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# Russian Collective Gardens: A Story of Institution and Remembrance

Frédéric Lemarchand

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	Particle	
	Given Name	<b>Lemarchand</b>
	Prefix	
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	Division	
	Organization	MRSH-b Pôle risque, Université de Caen
	Address	Esplanade de la Paix, 14032, Caen Cedex, France
	Email	frederick.lemarchand@unicaen.fr
Abstract	Starting from a fieldwork carried out in the Republic of Tatarstan (Russia) on industrial pollution and the necessity to support gardeners in changing their practices, the present research opens a socio-anthropological perspective on the (sub)urban garden. The datcha is first and foremost a Soviet institution that has now spread to all Russian cities to become a social, cultural, and intergenerational phenomenon.	

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# Chapter 5

## Russian Collective Gardens: A Story of Institution and Remembrance

Lemarchand Frédéric

«In His life, a man has to build a house, plant a tree, father a son» Russian Proverb.

**Abstract** Starting from a fieldwork carried out in the Republic of Tatarstan (Russia) on industrial pollution and the necessity to support gardeners in changing their practices, the present research opens a socio-anthropological perspective on the (sub) urban garden. The datcha is first and foremost a Soviet institution that has now spread to all Russian cities to become a social, cultural, and intergenerational phenomenon.

The collective garden, as a part of the Soviet roots of nowadays Russia, turns out to be a good vehicle of social structures exploration as well as a great tool to analyze the development of the relationship between men and nature, as the works of Hervouet (2009) or Gessat-Anstett (2001) have shown. This is why we consider it a *social fact*, in other words a *collective, institutional, and imaginary* production. This socio-anthropological approach, characterized by its double perspective ranging from the microscopic to the macroscopic scales, and referring to the study of both its symbolic and local aspects (depictions, attitudes, beliefs, practices) and the social and historical movements and structures surrounding those particular realities, appeared to be particularly relevant to grasp the intricacies of a subject located at the crossroads of culture, nature, and technique. The target program had to balance the reality of environmental and health issues by mobilizing best available scientific knowledge with another reality, namely the symbolic and socioeconomic reality, that of the complex, aesthetic, memory-based relations that the people of Russia have with these gardens. In the face of the projects to adapt to the environmental and health risks, the *dialogical* perspective, based on the idea of an eventual parallel between affinity scientific knowledge and social knowledge and on the assumption of their equal validity, seemed to be the most relevant one (Figs. 5.1 and 5.2).

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L. Frédéric (✉)  
MRSH-b Pôle risque, Université de Caen, Esplanade de la Paix,  
14032 Caen Cedex, France  
e-mail: frederick.lemarchand@unicaen.fr





**Fig. 5.1** A gardening woman posing in her garden

### TRADITIONAL FARMING GARDEN

Anatolie, a 50-year-old worker, grows tomatoes, cucumbers, zucchinis, beans, cabbages, potatoes, etc., in the so-called Runo garden in Kadisheva (150 plots). In this garden, which he bought in 1980, you can find the whole range of vegetables available in this region of Tatarstan. In front of the house, a few flowers grow for decorative purpose, next to medicinal plants (mint, lemon balm) which the Russians use extensively. He even used to raise pigs and rabbits for a long time, thus making his garden a mini-farming business. The products from his garden and the breeding of his animals provide for all the food basics he and his family need all year long. He grows seeds in the city and plants them in June. The vegetables are then canned to last over the winter period. Anatolie goes to the garden every evening from the beginning of May and until the harvest; he also spends his weekends there.

The datcha, and above all the garden, has an essential economic function in his budget balance. He comes to the datcha “to work, not to rest” except in winter, when he can enjoy the *bagna* (a traditional sauna-like Russian bath). As a child, he used to observe his parents, who also have a garden, but he prefers saying he learnt the farming techniques on his own. Anatolie only has very little contact with his neighbors; they sometimes exchange knowledge and know-how tips to avoid pests or to grow this or that plant, but there is nothing constant or regular in these conversations which he sees as little compliance talks and basic good manners.



Fig. 5.2 Location of the study-targeted gardens

## 5.1 The Collective Garden as a Tool for the Analysis of the Changes in the Imaginary Representations of Nature in Contemporary Russia

