baltics - Mincyté, 2011, Aistara, 2015, Pungas, 2019; and Moldova - Piras, 2020). In addition to various beneficial aspects for mental and physical health - community cohesion and high quality food - these farming practices (which mostly encompass

a range of agroecological practices) have positive impacts on soil, biodiversity and more, thus serving as examples of “quiet sustainability” (Smith and Jehlička, 2013) and “quiet food sovereignty” (Visser et al., 2015). These practices are ‘quiet’ because they do not have an explicit political dimension, nor do the people involved strive for political visibility or raise political issues regarding the current agri-food system.



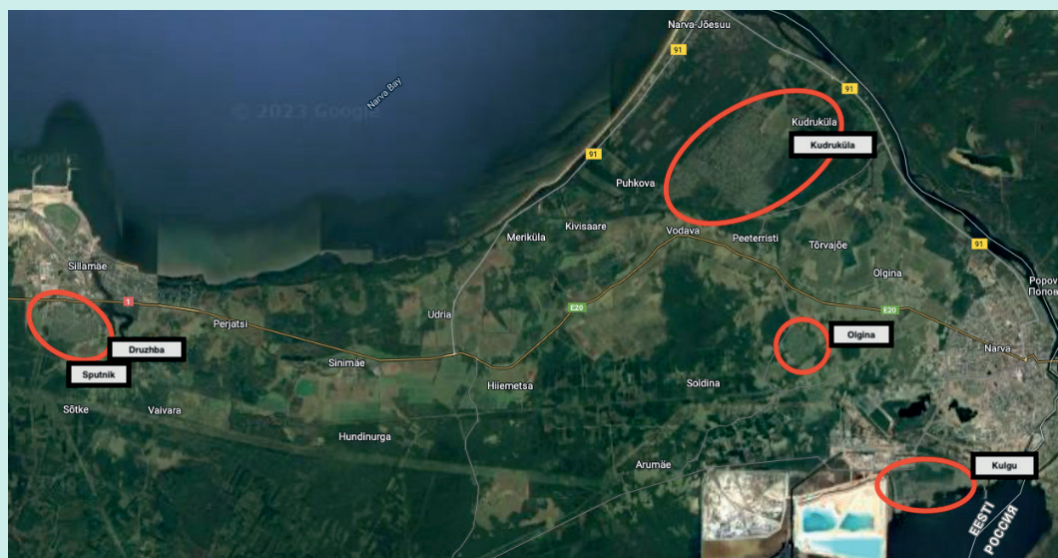
*Photos of dachas and a Plattenbau complex in Sillamäe (Photos: Lilian Pungas and Saara Mildeberg)*

## Dacha cooperatives in Eastern Estonia

The word *Dacha* originates from Russian (in Russian: дача) and refers to a plot of land with a seasonal allotment house used mainly for food production. Dachas are very common in most post-Soviet countries, including Estonia and they are normally located in the peri-urban areas, often surrounding (previously) industrial cities. People living in dachas are colloquially called *dachniki* (дачники). This term not only refers to the dacha dwellers but to a very distinctive lifestyle, as described by Stephen Lovell (2003) in “Summerfolk: A History of the Dacha, 1710-2000” or by Melissa Caldwell (2011) in “Dacha Idylls: Living Organically in Russia’s Countryside”.

The noun 'dacha', comes from verb 'davati' (in Russian: давать - to give) and originally refers to land allotted by the Russian tsar to his nobles. During Soviet era dachas resembled a lot to their Western counterparts - allotment, a piece of land allotted by the local government to the local inhabitants for gardening or growing vegetables for personal consumption. Gardening in such allotment gardens used to be a common practice also in Western Europe and North America during the industrial era's rapid urbanization, Great Depression in the 1930s, during both world wars (Liberty Gardens, Victory Gardens ‘Dig for Victory!’) and the economic recession in the 1970s (‘Inflation gardens’) yet has been dropping steadily ever since in numbers (e.g. 5-20 per cent in old EU15 member states in 2009). However, in post-Soviet countries it still remains a vivid practice, especially among the elderly.

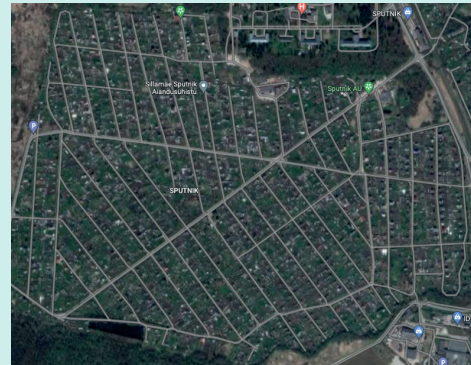
In Estonia, the biggest dacha areas are to be found in Eastern Estonia as most of the industry during Soviet era was located there. As early as the 1970s to 1980s, local fac-



*Satellite photos of Sillamäe in Eastern Estonia and its nearby dacha cooperatives whose territory is larger than the city Sillamäe itself*



tories and state-owned collective farms (kolkhozes) started giving their employees gardening plots on devalued state-owned land for gardening purposes. After the collapse of the USSR, most dacha gardens in Eastern Estonia were privatized in the 1990s and now belong to the members of the cooperative as a private property. The cooperatives are formally voluntary associations whose aim is to provide various services to its members that own the garden plots (e.g. ensure security and certain infrastructure such as roads, electricity, water etc.). Gardeners are invited to annual general meetings (AGM) and possess decision-making power in larger issues affecting the whole cooperative (one garden plot = one member = one vote). The legal term now is a ‘garden partnership/association’ (садовых товарищество in Russian). However, as gardeners commonly refer to the ‘garden partnership/association’ as cooperative, we also use this term. Estonia’s biggest garden cooperative Sputnik near Sillamäe with over 1100 members (see pictures below and on the page before) was the chosen location for our transfer event on the 11th of September 2021.



