

Article

Constructing Organic Food through Urban Agriculture, Community Gardens in Seville

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Abstract: The growing presence of community or allotment gardens seeks to respond to the challenges of today's urban societies in terms of sustainability. The food dimension of this phenomenon is one of its most important aspects, with clear repercussions on improving the quality of life of the allotment gardeners and their families. Through observation and qualitative analysis of some community urban gardens in southern Spain (Andalusia), this paper notes that the people who cultivate allotments within these community gardens attribute a wide variety of different meanings to their practices. One essential contribution of this research is the finding that this plurality of meanings moves beyond the rational-technical dimension of the act of growing, while at the same time redefining the act of consuming organic food, because of its connection with productive and social activities.

Keywords: urban agriculture; community gardens; allotment gardens; organic food; ecological nutrition; qualitative analysis; practices



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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, urban gardens and allotments have been springing up all over the planet. Urban agriculture (UA), however, is not a new phenomenon. In fact, urban development is historically linked to agricultural development [1,2]. Over the course of history, cities have grown food within the cities themselves and on their outskirts. In parallel, as trade became globalised, major metropolises gradually demanded food from increasingly further afield. However, with the age of industrialisation, an agri-food system began to develop that would eventually decouple cities from their local and regional environments. The triumph of the Green Revolution in agriculture and the neo-liberal city model from the 1950s onwards led to the biggest historical schism in countryside-city relations [3].

In this study context, the first urban settlements in southern Spain were directly related to extensive agriculture and more specifically irrigated agriculture [4,5]. In Spain, although industrialisation arrived later than in other countries, it also ended up affecting agricultural activities. One significant consequence has been the population exodus from the countryside to the cities: in 1950, 75% of economically active people living in the countryside worked in agriculture; by 1991, this proportion had plummeted to just 26% [6]. By the end of the 2010s, only 4% of Spain's working population worked in agriculture [7]. This implies the progressive disappearance of agricultural workers as a collective subject [8] and a process of de-agrarianisation that was not only productive but also cultural [9]. In parallel, in most Spanish cities, especially since the 1990s, there has been speculative urban growth that, on the Mediterranean coastline, has been expressively dubbed a "tsunami of urbanisation" [10]. The region of Andalusia, located in the south of Spain, is a key witness to these changes, with deep socio-economic roots [11].

Faced with this model of urbanisation and its economic and social consequences [12], initiatives launched by social collectives and movements, including the emergence of social

and community gardens, as new forms of UA, began to emerge in Spain in the 1990s [3]. This phenomenon, which is partly inspired by other UA references from around the world, is analysed by a whole raft of research and critical studies that highlight its nature as an alternative to ecological and socio-economic unsustainability, and its involvement in the production and social reproduction of a more human urban habitat [3,13–16]. This entails, among other things, understanding social participation in the design, management, and control of gardens as examples of generating local governance possibilities [17]. Participation that carries local political implications, while also being related to the defence of an agri-ecological food system that would reduce the environmental consequences of globalised industrial agriculture [18].

The benefits of these contemporary forms of UA have been examined extensively in the literature on this specific subject matter. On the basis of its multifunctionality [19], such benefits have been found in various areas, such as increases in physical activity [20], improvements in health [21,22], strengthening of social networks [23,24] and socio-economic contributions, for example in the face of crisis scenarios [14,25,26]. Nutritional benefits are among the most significant advantages identified [27,28]. Specifically, the role of these nutritional benefits linked to their social function has been highlighted [29]. Other aspects related to this area have also been underscored, such as improvements in food knowledge, skills, and awareness [30]. In addition, from the perspective of agroecology, other aspects have been developed in detail, such as the association between food sovereignty and food safety [13,31].