The collective garden is an institution that dates back to the first years of the Soviet Union and that enabled urban people to purchase a plot of land—with an average size of 600 m<sup>2</sup>—in order to start an agricultural activity for domestic purposes. At the very start, each garden depended directly on the institution to which it belonged: This was sometimes a factory, a specialized university, an administration, a hospital, a school, etc. The concept first appeared under Staline and allowed urban citizens to receive minimum wages by their own means of production based on the model of the pieces of land that were distributed to the kolkhoz workers. The collective garden got its real kick start in the two last decades of the Soviet Union (Ortar 2005). It played a major role in the economic survival that came along with the huge transition crisis of 1990 and 1991; however, its vocation cannot merely be confined to the economic sphere, as we are going to see further on. Nowadays, more than twenty-five years after the collapse of the USSR, it remains an important part of the Russians' *lives* as it provides around ten million urban dwellers, that grew up in the urban-industrial age, with the only possibility of finding a path to stability and of getting back in touch with nature. *“Gigantic and soulless cities, endless lines outside the shops, individual freedoms trampled upon, poorly insulated homes and small flats in which entire families cope with promiscuity the best they can, authorized food which we know is contaminated since it comes from Chernobyl... What is the meaning of life in such a world? Against overwhelming odds, the building of small houses and overnight shelters makes its inhabitants forget, for a weekend at least, about their worries,”* this is how Ronan Hervouet chronicles the genealogy of an original institution which prefigures what we will now call “urban farming,” whose early form is the collective garden. To be precise, this “suburban” (1) farming is reported to affect 65–80% of Russian people nowadays. Although geographically situated in the outskirts of big cities, sometimes up to ten kilometres away, the collective garden is a little bit like a “green town” right beside the metropole: There are main “avenues” from which smaller driveways merge, that contain many plots—sometimes many thousands—on which the famous *datcha* can be found inevitably, as a new version of the former garden shelter, which the landlords initially built themselves with the help of family members and friends, and which has now become a family home, or at least a secondary home in which families get together at weekends, between May and September. It is not uncommon for mothers to settle there for the holidays. People from every social background are working there side-by-side, there are all kinds of crops, such as vegetables, fruit, flowers, plants, people literally live there, sometimes part of the year, particularly women and children, families and generations gather to participate in a series of activities that are prohibited in the city.



105 **A WARMLY CONVIVIAL DATCHA** (collective garden of *Soutchi*, 700  
106 plots)

109 Galina, a 56-year-old retired woman, used to work as a corporate official in a  
110 Kazan-based firm. The company in which she worked provided her family  
111 with this land in 1990. When they first arrived, they had to build it all up and  
112 arrange everything on this sand field that had been created after the building  
113 of a bridge. Twenty-five lorries full of land materials were needed to make the  
114 ground livable. After that, her husband started building the house and she  
115 started setting up the garden. “Men take care of physical work, such as  
116 pickaxing for instance. The distribution of domestic work is not systematic,  
117 but gardening is rather something for women. Gardening is thought of as a  
118 female task.” The garden is first and foremost a living place where she can  
119 rest and spend time with her family (children, grandchildren) and her friends.  
120 Since they have arrived at the time of the great crisis caused by the break-up  
121 of the former Soviet Union, there has been an obvious increase in capital  
122 gains from the datchas (upstream from the city, on the banks of the Volga,  
123 where there is a micro-climate), which have become more and more valuable  
124 financially.

127 **As soon as they arrived, they started planting fruit trees and the bushes; the**  
128 **rest of the vegetable crops have been gradually developed (potatoes,**  
129 **cucumbers, tomatoes, etc.).**

132 Galina’s garden is much more diverse and richer now that she is retired  
133 and that her children are grown up and on their own. She keeps remaining  
134 seeds from one year to the next and buys some more from a catalog (she  
135 grows more than ten tomato varieties). Before planting, she has a look at the  
136 lunar calendar (in specialized magazines and publications). The quantity she  
137 produces is enough to avoid buying basic products (tomatoes, cucumbers) in  
138 the warm season, and she can even preserve food for the winter months.  
139 Galina lives on the plot for the whole “season,” from June to October; her  
140 husband (who still works) joins her in the evening. Their grandchildren spend  
141 most of the school holidays there.

142  
143 Her garden does not really have an economic function, and the experience of  
144 gardening has a rather hedonistic and aesthetic dimension and serves the “love of  
145 beautiful things.” Therefore, the garden is of course a place to rest, but also a place  
146 to experiment new things. The experience gathered year after year allows her to test  
147 new ways to grow crops in association (this plant grows faster next to that plant,  
148 etc.), to test biological control (this plant moves away the parasites that affect that  
149 type of fruit) and even agroecology (ashes or soap-based mixtures as substitutes to  
150 artificial fertilizer). Galina learnt gardening with her parents who had an individual  
151 house with garden. She has not had the opportunity to pass on her knowledge and

152 skills to her children yet, because of their lack of interest in the matter. However,  
 153 her grandchildren sometimes help her in small tasks. She maintains good relations  
 154 with her neighbors who share their experience with her, exchange seeds, etc.  
 155 However, they are not friends but “garden neighbors.”