*Above left: Dacha in Sputnik cooperative (Photo: Lilian Pungas)*

*Above right: Satellite photo of Sputnik cooperative*

*Bottom left: Map of Sputnik cooperative (Photo: Lilian Pungas)*

*Bottom right: Vegetable patch in a dacha garden in Sputnik cooperative (Photo: Lilian Pungas)*

**O**n the evening of the 8th of September 2022, about 20 local and regional stakeholders from academia, city administration, art, press, and the civil population came together in the Sillamäe City Library to reflect upon the significance of the dachas in Sillamäe. It was an evening with a wide variety of impressions.

The photo exhibition was opened by the Finnish photographer Sanni Seppo. The exhibition and a photo catalogue showed pictures of gardens and their owners, which the artist had taken in two dacha settlements near Tartu. Especially the gardeners

from Sillamäe enjoyed the pictures very much. The exhibition offered them familiar but also new perspectives on everyday life in the dachas. The visitors compared the grown vegetables and fruit as well as the design and equipment of the gardens with those of their own gardens, and enjoyed the diversity of hobbies and habits of gardeners that Sanni Seppo had captured with her camera.



Above: Participants look at the photo catalogue of dachas in Estonia and Finland exhibited by photographer Sanni Seppo (Photo: Sillamäe Library).

Bottom left: Russian-language flyer of the event on the 8th of September

Bottom right: Lilian Pungas (centre) opens the discussion evening and the photo exhibition by Sanni Seppo (first from the left) together with the head of the library (Elviira Sidorova, 3rd from the right) and the city representative (1st from right) of Sillamäe (Photos: Sillamäe Library)

Afterwards, five short presentations shed light on the different perspectives from which scholars, activists and a local politician look at the dachas in Sillamäe, and what cultural and socio-ecological significance they ascribe to them.

**Saara Mildeberg**, photographer, ethnologist and cultural geographer at Tallinn University, is researching the potential of cultural tourism in Ida-Viru County. In 2021, she was one of the facilitators of the creative research project ‘Sillamäe Residency’: She rented a flat in Sillamäe for three months with colleagues, friends and artists to investigate the essential character of the place. What makes Sillamäe special? Is it a spa town, an industrial town, a truly Soviet town, a ‘closed’ town? Something completely different? To approach this questions,



*Saara Mildeberg (Photo: Lilian Pungas)*

she documented her impressions of the city in drawings and photographs, initially from the perspective of a critical tourist. The perceptions of tourists differ from those of locals: they stir up relationships, attitudes and landscapes, shedding light on connections and stories that may have been pushed aside. How do the different aspects and affordances of the town play out together? Which image of Sillamäe - a tranquil resort, industrial town, a Soviet ensemble - is emphasised to the visitor, how, and why? In addition to her creative research, Mildeberg has recently published an article documenting and analysing Sillamäe as a Soviet heritage and an emerging tourism destination.

**Annela Samuel**, documentary photographer and social work PhD student at the University of Tallinn, is conducting a documentary photo project on the experiences of older people in and with Sillamäe. The special feature of the older people living there is that almost none of them were born in Sillamäe. They are immigrants from the territorial areas of the former Soviet Union and have thus brought along their own views, feelings, symbols and interpretations that are now manifest in Sillamäe. From a scholastic point of view, Annela Samuel is interested in these interpretations and emotions, and she also strives to learn more about what preoccupies the older people, how they see certain things and how these views are shaped by their respective individual biographies, how locals perceive themselves, how outsiders perceive them. Her work is also about understanding how this community in Sillamäe, with its own interpretations, symbols and peculiarities, came into being, which influence it has on the society surrounding it, and the other way around.

**Bianka Plüschke-Altöf** is a sociologist at the University of Tallinn and focuses on the similarities and differences between the community gardens in Tallinn/Lasnamäe and

the dachas in Eastern Estonia. She recently published a book chapter on this topic with Lilian Pungas, in which both case studies were presented by the respective authors. Bianka Plüschke-Altof is particularly interested in why and in which form urban gardens emerge and develop in Tallinn. The new trend of urban gardening is part of a long tradition of gardening in Estonia. Since the beginning of the 20th century, dachas have been used by city dwellers for food supply (especially in times of crisis) and as summer residences. In the 1990s, the importance of dachas in Estonian society decreased more and more. Many traditional dachas disappeared, particularly in the cities, as they had to make way for new buildings and roads. For a long time, greening was not an issue in urban development. Since around 2010, however, urban gardening projects have become a trend. This new social attention is mainly due to the fact that politicians, especially in Tallinn, have increasingly brought urban gardening into the public eye - within the discussions about sustainable development and climate protection. The trend towards urban gardening can thus also be seen as a consequence of an increasing greening and urban climate policy (for example, Tallinn aimed to win the “Green Capital” award with its community gardens). Bianka Plüschke-Altof raises the issue why regional and city administrations do not treat dachas in a similar manner and promote them accordingly. Bianka Plüschke-Altof’s presentation made clear that Sillamäe’s dachas could and should play an important role in implementing Estonian greening and climate protection projects, similar to the growing importance of urban community gardens in Tallinn.



