

DACHAS AS DRIVERS OF LAND-USE TRANSITION IN BELARUS, RUSSIA AND UKRAINE

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Collective gardens (also dachas) everywhere across Eastern Europe are in the middle of transformations in terms of the function, purpose, planning morphology and the overall metabolism. Depending on a specific socio-ecological context, this process takes different forms and pace, ranging from mass abandonment to being a driver of urban sprawl; in many locations, though, the transformation is only starting and still rather slow. The arrival points of those transformations can be observed e.g. in Central Europe, where socioeconomic transformations started earlier and went quicker; more ideas can be taken from plans and proposals for the rethinking collective gardens of Central Europe.

We assume that the collective gardens/dachas of Eastern Europe are still within a window of opportunities for steering their transformation to more sustainable trajectories, comparing to those that can be assumed given the business as usual situation, and from the reviewing of Central European and cases and some "advanced" Eastern European ones, such as Moscow (duly recognising its idiosyncrasy). The very concept of a "sustainable dacha" is missing in literature, although this is an extremely widespread land-use situation within a large chunk of Eurasia. In this paper we fill this gap by suggesting a set of indicators for "sustainable dachas" based on a review of their socio-ecological metabolism and ecosystem services delivery. We further map sustainability of dachas in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine, and explain this in their governance contexts. Transition pathways and options for governing them towards sustainable futures (as well as likely failures) are discussed against applicable comparisons in Central and Western Europe. The paper will be informed by case study research and institutional analysis for Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. Ecological and sociological field research was performed in Mogilev (Belarus), Pskov (Russia) and Kharkiv (Ukraine). Comparisons from Central Europe come both from a literature review and field research.

In terms of environmental governance implications, the three national case studies demonstrate that any arrangements for sustainable management of dachas become functional only if a robust governance framework is in place. Such a framework can be delivered by means of governance by the state, private governance, self-organisation etc., but it should have an adequate institutional back up and fit the overall governance landscape. Due to transitional nature of peri-urban landscapes (and dachas in particular), robust governance is often in deficit or is

greatly fragmented, while in societies under socio-economic and/or political transition, such a deficit may even turn into non-governance gaps, where neither state nor self-organised local communities care to maintain environmentally sound practices or to develop their strategic development visions. Once robust governance is established, environmental standards become important to ensure, and many sustainable practices and objectives become viable.