## 156 5.2 A Family-Institution Above All

157 Most of the gardens we have visited date back to the 80s, sometimes even to the  
 158 70s, which means that two and sometimes three generations get together there. The  
 159 first generation, that had been given the plot in the Soviet period, is slowly dying;  
 160 however, the challenges concerning the future and the development of those gar-  
 161 dens still remain an issue for all three generations. So there is obviously more than  
 162 one single kind of relation to collective gardens, and there is obviously no “model  
 163 garden,” but rather a typology of agricultural practices, of expectations, of social  
 164 relations, that are deeply rooted in the historical development of collective gardens.  
 165 The first “pioneer” generation (ours date back to the eighties, which is quite late on  
 166 the history scale of the collective garden) has been given gardens “for free” in the  
 167 framework of collectivism, whereas the following generation had to, and still have to,  
 168 invest heavily to acquire a plot. In terms of size, the collective gardens differ  
 169 from one another (ranging from a few dozens to several thousands of plots), just  
 170 like their quality also differs: the garden of *Soutchi*, in which we carried out our  
 171 investigation, near the built-up area of Kazan (1.2 million inhabitants), and at the  
 172 same time upstream from the city, on the Volga riverside, on a sand island on which  
 173 there is direct and private access to the river; this has become a “must” for the  
 174 inhabitants. However, those recreational and aesthetical qualities will not make the  
 175 happiness of those who wish to make a food production profitable; these people will  
 176 have to look for a richer land with less frequent flooding, and nevertheless less  
 177 expensive. *Roughly speaking*, the historical movement that we wish to describe here  
 178 ranges from productive gardens to leisure gardens, and all hybrid and intermediate  
 179 forms. However, other characteristics may arise, as we will see. Therefore, it is  
 180 quite tricky to fully understand the collective garden *institution* without considering  
 181 its historicity, without interviewing different generations of Russians, pioneers,  
 182 heirs, or buyers of these precious plots; actually, this is prerequisite to draft an  
 183 exploratory typology of the gardeners in line with their values and expectations  
 184 (Fig. 5.3).

185 So these are the generations we will consider throughout this study, even if these  
 186 categories cannot be held as representative of the all individuals who are supposed  
 187 to belong to these generations.

- 188 – The 60–80-year-old generation: the “pioneers,” characterized by their deep rural  
 189 and farming roots; strongly attached to the food productive use of the gardens
- 190 – The 40–60-year-old generation: the “heirs,” urban generation whose “farming  
 191 culture” was acquired in the garden

AQ7

AQ8

AQ9

**Fig. 5.3** Datchas and gardens along the Volga



192 – The 20–40-year-old generation can be of two types: on the one hand, the “new  
 193 Russians,” who tend to develop the occidental-model-based pavilion datcha, this  
 194 means that it has no vegetable garden; on the other hand, the “young ones” as  
 195 bearers of new aspirations, and quite reluctant to garden cropping, encouraging  
 196 new recreational and aesthetic purposes of these gardens.  
 197

198 This means that all age-groups play a role that it at least as important as the part  
 199 played by social classes, both being historically speaking involved in a process of  
 200 understanding the attitudes and practices of the gardeners. The perspective of the  
 201 intergenerational transmission of gardening is a crucial factor: Inheritance, when-  
 202 ever accepted, is seen by most people as a moral duty to carry on the work begun by  
 203 the parents who cleared the land, fortified and cropped it, planted trees, built a  
 204 house (the datcha), etc. The weight of this burden to perpetuate *ancient family*  
 205 *traditions* may seem paradoxical when seen through the perspective of current  
 206 aspirations of the heirs to transform the garden and sometimes even getting rid of it.  
 207 H el ene took over the datcha and the garden based on the moral duty to respect the  
 208 legacy of her parents, in order to live “in accordance with traditions” even though



209 this has never been her own personal choice. “This garden is like a suitcase without  
210 a handle: a heavy load that you cannot leave or even just lay down for a while.”

### 211 5.3 The Economic Role: Distinguishing Discourse 212 and Facts

213 In the early 1990s, as Russia was deep in economic crisis, the gardens have played a  
214 significant and essential role in daily nutrition; however, it is surprising to note that,  
215 when asked, most gardeners today tend to deny the economic basis of their work. It  
216 has often been said that if we had to take calculations of inputs (buying or hiring of  
217 the land, buying of agrochemical products, of fertilizers, eventual buying of plants  
218 and seeds, etc.) on the one hand and of outputs on the other hand, the balance would  
219 be **negative; except for monoculture exploitations**, maybe (potatoes for instance).  
220 But these are extremely infrequent and usually grown whenever a family finds itself  
221 in the situation of inheriting two plots: One of the plots can be used in essentially  
222 productive “business” activities; in other words, it is dedicated to selling agricul-  
223 tural products on local markets. It is important to add that the agricultural products  
224 delivered by the kolkhoz are cheap and generally of good taste quality (when the  
225 extensive cultivation is carried out on good soil conditions).

226 The gardeners readily admit that the garden products provide varied and healthy  
227 food, thus denying the true health hazards arising from pollution of the river in the  
228 present case, but at the same time, they all agree to say that it would be more  
229 profitable for them to buy vegetables on markets or from the kolkhoz, particularly  
230 in the season when the prices are low. But these are only *words* intended to show  
231 the non-utilitarian nature of the gardens and no one *really* tried to make such a  
232 calculation, since it would only be of limited relevance here. We shall note here the  
233 existence of the *rhetoric of economic disinterest*, which means that the real pur-  
234 poses of the gardens are to be found somewhere else: keeping in touch with nature  
235 (banned notion in the Soviet industrialist speech), convivialism, recreational and  
236 educational activity, etc.