*Bianka Plüschke-Altof (Photo: Lilian Pungas)*

**Hardi Murula** works in the Ida-Viru Association of Local Authorities. Due to the climate crisis and its predictable negative consequences, there is a necessity to develop adaptation strategies. For Estonia, four scenarios were officially elaborated, demonstrating the potential directions in which the society could develop in the course of climate crisis. “Greater Tallinn” - this is the name of the most pessimistic scenario, which points to further increasing urbanisation in Estonia (around the capital Tallinn, while other regions suffer from ‘rural drain’) and is a trajectory for ‘business-as-usual’ strategy. According to Hardi Murula, an opposing scenario is “Estonia of eco-communities”, which is also the necessary and desirable scenario for Murula. In this scenario, dachas and the culture of gardening, self-provisioning and associated lifestyles are essential. In general, the importance of rural areas would increase, as this scenario envisages a deurbanisation of Estonia. The negative effects of possible crises (power cuts, energy shortages, shortages in food supply, etc.) could be better absorbed

### **Eastern Estonia and the socio-historical context of Ida-Viru**

Most Estonian dacha cooperatives are located in the Eastern Estonian county of Ida-Viru, where 85 per cent of the inhabitants belong to the Russian-speaking minority. Most of them were resettled there from thousands of kilometres away during the Soviet era between 1950 and 1970 to work in local industry (Raun, 1997, p. 336; Stat, 2021). After regaining independence in 1991, the Estonian government implemented rigorous neoliberal economic reforms that disproportionately affected the Russian-speaking minority in terms of unemployment and poverty (Pungas, 2017; Lauristin, 2003; Bohle, 2009). In an effort to ‘shake off the unwanted past’, Estonia’s political elite opted for a “complete break with the Soviet past and everything that resembles it” (Lauristin, 2003, p. 610), including socialist norms of equality and solidarity as well as political structures and financial reallocation mechanisms (Bohle, 2009; Lauristin and Vihalemm, 2009). This culminated in the so-called Citizenship Act in 1992, in which the local Russian minority lost their Estonian citizenship unless they could prove a certain level of Estonian language proficiency (Riigiteataja, 1992; Järve and Poleshcuk, 2019; Hughes, 2005). Against the backdrop of such socio-economic hardship and loss of social status and citizenship in the 1990s, dacha gardens played an essential role for many people. As early as the 1970s and 1980s, local factories and state collective farms (kolkhozes) began to offer garden plots on municipal wasteland to their employees to ensure food security and a more diverse food supply in a “shortage economy” (Kornai, 1980). As such, the dacha gardeners in Eastern Estonia can be characterized by challenging socio-economic biographies, wariness towards the (neoliberal/Estonian) state and at the same time with a high level of reliance towards the dacha gardens that provided an anchor throughout difficult times. Both the dacha gardening practice, and the informal networks of mutual aid within the garden cooperative, have been indispensable for dachniki in times of political and economic turmoil. By contrast, the formal infrastructures or state (aid) have rather brought along a massive disillusionment.

In 2020, Estonia still had about 70,000 stateless citizens, many of whom live in Eastern Estonia (BNS 2020). The reasons for this persistent statelessness are diverse and, as various scholars have shown, not ‘black and white’ (Vetik, 2012). What can be said with certainty, however, is that many ethnic Russians (or Russian-speaking Estonians) have perceived themselves to be ‘second-class citizens’ since the 1990s (Lauristin, 2003) and have lost their political trust to a considerable extent (Saar, 2007; Hallik, 2006). Particularly the elderly, who make up the majority of the Ida-Viru population, have seen their knowledge and practices devalued in the last decades of neoliberal transformation and nationalist framing, and distrust all politics. Russian state media has therefore always been a trusted source for Russian-speaking inhabitants, making the reporting on the war in Ukraine all the more polarising for Estonian society.

in and by dachas. The scenario “Estonia of eco-communities” would go hand in hand with a new, sufficiency-oriented lifestyle. In this sense, the dacha cooperatives, where the gardeners have the necessary know-how, are already a model for this ‘new life’. Due to their climate adaptation potential, dachas ought to receive more attention and appreciation. It would be appropriate, for example, to invest more funds, which are intended for climate resilience promotion in rural areas, in dacha cooperatives. In this way, dacha-typical (co-)living, self-provisioning and economic activities would be fostered. Cooperatives could strive for more autonomy and could therefore, for example, have resources such as water, renewable energy and other infrastructure at their disposal.



Hardi Murula (Photo: Lilian Pungas)

**Lilian Pungas**, a researcher in the flumen project at the University of Jena, is conducting research on dachas in Ida-Viru County as an example of agro-ecological circular economy and socio-economic resilience, as well as on the human-nature relationships and care practices prevalent among the gardeners. Her research interest is about which practices are best suited for a truly sustainable way of life. The practices in Eastern European dachas are unique and have so far not received much attention in the discourses about sustainability. If we look at food sovereignty, that is, the right and opportunities of people and social groups to provide themselves with sufficient, self-determined and healthy food, Estonia offers a promising picture. Ida-Viru county stands out in particular: it has the highest density of dachas per household in Estonia - in fact, every family has a garden or access to one. This becomes especially clear when looking at satellite images of Sillamäe. The area occupied by dachas exceeds the area built up for residential areas - which would be unthinkable in large Western European cities. Lilian Pungas also draws attention to the special nature of the pronounced care work provided by Sillamäe’s dacha gardeners. Different care dimensions play an important role when it comes to mentalities and ways of life in socio-ecological transformation processes towards circular bioeconomies.

Lilian Pungas presented three dimensions of the care work of dacha gardeners: the individual, the social and the ecological dimension. The ecological level - that is, the level of ‘taking care of nature’ - is especially about the nutrient cycle management in the dachas that is oriented towards ecology and natural cycles of more-than-human nature. This includes not only the composting practice, but also the fact that the

dacha gardeners produce humus-rich soil as well as organic fertilisers and pesticides themselves, and apply traditional knowledge for plant cultivation and maintenance.

The social dimension of care, the ‘looking after others’, includes gardeners caring for the well-being and health of their families, friends and acquaintances by providing them with fresh food or processed and preserved products from their dachas. Provisioning (stockpiling, preserving fruits and processing them into pastes, juice and the like, maintaining storage and cultivation areas, etc.) is also part of the social dimension of care work because it contributes to food security and well-being in times of winter or crisis.

Finally, the care work done by the dacha gardeners is equally important at the individual level: by gardening, the dacha owners also take care of themselves. Gardening helps them cope with stress, is beneficial to their health, has a psychotherapeutic effect and increases their sense of self-efficacy. With their care expertise, the dacha gardeners offer a pool of valuable knowledge, experiences and practices that could foster a socio-ecological transformation. At the same time, these practices also buffer up potential socio-economic negative effects (unemployment, material uncertainties, loss of status, etc.) while applying the principle of a circular economy. The gardeners do so without energy- and resource-intensive products and activities, and practise agro-ecological circular economies.