237 From the economic point of view (in the sense of exchanges), we could state that  
238 the gardens are places “for free” following the logic of giving. Here, the use of the  
239 adjective “free” refers to the work of nature that human beings have been selling  
240 and buying since Neolithic times: All we have to do is plant or seed to harvest the  
241 fruit. We then save the seeds, and the cycle goes on. This has indeed become a key  
242 issue of careful thoughts given to “nature-provided services,” also known as  
243 *environmental amenities*.

244 This principle of free availability is directly linked to the very logic of living  
245 beings reproduction and results in another socio-anthropological principle: It is  
246 possible to give out the harvest of nature (through our own work), without losing it,  
247 just like we can duplicate computer files or share knowledge. This is how the  
248 release for free circulation of crops including seeds, beans, plants (especially in

spring), but also of empirical knowledge and know-how, occurs between neighbors, family members, or friends. These exchanges/gifts were theorized by Marcel Mauss and gained widespread acceptance (Caillé 1989); they involve a concept of reciprocity—which also fosters biodiversity!—through barter trade practices and all kind of non-monetary transactions such as neighborly goodwill. We had the opportunity to experience this logic of gift every time we visited the gardens; we left back home with arms full of flowers, fruit and vegetables each time and were also often kindly invited to use the *bagna*.

### THE ANTI-CRISIS GARDEN

In 1980, Tamara and Victor, 48 and 52 years old, were “pioneers” in their garden in Soutchi, which today counts 400 plots, each of 400 m<sup>2</sup>. They wanted a garden to bring up their children in the middle of nature, while the falling living standards resulting from the perestroika did not allow any vacation or even leisure time in the State’s various recreational centers. He uses to work 20 days in a row in the garden and then takes ten days’ rest. She spends all her free time there, that is to say from May to September, taking paid vacation here and unpaid time off there. The production of tomatoes, cucumbers, salads, berries, condiments provides partial food self-sufficiency. The economic function of the garden emerged gradually along with the drastic fall in living standards and the declining purchasing power of the working class that started ten years ago. A great part of the production is consumed locally (to the most possible extent), at least during the summer season. Fresh fruits and vegetables are said to taste better; the remainder products are preserved for the winter season. Tamara belongs to the urban generation and has learnt gardening “spontaneously,” reading books and magazines, talking her colleagues’ advice, and experiencing things. The children and grandchildren have been socialized through garden work; the grandparents take care of their grandson there all summer long. The aesthetic function of the garden is present but secondary. Paradoxically enough, it was much more present at the beginning, when the economic function of the garden was not yet the first concern. The datcha was built up by the husband, with the help of his friends. It was the first step, the garden followed.

Proximity network, automatic solidarity among neighbors. Exchange of products and seeds. Mutual assistance, particularly for hard work and household repairs.

### *Work, social links*

The issue of work is central in the garden. Work here refers to an activity that involves high-intensity exercise dedicated to change the world—change the land in the present case—to get a product out of it. Gardening a 400–600 m<sup>2</sup> plot is an activity that consumes time and attention, sometimes tedious, that could be a

296 full-time job for a single person, from spring to autumn. This is what happens in  
297 “permaculture” micro-farms that have developed in Europe for the last few years. It  
298 should be noted that some people, like retirees, unemployed or part-time workers,  
299 take this time. Some others, like employees or freelancers, spend all their free time  
300 there, including holidays and weekends. The value of labor occupies a prominent  
301 place. The act of gardening is particularly described as a teaching medium for  
302 young children: The harvested fruit and the freedom to enjoy consuming it is the  
303 product of the work dedicated to nature as a reward for our labor. Older people  
304 often use the following proverb to express this connection “You cannot have bread  
305 without stalks of wheat!” Just like in the rest of the society, in Russia, the act of  
306 gardening is a reality that happens to have a division by sex: Women (sometimes  
307 men) take care of the crops. It is fairly rare to see both being simultaneously  
308 “masters” of the house. Following a period of empirical observation, we were led to  
309 think that the garden is rather a place for women, as it is part of the imaginary  
310 continuity of the house. This does not mean that men are inactive, since he has a  
311 responsibility—with the support of neighbors and family members—to build and  
312 maintain the datcha and its “outbuildings” (toilets, sauna, greenhouses) and to  
313 perform the hardest household chores (plowing, ensure manure supply). In some  
314 gardens, at the very beginning, it was necessary to import the whole of the arable  
315 land; this was a typically masculine task (Fig. 5.4).

316 “The datcha is not a place to develop friendships,” says Hélène, “In the garden,  
317 you get to know people but you do not make friends.” The idea that the sociability  
318 networks among gardeners are different or even distinct from the urban friendship



Fig. 5.4 Leisure, family, nature

319 networks is not uncommon. Alfia also emphasizes this distinction between the  
 320 friendly relations she developed in the city and those she developed in the datcha  
 321 since, she says, “at the datcha, you socialize with your direct neighbors, you do not  
 322 choose them; in the city, friendship is more selective but the relationships are  
 323 richer.” This is how people regain the ancestral automatic solidarity, particularly in  
 324 mutual assistance practices, without really considering their neighbors as heart  
 325 friends. Nevertheless, Alphonso keeps on insisting, like many others, on the existence  
 326 of convivial moments (the people from his garden often share grilled meals),  
 327 with a traditional meal to celebrate the end of the season in October. According to  
 328 him, the relationships are “easier at the datcha than at the Institute, you can talk to  
 329 people without bothering about social status.” Hence, the garden is at the same time  
 330 a social marker (having a “great” garden is ego-boosting), but also, paradoxically,  
 331 an eraser of social status, particularly in huge gardens where all social strata from  
 332 the ex USSR work side-by-side (ranging from the skilled—or not—worker to the  
 333 director). It goes without saying that the “new Russians” who belong to the  
 334 financial oligarchy take over other places. However, there is a great deal of  
 335 socializing practices; all along our stay, our hosts have made real efforts to invite a  
 336 number of friends to join in and thus find the opportunity to show us the inimitable  
 337 samovar, topped with its usual boot, old fashion-like, and of course, the traditional  
 338 Russian barbecue. The meal ritual refers to other various ritualistic procedures from  
 339 the early customs, just like in western practices: the use of fire, alcoholic beverages,  
 340 the investment of the outside world, etc.

#### 342 THE DATCHA—(ecological) COUNTRY HOUSE

343 Raphael and Alfia, 42 and 45 years old, respectively, builder in the building  
 344 industry and biologist, live in Kazan and own a 600 m<sup>2</sup> plot on which they  
 345 grow potatoes, tomatoes, onions, cucumbers, beans, mainly in summer.  
 346 Raphael built his datcha step-by-step, starting in the nineties, when they  
 347 bought the garden. In the case of this family, the products grown in the  
 348 garden have absolutely no economic value. Alfia is the only one taking care  
 349 of the garden, since Raphael is busy building the house. Raphael works in the  
 350 private sector and has no time to work in the garden and enjoy it. They could  
 351 easily “cover the yard with asphalt and place decorative plants,” she says. But  
 352 the interesting thing about the garden is to “watch the crops grow,” says Alfia,  
 353 insisting on the recreational side of the garden for children: One of the main  
 354 goals of the garden is to “bring the children back to nature” by making it a  
 355 mini-environmental education center. Alfia has never learnt gardening and  
 356 her knowledge in biology and her job only help indirectly. She says that she  
 357 can “feel” what plants need just by looking at them, even though she learnt a  
 358 few basics from her parents. The datcha may in time become a real holiday  
 359 house; this is how they bought the plot. For them, the garden is above all a  
 360 means to forget about their routine work in the city, which, they think,  
 361  
 362

363 is tedious. Social relationships there are limited and “urban,” except for a few  
364 close friends that they know from the garden. The datcha is modeled on the  
365 French country house, where they meet friends that are “external” to the  
366 garden. Their three young children even have little summer friends here, that  
367 they meet each year.

#### 369 **5.4 The Garden as a Work of Art Dedicated** 370 **to Remembrance and as a Vector for the Transmission** 371 **of the Farming Culture**

372 During this investigation, we found evidence that could possibly validate the  
373 assumption that the garden could be a place of memory and transmission of the  
374 farming culture in the Soviet and post-Soviet society. Indeed, many gardeners from  
375 the pioneer category admitted that they spent their childhood in the country, in small  
376 villages, in connection with the land, the land of the kolkhoz, in connection with  
377 animals and with the last Russian farmers, before the Soviet system declared the  
378 peasant society as a completely insolvent social class. When asked “where did you  
379 learn gardening?”, older people frequently answer: “in the village where I grew up,”  
380 whereas others tell us about their family life in city houses with gardens (there are still  
381 a few of those houses in some parts of Kazan, as in many old Russian cities. What we  
382 call “memory of the farming culture,” is much more than just a series of skills and  
383 know-how: It is a collection of concepts and representations of the world, based on  
384 particular values and around a collective memory; it is common to all farming cultures  
385 that developed on several continents from the year 1000 to the twentieth century. The  
386 reproduction of family and social structures, the predominance of particular social-  
387 izing models (family, friends, neighbors), over secondary socializing models (insti-  
388 tutions, trade, State), the development of non-monetary trade (exchange, mutual  
389 assistance, gift logic), the direct transmission of skills and know-how, the worries to  
390 preserve the environment, the connection to the land, the preservation of collective  
391 memory, the development of self-production and home consumption, and finally, the  
392 will to maintain personal freedom places are the main characteristics of the memory of  
393 farming culture, the ones that industrial and technical modernity simply swept aside,  
394 supposedly in the name of Reason (Bitoun and Dupont 2016). The sacrifice of the  
395 whole farming population on the altar of productivism and modernity has, indeed,  
396 played a particularly violent part in the Soviet experiment that preached for their  
397 anthropological change into a working class; to that aim, they were locked into factory  
398 farms named kolkhoz, to fit in with the ruling ideology. The repression of peasant  
399 movements and the planned destruction of rural societies even turned into a real  
400 genocide, in the initial times of the Russian revolution (De Crisnoy 1978).