The presentations were followed by a **discussion with the audience – “Dachas and Urban Gardening - for whom and for what?”** The moderator and interpreter Jana Budkovskaja addressed various aspects from the presentations. She asked the gardeners among the audience whether they were aware of their importance for future-oriented, climate-friendly development. The gardeners answered with “no”. One participant added that she was only gardening for her own peace.



*Left: Jana Budkovskaja (on the left) and Lilian Pungas (Photo: Väike Pungas)  
Right: Judith Kiss (in the middle), project coordinator for flumen (Photo: Lilian Pungas)*



## Increasing polarisation in Estonia in the summer of 2022

Tensions in Estonia were almost omnipresent in the summer of 2022. The Russian-speaking minority in Estonia makes up around 28 to 30 per cent of the population. However, in the Eastern Estonian region between Narva and Sillamäe, where Lilian Pungas conducted the interviews and organised transfer events, the majority of residents is Russian-speaking. This applies both to those who moved to Estonia during the Soviet era (older generation) as well as to their children and grandchildren. Most people in the larger towns of the region speak Russian as their mother tongue and therefore are more inclined to consume Russian media, which may be one of the reasons why the opinions regarding the war in Ukraine vary extensively within Estonia, especially between ethnic Estonians and Russians. This polarisation increased ever since the Estonian government banned the broadcast of Russian TV channels in March 2022 (ERR, 2022). In addition, after months of debate, the Estonian government dismantled the war memorial of a tank T-34 close to the Estonian-Russian border



*Protest against the dismantling of the war memorial of a tank T-34 (Photo: Lilian Pungas)*

town of Narva in August 2022 due to the war in Ukraine (Henley, 2022). This has caused, among other things, unrest and further polarisation, as most residents in the region tend to support the war. Against this background, there was a justified fear on the part of the organisers that the transfer events would be overshadowed and dominated by these issues, so that a conversation between Russian gardeners, Western European or Estonian scholars and photographers would hardly be possible. Therefore, it was all the more important to

prepare the events with a lot of caution, to select 'neutral' interpreters and guests, and to focus on different formats of indoor and outdoor photography exhibitions, so that the topic of transfer activities (dachas and semi-subsistence agriculture in the region) would remain in focus in all conversations and debates via surrounding images.

When asked what gardening means to the people of Sillamäe, there were lively responses from the audience. The participants emphasised that gardening has two sides: On the one hand, it is exhausting and energy-consuming, but on the other hand, it is fulfilling and gratifying. In sum, gardening is worthwhile: because it is good for the gardeners, provides fresh and tasty food and because family and friends come together in the dachas. The dachas provide the gardeners with so many good vegetables and fruits that they often give away large quantities to people who do not have dachas. Some gardeners do not even realise themselves how tasty and special their harvested



produce is. The gardeners in the audience also noted that the function of the dachas is changing, especially for younger generations. Young dacha owners tend to design their gardens for stress relief and recreation: more lawns, the construction of a sauna and barbecue areas. However, many new dacha owners are not afraid to put their fingers straight in the soil and engage in exhausting physical labour. On the contrary, many of them are looking for just that.

The question of whether the dacha gardeners felt valued by society was answered with “yes” by those present. Although they had not thought about this question before, they said they felt appreciated, especially by the people who are familiar with gardening labour, but also by the people who are willing to pay a higher price for dacha products on the markets. Those who are unaware of the extent of hard labour in the dacha are also not able to appreciate their work as much.

The local people present were also asked how they felt about the interest of scholars in Sillamäe, its inhabitants and dacha gardening. The answers made clear that the participants were grateful for the interest, as the place and its (Russian-speaking) population received some visibility through the (research) interest from outside. They saw a



*Dacha gardeners from Sillamäe (Photo: Sillamäe Library)*

chance for the city to open up further. During the Soviet era, Sillamäe was a semi-closed city<sup>1</sup>, because it was an important location for the Soviet nuclear industry. Since Estonia's independence, Sillamäe is no longer a closed city. However, the predominantly Russian-speaking locals have remained involuntarily among themselves, as Sillamäe has hardly been able to attract strangers, visitors or tourists.

### **Summary of the evening event on the 8th of September**

The evening event made the significance of dachas in Estonia, which have barely been noticed by the public so far, impressively clear to all those present. Dachas hold a considerable potential for the local implementation of climate mitigation and adaptation strategies in Estonia. At the same time, gardeners in dachas cultivate practices that are essential for a socio-ecological transformation, for a path towards a fossil-free future or bio-based circular economy. These practices are characterised by sufficiency practices, agroecological land management, circular economy, as well as anticipatory harvesting and processing expectations that are adapted to natural cycles. They include important care 'services' to nature, the community and oneself that provide for care, health and security. Dachas as spaces of reurbanisation and food self-provisioning practice also contribute to the formation of 'Estonia of eco-communities', which is the focus of one (out of four) scenarios for a future Estonia. This scenario would not only be far more resilient to negative climate crisis impacts (such as energy or food shortages) than a highly urbanised society, but also promises the highest values of health, life satisfaction and social cohesion.

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<sup>1</sup> Sillamäe was a semi-closed town in the Soviet era, whose well-educated population had many advantages, but lived and worked in a 'sealed-off' town, due to the highly-secretive uranium-oxide mining and a uranium enrichment plant on site.