This is how one may understand the keen interest of Russians in the gardens, since they serve as a support for the inscriptions of remembrance that has never been fully erased from the farming culture, even though the social, economic, and political class structure of the “peasant society” finally disappeared, as it did in Western Europe (Mendras 1995). Beyond the materiality of things, our investigation led us to discover the extremely rich and complex side of the existing memorial relations, through the testimonies of the three or four generations, the oldest of which still holds the living memory of the Soviet system experiment, and even of the twentieth-century totalitarianism, from the garden institution and the memory of peasant societies. The farming culture, in terms of ethos (a set of values) and praxis (set of historically oriented practices), can be found at different levels of the practices and representations of the gardeners, especially of the “pioneers,” who were the first to colonize the land, sometimes with a heavy hand. Its main characteristics are (open-ended list):

- The development of non-monetary trade
- The act of giving excess production to neighbors and friends
- Mutual assistance for tedious tasks and the building of the house
- The limitation in the development of the garden’s productive capacities
- Ecological awareness (more or less implicit)
- The establishment of a relationship between working the land and freedom
- Direct transmission of experience
- Inputs self-production and family consumption of the products.

The purposes of the French family or professional use of the garden, whose institutional codes are historically varied, are quite the same. From this point of view, the garden is a symbol of the essential downside to urban and industrial modernity whereby the practices, skills, and social logics that the institutions of modernity have erased in the name of Reason (and economic profitability) can be updated. It is somewhat reminiscent of the reflections undertaken by Jean Baudrillard (1967) on the dialectic that seem to underlie our world of domestic objects: “A whole category of objects seems to evade the rules of a system that we have just analysed (functional): these are baroque, folkloristic, exotic, antique objects. They seem to contradict the requirements of a functional numeracy in response to wishes of another kind: testimony, memory, nostalgia, escape. There is always a temptation really to mean that they represent the survival of a traditional and symbolic order. Although these objects are different, they are all part of modernity, and this is where their double meaning emerges.” Wouldn’t it be the same logics for collective gardens? It was instituted at the beginning of the twentieth century, essentially for economic reasons, and over time, it has become an institution of remembrance of a relation to nature that got lost in the development of the urban-industrial project; however, it is dedicated to social remembrance. Though it was genuinely a support for memory, at least, this is what the aesthetic and theory of the gardens teaches us (Yates 1975), the garden would now find its place in the Art of Remembrance. Since it provides *landscape captures*, that is to

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445 say that the landscape can be understood in its aesthetic and nature-sensitive  
446 meaning (Berque), the garden could possibly be seen as a medium between an *un-*  
447 *overtaken* past seeking for modernization—the pre-modern anthropological inher-  
448 itance—and a present that cannot respond to anthropologically fundamental needs  
449 such as rooting, giving “for free,” and living a “good life.” Our interview with the  
450 painter Ildar Zaripov (exhibition at the Tretyakov Museum of Moscow) has brought  
451 much like to this subject.

#### 453 THE GARDEN OF AN ARTIST

454 Ildar Zaripov, a 54-year-old Tatar painter, is a well-known figure of Kazan.  
455 His 400 m<sup>2</sup> garden is located in Kadicheva, on the edge of the city, near the  
456 factories, in the south part of Kazan. In 1980, Ildar visited a friend in this  
457 garden and he saw a “for sale” sign on the datcha. It was love at first sight.  
458 Since then, he has grown tomatoes, onions, garlic, various flowers... he has a  
459 good standard of living and does not need to earn money from the garden.  
460 However, it cannot be denied that his production of vegetables is a direct  
461 advantage for his own economy; his wife always cans the excess production  
462 to keep food for the winter season. In fact, for Ildar more than for others, his  
463 garden has become the continuity of his workshop, or even “a workshop per  
464 se” as he says, a kind of vegetal workshop in which the movement of the  
465 work of art and the movement of nature both commune: “When I am sur-  
466 rounded by plants, I can rest, ideas cross my mind and I draw them on the  
467 canvas, it opens my eyes and nature is right here, I can hear the birds singing;  
468 this is the truth about my life.”  
469

470  
471 The transmission of the “art of gardening” shall be done through the work  
472 of art more than through social relationships themselves. Hence, some canvas  
473 include remnants from the old wheat fields that used to surround the garden,  
474 and some others contain representations of garden flowers. According to his  
475 own sayings, he learnt gardening through the farming culture that his father  
476 left behind him. He had settled in Kazan in the thirties, in an individual house  
477 with garden, in which he reproduces the organization of rural life (gardens,  
478 trees, farmyard, animals, etc.).  
479

480  
481 The aesthetic vocation of the garden seems to be a particularly vital concern  
482 and does take here a really specific dimension in which the garden stands as a  
483 symbol for much more than a “beautiful place,” but for the place itself in which  
484 beautiful things can be created. Ildar hangs out with neighbors and close friends,  
485 with whom he has more “intellectual” than practical relations. In that sense, the  
486 word datcha is returning to its original meaning that is a second country home in  
487 which the ruling class invited people from good society.  
488  
489

493 Ildar’s conception of the garden goes deep into the “Russian mind” in its  
 494 relation to nature. The garden is “intrinsically pure” and helps balance  
 495 physical and psychological health; this is an image that can also refer to  
 496 Japanese gardens: “Garden work can also be a way to rest; physical activity  
 497 brings inspiration and creativity. When I work in the garden, I think.”

## 498

### 499 5.5 Collective Garden, Landscape, and Transmission

500 We now have to consider the anthropological challenges of the contemporary  
 501 garden properly speaking, by means of an empirical analysis whose limits we are  
 502 well aware of. To put it in a nutshell: It has a very poor economic value, except in  
 503 cases of acute crisis. It is definitely a place to socialize, but it is more appropriate to  
 504 develop “mechanical” relationships with neighbors than real elective friendships. It  
 505 remains a place for meditation that is deeply rooted within the central community,  
 506 that is, family, in which people can work/meditate on their own from time to time.  
 507 Finally, it is only inhabited a few months in a year and remains, most of the time a  
 508 familial or personal “rustic utopia” of a production obtained from a small “nature  
 509 monument” which structures expectations. In the garden of Sochi, H el ene thought  
 510 that “gardens need to be kept alive because they represent nature, they shall not  
 511 disappear, men need nature.” At this point of our analysis, we think it is helpful to  
 512 highlight the theoretical contributions of landscape aesthetics and of the art of  
 513 gardening with the aim to underline the epochal dimension—hypothetically, of  
 514 course—that structures the connection between gardeners and their terroir/territory  
 515 (Fig. 5.5).

516 Let us quickly recall what A. Berque stated: “Societies organize their environ-  
 517 ment according to their own interpretation of it and, conversely, they interpret it  
 518 according to the way they organized it.” Therefore, the aesthetic connection we are  
 519 interested in right now finds its roots at the limits between cultural and biological  
 520 history, at the place in which the gardener finds himself literally “engaged” with his  
 521 environment. This *affordance* (the French borrowed the word from the English  
 522 language), according to Berque, is at the same time of ecologic and cultural nature  
 523 and enables an attachment to the landscape, a possibility to inhabit this world (from  
 524 *habere*: to hold, to take, in Latin). There are only few institutional representations of  
 525 the garden—in contrast, painting of nature landscapes—except for the individual  
 526 domestic iconography containing family portraits, since the garden stands out as a  
 527 separate landscape category per se (just like literature and painting). By opposition  
 528 to the administered and streamlined universe of the Soviet city—the standardization  
 529 of which still remains stunning to western people—the garden rises out of the earth  
 530 to create intimate spaces and build relationships between the self and others through



**Fig. 5.5** Lakeside landscape «à la Tarkovski» in the garden of Sochi

531 the cropping of the land. The point here is that modernity, and most particularly the  
 532 Soviet scientism that dedicated a boundless passion to the artificial, had distanced  
 533 itself from nature and founded its anthropology *outwardly* from it. From the  
 534 Renaissance onward, landscapes start being set apart from nature, (Luginbühl  
 535 1989); this new vision was introduced by the *non-peasant* strata, since farmers, the  
 536 country children, are unable to step back and understand these changes (this is the  
 537 reason why farmers were unable to aestheticize nature). Hence, city dwellers were  
 538 the first to discover—here to be understood as “invent”—rural landscape by  
 539 combining three kinds of factors: natural, technic, and symbolic. Gardens, parks,  
 540 become the natural backdrop for “beautiful landscapes”, garden fence were to  
 541 nature what frames were to paintings: institutionalizing contemplation. Beauty is set  
 542 aside, suspended; that is the one we were able to admire, within our gardeners’  
 543 (women for the most part) intimate spaces. But let us not forget that, until the  
 544 Revolution and probably still afterward, Russian society (except for an aristocratic  
 545 elite that was closely linked to the Enlightenment) was a deeply rooted rural and  
 546 farming society. For most people, this change in the aesthetic approach of nature  
 547 emerged with a move toward industrialization in the twentieth century, in con-  
 548 junction with the institution of collective gardens. This sanctification of nature is  
 549 consubstantial with the end of family farming, but this will receive no further  
 550 debate. The hurtling of Soviet modernity (Moore 1966) involved a three dimen-  
 551 sional, identical, and standardized urban space, which resulted in the neutralization  
 552 of real sites. A famous Soviet comedy sheds light on this reality through the story of

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**Fig. 5.6** The exploration of the “beautiful nature” in the datcha

553 a man driving back home, who takes the wrong street in the wrong city and comes  
 554 into the wrong apartment for it looks exactly the same as his. The image of the  
 555 garden stands in opposition to this space on which no one can have a proper grip; it  
 556 is a complex place that seems to link elements that had been set apart for moder-  
 557 nity’s stake: on the one hand, the local and global, the universal and particular (in  
 558 the ecological paradigm); on the other hand, the physical and logical, the material  
 559 and spiritual (in the phenomenological paradigm) (Fig. 5.6).