## Reflections by one of the organisers, Annela Samuel

I started my documentary photo project about Sillamäe 5 years ago, when there were even fewer Estonians in the city and everything seemed to be surrounded by an air of mystery. I didn't know any people in the city at that point, but through a filmmaker I knew, I immediately got in touch with people who led me to very different locals who were extremely open in sharing their experiences and life stories with me. In my doctoral studies, I conducted my own ethnographic research on the meaning of place in the experiences of elderly (second Covid-19 autumn). During this period, I also lived partly in Sillamäe with a local woman in an apartment where I had my own room. The Covid-19 pandemic had left a strong mark on the city, making it perhaps even more isolated, especially for the unvaccinated elderly residents. The war in Ukraine left yet another strong imprint.



*Annela Samuel (on the right; photo: unknown)*

I finished my fieldwork in Sillamäe in January 2022 and visited the city one week before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine

when tensions were already palpable, especially in the Ukrainian community. The most difficult period for me was the six-month period after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, when I had an exhibition opening in Sillamäe planned for March, and several other events. People in the city lived through it in different ways, but there is no doubt that this war was and is very difficult and for many people remains incomprehensible. It was also difficult for me to be impartial, not to take sides, not to condemn anyone, but I understood how necessary it was in order to continue a dialogue in this situation. On several occasions, I received calls from my acquaintances in Sillamäe, who were simply talking to get their own questions and pain about the war out of their heads. The biggest fear and challenge for me was whether I would dive too deeply into this community, into the personal lives of the residents of Sillamäe. Therefore, it was essential for me to regularly reflect on my own work with my supervisor and fellow PhD students.



*Visitors of the evening event organised by Annela Samuel (Photo: unknown)*

**O**n the 11th of September 2022 the **Open Gardens' Day** was celebrated. In the allotment garden cooperative Sputnik OÜ people opened their gardens to the interested public. As the special event had been widely advertised, many people from all over Estonia and occasionally even from abroad seized the opportunity to get to know the largest dacha cooperative in Estonia and the people behind it, in addition to the local population. PhD students Lilian Pungas, Annela Samuel and Saara Mildeberg implemented the festival with the support of the cooperative management of Sputnik OÜ and the Sillamäe Cultural Center. The visitors took part in a dacha excursion and gained insights into the mysterious world of dachas through personal conversations with the gardeners.

### Schedule:

- 11.00 - Opening of the day and market with Accordion player
- 11.45- Welcome speech (by the board of Sputnik and organisers)
- 12.00 - Band Ivuski
- 12.30 - Guided tour of Sputnik  
(Dacha excursion)
- 13.00 - Trio Nadezda
- 13.30 - Workshop “Wild plants  
on the menu”
- 14.15 - Performance by Brigitta  
Davidjants and Marion  
Selgal
- 15.00 - End of the event



*Flyer of the Open Gardens' Day on the 11th of September*

In the workshop “Wild Plants on the Menu”, the older generation of gardeners and the younger, more urban workshop participants - some of whom came from the capital, Tallinn - exchanged their knowledge about edible wild herbs with each other. Nationality was no longer an issue in this workshop.

There was also a market with home-grown vegetables, fruits, eggs, honey, flowers and various delicacies that the gardeners had made from their dacha products. Some gardeners sold their handicraft products, others displayed their drawings and paintings in a spontaneous exhibition for all to see. Another artistic programme was the large



*Visit to the dachas with interested guests (Photo: Saara Mildeberg)*

outdoor photo exhibition by the photographer Sanni Seppo, whose huge dacha photographs were displayed on the brick walls of the garden cooperative and bus stops, and thus 'brought' directly to the gardeners. In addition, there was another exhibition of photos and paintings by Lilian Pungas, Hendrik Haedige, Annela Samuel and local artists with stories about the dachas and information about the exhibition in the Sillamäe Library, which remained there for another two months. Du-

ring the garden festival there were many musical performances by local and national musicians, demonstrating the whole variety of Estonian and Russian, traditional and newer music, all received with enthusiasm by the audience. For the guests there were tents with seating, coffee and cake and other snacks. The gardeners used the Open



*The organisers of the events: A. Samuel, S. Mildeberg and L. Pungas (from left; Photo: Sanni Seppo)*

Gardens' Day to present themselves and to get in touch with visitors. At the same time, it was important for them to experience what is possible through cooperation with the town of Sillamäe (cultural centre), the garden cooperative, scholars, artists and musicians from all over Estonia and abroad, and how much resonance and interest their dacha culture has met with. The dacha gardeners and the board of the garden cooperative liked the Day of Gardens so much that they want to make it an annual event. Already on site, the local journalist remarked that there had not been such enthusiasm for an event in Sillamäe for a long time.



*Visitors on the Open Gardens' Day (Photo: Saara Mildeberg)*



*Above: Visitors take part in tastings and the wild herb workshop (Photo: Lilian Pungas)  
Below: Local and national musicians also enriched the programme on Open Gardens' Day (Photo: Saara Mildeberg)*





Above: Visitors view Lilian Pungas’ photo exhibition on dachas and their gardeners, taken during interviews with dacha gardeners and three field visits in 2019-2021 (Photo: Saara Mildeberg).



Left: The board of the Sputnik dacha cooperative, whose map is in the background, plans to repeat the Day of Gardens in subsequent years. The photo shows the entire board with Finnish photographer Sanni Seppo (top right), organisers Annela Samuel and Lilian Pungas, and Judith Kiss (bottom). (Photo: Lilian Pungas)



## Lessons learned for the scientific transfer

Despite many challenges in transdisciplinary research projects, target groups that are difficult to reach were actively included in the transfer activities. In addition to the many difficulties reported by Jaeger-Erben et al. (2018), the organisers also encountered language barriers, a high level of mistrust towards external stakeholders as well as informal organisational structures, all of which made the implementation of the transfer activities difficult. In order to deal with these difficulties and still achieve a valuable exchange for all participants, the following points proved to be important for us:

- To build on issues that are a significant part of the *everyday reality* of the target group. Since topics such as the bioeconomy and socio-ecological transformations are very abstract, complex and sometimes not well-known, they need to be ‘translated’ into local, concrete and relevant topics, as also recommended by scholars from the BioSTEP project (Davies et al. 2016, p. 14, 17). This increases the resonance with the local population (cf. Engels 2020).
- In addition to formats that primarily address an already active audience that values education - such as discussions, presentations and workshops - *creative and engaging formats* such as photo and film presentations or exhibitions and events in which the target group members can also present themselves, are particularly suitable for somewhat more secluded groups.
- In transdisciplinary research activities, it is essential that diverse perspectives and real life experience of practitioners come together with scholars and decision-makers *on an equal footing* (Rogga and Zscheischler 2019, p. 47). For this reason, during the implementation, particular attention was paid to ensuring that the expectations and wishes of the target group were taken into account and that the views of the participants were prioritised in discussion events. This also involves language, problem-framing and avoiding purely academic jargon. Finally, a *benevolent openness* to diverse perspectives is *the* prerequisite for co-production of knowledge (cf. Davies et al. 2016, pp. 16-17).
- The *appreciation* of the workshop participants and interviewees as experts with valuable empirical knowledge proved to be particularly important, as they had hardly been recognised as such before. At this level, they could feel *competent and ‘effective’* - unlike when abstract concepts or complex technical solutions are presented or imposed on them by external actors, without them as locals having a say (see also acceptability research by Busse et al. 2019). This appreciation is particularly important in relation to concepts such as epistemic extractivism, which questions knowledge production and appropriation in peripheries by Western scholars (see, for example, Grosfoguel, 2019; Klein and Simpson, 2012; Meza, 2019).

- In addition, the second transfer event in particular showed that it makes sense to *go to the target group itself* (in this case to the garden cooperative) and to implement many different formats *on site* that correspond to the wishes of the local population and reflect their everyday needs and interests. This allows a much broader target group to participate and engage in dialogue with each other, and is therefore very inclusive and needs-based.
- It is extremely helpful to organise transfer activities in coordination or at best *in cooperation with “gate keepers”*, i.e. people who are recognised to be influential, knowledgeable and well connected in the community. In our case, this minimised the (escalation) risk in an extremely tense socio-political context, kept the focus on the object of research interest and ensured a constructive, appreciative and trusting dialogue.
- It can often be worthwhile to involve various *cooperation partners and local/regional artists* in the conception and implementation of transfer activities in order to give the activities greater significance, to realise different formats and to reach more people.
- It may make sense to organise transfer events *as part of other bigger cultural events or festivals* in order to reduce the organisational effort, and to reach target groups that would otherwise stay away. In rural areas this is also a question of logistics, and this additional offer of cultural events can additionally be used to bring urban target groups to places they would otherwise not visit.



*Photo exhibition on the walls of the dacha cooperative building (Photo: Lilian Pungas)*

### Lessons learned for decision-makers

Many actors who are relevant for a socio-ecological transformation are overlooked or are themselves not even aware of their importance. They are not in the focus as a target group or even as partners, although they could provide important insights, practices and examples. It is worthwhile to look for such opportunities of exchange and dialogue with groups that are considered to be difficult to reach or hardly visible. Moreover, these groups are often indispensable as possible coalitions or proponents of socio-ecological transformations, as they are also the ones who bear the main burden of these transformations (cf. Davies et al. 2016, p. 12). Therefore, purely symbolic participatory processes are not enough. Instead, co-design on an equal footing with local stakeholders should be promoted and prioritised.

Above all, the transfer activities have also shown the following: Scientific transfer needs trust between all actors involved, and trust, in turn, needs (a lot of) time. The preparation and implementation of transfer activities repeatedly encountered obstacles and delays, as many stakeholders expected regular and repeated face-to-face meetings (instead of short phone calls, e-mails, zoom meetings or similar) in order for cooperation to take place. In addition, it became clear to the organisers how important it is to seek out and address people in their own language, in their own formats, in their everyday reality, so that an encounter on an equal footing is possible. Science transfer is always context-dependent and a purely academic workshop is not necessarily expedient if a wide range of stakeholders are to be equally involved.



*Sunflower on the grounds of the event (Photo: Lilian Pungas)*

## Media & coverage of the transfer events

The two events were covered in Estonian-language national newspapers as well as Russian-language local newspapers. Below are both articles (published online and in print).

### Excerpts from the Estonian newspaper:

**EESTI UUDISED**

**GALERII | PIDU SPUTNIKUS! Sillamäe lähistel aednike päeval jagus üllatusi: pudelitest palm, purki pistetud karulauguõied ja rahvusvaheline laadamelu (2)**

HELGE PÄEV: Aednike päevale tulijaid rõõmustas kohalik ansambel Ivuški. Ekskursioonil suvilatesse jäi silma pudelitest valmistatud palm koos autokummist tehtud luigega.  
Foto: Kollaaž (3 x Saara Mildeberg, Annela Samuel)

**Evelin Kivimaa, 12. september 2022 12:42**

Kui itaalia turist Vaivara rongijaamas pühapäeva hommikul pärast kella kümnet rongilt maha astus, siis põlnud aednike päev veel alanud. Peagi aga küll: kell 11 oli juba Sputniku alandusühistus laadakaup välja pandud ja lõõtspillimees lasi näppudel lennata. 11. septembril toimus Sillamäe lähistel Sputnikus suurim üritus üle kümne aasta: tähistati aednike päeva.

*Õhtuleht, 12th September 2022 Online, URL: <https://www.oh tuleht.ee/1069923/galerii-pidu-sputnikus-sillamae-lahistel-aednike-paeval-jagusi-ullatusi-pudelitest-palm-purki-pistetud-karulauguoid-ja-rahvusvaheline-laadamelu>*

**PIDU SPUTNIKUS! Sillamäe lähistel aednike päeval jagus üllatusi**

Kui itaalia turist Vaivara rongijaamas pühapäeva hommikul pärast kella kümnet rongilt maha astus, siis põlnud aednike päev veel alanud. Peagi aga küll: kell 11 oli juba Sputniku alandusühistus laadakaup välja pandud ja lõõtspillimees lasi näppudel lennata. 11. septembril toimus Sillamäe lähistel Sputnikus suurim üritus üle kümne aasta: tähistati aednike päeva.

Alapidamine on Sillamäe rahvale vägagi südamelehedane: kolmest kohalikest elanikust on vihemalt kahel olemas suvila ehk datša, kus sõrmed mulda pista. Eesti suurim alandusühistus Sputnik, kus asub 1000 suvilat, paiknebki just Sillamäe külje all. Samas põlnud Sputnikus kümne aastat toimunud nõnda suurt üritust nagu nüüd, kui aktiivsed doktorandid Annela Samuel, Lilian Pungas ja Saara Mildeberg selle kohaliku kogukonna rõõmuks korraldasid, ühistu Sputnik suure toetusel ja Sillamäe Kultuurikeskuse abiga. Nimelt on kõigi kolme doktoritöö siit- või sealt-

napudelli põhja. Teises peatuses aga puhkas rahvas niisama jalga ja puhas juttu.

Välkkest laadalt sai osta mõistagi aiasaadusi, nagu näiteks kollaseid küpseld alõtsaid, pirakaid kartulikotta ja hommikul noptud värskeid kurke. Ent ka pardi- ja kanamune, mett ja meekärgi, kunstiteid ja käsitöösemeid.

Huvilised said osaleda töötöös „Metsikud taimed toidulaual“, maistest purki pistetud karulauguõisi ja võlillennute. Samuti sai minna ekskursioonile mööda datša'id, kus taimekõluse seas nägi ka rohelistest plastpudelitest valmistatud palmi koos autokummist tehtud luigega. Ühed omanikud tutvustasid aedu, kus peale kurkide-bunte sai suhu pista ka põnevald marju, massiivseid ning aktiivsed, mis maisteb nagu tikri ja kivi segu.

Ürituse lõppedes olid memmed-taadiid igati rahul ning korraldajate plaan, et ehk võiks aednike päevast saada iga-aastane traditsioon, langes viluks muidu. **EVELIN KIVIMAA**

HELGE PÄEV: Aednike päevale tulijaid rõõmustas kohalik ansambel Ivuški ja trio Nadežda. Annela Samuel

kandist sealse rahvaga seotud. Aednike päevale tulid lisaks kohalikele aiapidajatele ka huvilised kaugemalt, Itaaliast kuni Londonini, rääkimata Eesti eri-nurkadest. Esinesid Sillamäe ansambel Ivuški ja trio Nadežda, muusikalisel elamusel kaugemalt pakkeisid Brigitta Davidjants ja laulja Marion Selgall. Ühtlasi said kohalikulnuda näha Soome fotokunstniku Sanni Seppo üuenähtust suvilatest ja aednikest, Eestis ja Soomes.

Suured fotod aedadest andsid hoopis uue ilme ka lähedal asuvatele bussipeatustele. Neist ühes peatuses sumises kohalikest meestest koosnev võttegrupp, pildides toimuvat läbi vii-

*Õhtuleht, 15th September 2022 in print (p. 6)*

**Translation of the excerpts from the Estonian newspaper:**

“When the Italian tourist got off the train at Vaivara station on Sunday morning after 10 o'clock, the gardeners' day had not yet begun. But soon it had: at 11 o'clock, the garden cooperative Sputnik had already laid out its gardening products, and the accordion player let his fingers fly. On 11th September, Sputnik, near Sillamäe, hosted its biggest event in more than a decade: the Gardeners' Day.”

“Gardening is very close to the hearts of Sillamäe residents: at least two out of three have a garden shed or dacha to put their fingers in the soil. Sputnik, Estonia's largest garden cooperative with over 1,000 dachas, is located just outside Sillamäe. However, Sputnik has not hosted an event as big as this one for ten years. Now the active PhD candidates Annela Samuel, Lilian Pungas and Sara Mildeberg organised it for the local population with great support from the Sputnik cooperative and the Sillamäe Cultural Centre. The dissertations of all three are related to the people in the region.”

**Excerpt from the Russian-language paper:**

**Силламяэский вестник** 23

**Дачи как составная часть жизни Силламяэцев**  
(См. материал на 4-й стр.)

**4** **Силламяэский вестник**

**В социальной сфере**  
**Дачи как составная часть жизни Силламяэцев**

Более трёх часов продолжалась в городской библиотеке открытие фотовыставки «Силламяэские дачи», подготовленной докторантами Таллиннского университета в качестве составной части их докторских работ. Фотографии разместились на стенах, столы, расположенные в библиотеке. Привлекшие на мероприятие люди, рассматривая снимки, находили на них своих знакомых, узнавали чьи-то дачные участки, обменивались мнениями.

Начало открытия выставки с презентацией книги докторанта Саэни Селмо о садах Финляндии. Она одна из авторов работ на силламяэской выставке. Представила свою книгу и фотографии. Саэни говорила, что использует фотографии преимущественно как социальный и документальный инструмент. Гораздо важнее своим образом жизни и действиями стремиться повлиять на общество, его ценности, представления о счастье. «Уже более 20 лет у меня есть городской сад в Финляндии. Довольно быстро я поняла, что его ценность не только в том, чтобы посадить растения и обеспечить себя едой. Она гораздо глубже. Городской сад - это место, где можно собраться и расслабиться. Сообщество в саду объединяет - люди делятся друг с другом опытом выращивания чего-то, знакомят друг друга, дружат при этом имеют возможность побыть в одиночестве, когда это необходимо. Возможно, контакт с землей является как-то полезным, независимо от страны проживания или национальности», - говорила Саэни на открытии выставки.