#### THE POST-SOVIET URBAN DATCHA

561 Guselle is 29 years old and works as a shopkeeper in Kazan; she took over a  
 562 piece of land from his brother-in-law in 1998. It must be seen as an oppor-  
 563 tunity rather than as an active decision. This land was chosen for its location,  
 564 near the city and on the banks of the Volga. It contains a datcha without a  
 565 garden and thus without any vegetable crops and is surrounded by lawn  
 566 arranged for children games. Her house, as well as that of her brother-in-law,  
 567 has been built up on the site, following the European model: They have a  
 568 prefabricated house; his husband assembled the panels and bounded it all  
 569 with bricks; the second house has been built by professionals. However, her  
 570 husband built the bagna, a traditional Russian “sauna.” Here, the datcha is  
 571 exclusively devoted to rest: “We don’t think that we need a garden, we come  
 572 here once a week to rest.” Guselle explains this choice by telling us that a  
 573 garden entails considerable expenses and that she and her husband would  
 574  
 575  
 576

577 rather spend that money on children's games and on all comfort and  
578 amenities for the datcha. Moreover, her occupation only leaves very little  
579 time for leisure activities. Guselle also admits her lack of interest in gar-  
580 dening; at the most, she is thinking of planting raspberries and blackcurrant  
581 berries for the children. The household does not need a garden to have best  
582 quality products since Guselle's mother owns a large plot (600 m<sup>2</sup>) and  
583 provides her family with fruit and vegetable during the nice season and  
584 canned products for the winter season. Although she rules out working in the  
585 garden, Guselle enjoys fishing on the Volga with her husband; they own a  
586 small motorboat which they use for this purpose. Guselle and her husband  
587 keep up with the neighbors; her neighbor brings her fruit and vegetables  
588 whenever she has too much of it, even though they do not belong to the same  
589 social class. The discussions are friendly: meal sharing, mutual invitations to  
590 birthday parties, games (chess), etc.

591

## 592 5.6 Conclusion

593 The recent evolution of the datcha through an approach based more and more on  
594 aesthetics and less and less on production could be seen as an attempt to move  
595 beyond modernity (which is here the genuine economic function of the collective  
596 garden) has started. Of course, this is not a matter of reverting to the original  
597 empathy of the subject (the farmer) toward the object (nature) but of going beyond  
598 this distinction. Following the model western suburban gardens, each plot tends to  
599 become a kind of small eco-museum, an eco-emblematic temple of our time, a  
600 small nature monument that does not tell the "great victorious national Tales"  
601 anymore but rather small particular stories of universal value. Augustin Berque tells  
602 us that the post-modern paradox has enabled a re-sanctification of nature "in pro-  
603 portion to the profane knowledge brought by science." This dynamics can be  
604 understood from the metamorphosis and transmissions of the gardens generation  
605 after generation, and from the restoration that enables their survival, even if their  
606 function has changed. If reality seems to be complex, it is because all the  
607 above-mentioned dimensions can coexist within a single garden, just like the  
608 datchas are home to all generations.

609 The meaning of the garden thus finds itself at a crossroads between the wish of  
610 the elderly to perpetuate solidarity in the family, with the garden's production being  
611 strictly divided up between family members (particularly toward progeny) but also  
612 dispatched among neighbors and friends in order to structure a sociability network.  
613 However, the new aspiration of the post-Soviet generation that is now old enough to  
614 procreate introduces an intergenerational break (abandonment of the agricultural  
615 activity or even of the garden) which (dialectically) calls for greater family



616 structures. The transformation of the datchas finally appears to be a powerful  
617 anthropological factor that reveals the changes of Russian society (and, on a broader  
618 level, of post-Soviet societies like Ukraine and Belarus), caught between, on the  
619 one hand, the continuation of the modern industrial dream involving a tear-off from  
620 the land and, on the other hand, the dream of going back to nature, thus maintaining  
621 a solid bond with tradition, family, and the land. **New forms of sociability and of  
622 land use forms might arise from this preservation of species, knowledge, know-how  
623 and memories that may all serve as a basis for transition societies.**

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## 641 Author Biography

642 **Frédéric Lemarchand** sociologist, is a Full Professor at the University of Caen. Director of the  
643 **Risk Network** (Institut for Humanities), he began his research on various environmental topics. In  
644 1995, he started to analyze the social consequences of the Chernobyl disaster, for 10 years (and  
645 included the nuclear Fukushima disaster, in 2011). He pursues a personal reflection about  
646 transhumanism, relationships between humanity and techniques, environmental transitions, and  
647 democracy. He is a member of numerous scientific journals (as *Vertigo*, *CA*), director of many Ph.D.  
648 on this topics, and member of the scientific council of CRIIGEN (Committee for Independent  
649 Research and Information on Genetic Engineering).

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