Другого автора работ - Сауру Мильдберг, этнолога, фотографа, культуролога - Силламяэскому празднику своей архитектурной и многогранностью. Чтобы поближе узнать город, некоторое время жила здесь со своим племянником на семейной квартире. Архитектурой города её интерес в Силламяэ не закончился. Обратилась к истории и на силламяэские сады города как составную часть жизни горожан. Свою исследовательскую работу она пишет по теме «Наследие советской эпохи».

Аннела Самуэль вышла на Силламяэском празднике через неё, сделала много фотографий и показала свою историю весной этого года в музее Силламяэ, ставя свою выставку «Коммуна УИ - город утопии». Этот город стал для неё отправной точкой для изучения дачной работы. Ей было интересно изучить, как пожилые люди относятся к тому месту, где живут, что оно для них значит. Во время интервью со старожилками узнали, что в плане планировки от города есть место «чуждым», силламяэские сады рождаются как необходимость с садоводами, сделать фотографии - это тоже докторская.

Докторант в области социологии и окружающей среды Лилиан Пунгас, обратила внимание на то, что многие из обучающихся там же своего научного работ искали вдохновения, например, в жизни Марины Петру, на была совсем не интересна, например, прибалтийская жизнь. Лилиан считает личи уникальным явлением, получившим Европой. И уникальность видит не только в том, что она даёт человеку возможность обеспечить себя натуральными овощами, фруктами и намы образом играть экологическую и социальную роль (способствуют выживанию), но и роль экологическую, которая выражается в уходе дачников за природой. К тому же люди способны строить личной идентичности, поскольку чаще даёт силы, возможность реализовать на другой род деятельности, побыть в одиночестве. Силламяэские дачники она считает самыми гостеприимными людьми из тех, кого когда-то встречала, выходя из погранично-эстонских испанских.

Выступили и другие участники открытия выставки. К примеру, Харди Мурта, представлявший Совет славы урбанистической Пил-Виртуна, предложил карту, размещённую рядом с красными будущими планетами. Яркие красные цветом были обозначены места, где в недалеком будущем дача будет невозможно, там более что-то кардинально для собственного пропитания, светло-зеленым - где жить возможно, а вот что-то вымаршата пропитание, светло-зеленым - где жить возможно, а вот что-то вымаршата пропитание, жёлтым цветом - наиболее предпочтительные районы для жизни и создания садов, огородов, для эстетики, жёлтого цвета на карте Мурта не стоит уже и много). Роль для ответственности любой точки земли и прежде всего как возможность выживания в случае экстремальных ситуаций. Харди отметил, что эстонцы следуют двигаться к экологическому, что сеть дачных кооперативов может быть хорошим примером для Европы. Он привнесёт дачу на тем, как сделать садоводческие товарищества более автономными, чтобы у них были свои коды, экстерриториальности, готовиться и т.д.

После представленных презентаций в беседе включились местные садоводы (правда, их аудитория была малочисленной). Делались замечания о роли своих садоводческих участков, их значении в жизни, о тенденциях, которые наблюдаются в товариществах.

Продолжением открытия выставки стало другое мероприятие, которое было организовано 11 сентября того авторами представляемыми в библиотеке экспозиции фотографий. Намечалось оно было садоводам и проживающим на территории товарищества «Спутник» при поддержке его правления и технического обслуживания Центра культуры. После того, что было в программе этого дня, обещаны усиленные реализации. Были привлечены силами организаторов мероприятия Аннела Самуэль, Сауру Мильдберг, Лилиан Пунгас, а также руководители правления «Спутника» Ирма Наванов, председатели комиссии по культуре и образованию городского самоуправления Бисакоппа, который поддержал садовода с добрым почтением. Был концерт, программу которого открыл местный паровозик Владимир Кушман, а продолжил её вокальный ансамбль «Иттишанн-и-Силламяэ», трио «Илакс-дада», танцевальный дуэт Бретитты Даллиевит и Марионн Селламяэ. Была небольшая экскурсия для желающих по саду участком «Спутника». Провели мастер-класс по теме «Сад растений на обочине шоссе». Организаторы угощали присутствующих на мероприятии бесплатными чаем и кофе со сладостями. В презентации правления «Спутника», где находились магнитики, были размещены благотворительные фотографии Селмо Селмо о финских и эстонских садах и огородах. Единственное, что не состоялось по программе, так это примера: среди садоводов «Спутника» нашлись лишь пару человек, оказавших что-то проехать (ида, ичиди, раскисли). Хотя устройство мероприятия были созданы для горожане предпочтительные условия.

Спасибо организаторам дня садоводам заслужили внимание. Возможно, отметить его с лёгкой руки молодых докторантов будет доброй традицией «Спутника».

Лилиан ПУНГАС  
Фото автора  
на 23-й странице

*Sillamäe Vestmik (in Russian), print newspaper, available online as PDF ([https://hvezine.com/fjup-book/5c2515a79a.html?fbclid=IwAR1FbntHghvLVoZnYrRo7dnbmaCDtlysp42F-LeKGxzTZr6fhtAqY4X8\\_Gs#page/7](https://hvezine.com/fjup-book/5c2515a79a.html?fbclid=IwAR1FbntHghvLVoZnYrRo7dnbmaCDtlysp42F-LeKGxzTZr6fhtAqY4X8_Gs#page/7)). 22nd September 2022 (pp. 4 and 23)*

**Translation of the excerpt from the Russian-language paper:**

“A dacha is the place where you can hide and relax. The community in such gardens is special: people share their experiences of growing different foods, they help each other, make friends, but they always have the possibility to be alone whenever they need to. Maybe contact with the earth makes us all the same, no matter where we live or where we come from,’ said Sanni Seppo at the exhibition opening.”

“Lilian [Pungas] considers dachas to be a unique phenomenon that has unfortunately been lost in Europe. She sees the uniqueness not only in the fact that the dachas provide people with organic vegetables, fruits and berries, and thus they play an economic and social role, but also an ecological one, as the gardeners protect nature.”

(Translation: Anna Treier)



*Dacha in Sputnik cooperative (Photo: Lilian Pungas)*

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