However, few studies have dealt with this food dimension through the perceptions of those involved in relation to their practices [32–34]. This precisely is our contribution, analysing the practices of the participants in these experiences. Taking a Practice Theory approach, this article studies the meanings attributed by community gardeners to the consumption of food from their allotments. For Shove et al. [35], practices are defined by relationships of interdependence between materials, competencies and meanings. As these gardens produce food for the gardeners' own consumption, we will address these three dimensions in the areas of consumption and production, as they are interrelated. Thus, the materials will be, in our case, things, tangible physical entities (water, land, tools), technologies (food cultivation and preparation), as well as the products obtained themselves (fruits and vegetables), among others. Competencies relate to know-how and cultivation skills, but also to food preparation and processing. Finally, the meanings underlined in this article include ideas, aspirations, and constructions of meaning in their dual dimension: those perceived by practitioners and those transmitted by them through their consumption and production practices. Analysing meanings in depth does not imply understanding them separately, since, as we will see, the three elements are closely interrelated.

In this analysis of meanings, we will examine their interpretations and redefinitions of the ecology and nature present in the practices of community allotment gardeners in-depth. The opinions expressed by UA gardeners with regard to ecology have been addressed in detail in relation to their degree of awareness or commitment to ecology [16,33]. Our contribution to this specific point, rather than focusing on detecting such levels of ecological commitment, seeks to understand the roots that determine the meaning of such practices.

Understanding the meaning of growing your own food is important because, as other studies have shown, there may be different interpretations of the various social agents involved in urban agriculture, particularly policymakers and market gardeners [33]. This is especially relevant for designing plans and policies to promote urban agriculture with the participation of social agents [27]. In short, it is an issue that can contribute to the debate on the possibilities of urban agriculture in the development of more sustainable cities with the participation of different groups in municipal governance.

Linked to this perspective is also the challenge of moving beyond the analysis of collective practices (the collective being in this case the community gardeners) as the mere sum of their individual decisions. In this sense, following Ingold [36], practices become mean-

ingful within a process of learning and communication that is embedded in both physical and social interaction contexts. This will involve, using Leach's terminology [37], probing the dual dimension of this process: its communicative dimension, that is, culturally defined by the collective within its own communication code; and its rational-technical dimension, based on useful functions. Without a fixed boundary between the two dimensions [37], our objective when analysing the meaning of the community gardeners' practices will be to gauge the preponderance of each dimension (communicative or technical-rational) in the various scenarios in which the gardeners perform their practices. We will therefore analyse the implications of this on their eating habits of the food produced on their allotments, as we say, in relation to their redefinitions of nature and ecology.

In summary, our objectives focus on two basic points:

- To know the meanings that gardeners attribute to their feeding practices, with an emphasis on their interpretations of ecology and nature.
- To calibrate the preponderance of the communicative or technical-rational dimension in the practices of gardeners.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Context: Community Gardens in Seville

The community gardens included in this study are located in three peripheral areas of Seville: the neighbourhoods of San Jerónimo and Montequinto, located to the north and south of the city, and the peri-urban area "Hacienda Porzuna", located in a small town, west of the capital (Mairena del Aljarafe). All the gardens were created as neighbourhood initiatives and later supported by the local authorities, the first being set up in San Jerónimo in 1995 and the most recent, Parque La Vaguada (Montequinto), in 2015. Table 1 sets out basic information for each of the gardens, in terms of the size of the community garden and allotments, as well as the number of people participating in our study. These gardens are part of a broader context of the emergence of urban community gardens in the city of Seville that began in the 1990s. They are located close to green areas and parks and do not come into conflict with other properties or urban areas of special public or private interest. Their beneficiaries are usually older people, mostly men, Spanish, residing in neighbourhoods near the allotments, and this is also the general profile of the subjects included in this study. Most of them are retired (82%) or unemployed (12%). Employed persons are a minority (6%), performing different occupations and jobs. Ownership of the allotments is granted for a limited period, which is renewed periodically. Only one plot per person can be assigned, so the number of gardeners is equal to the number of plots. These gardens are geared towards organic cultivation, as set out in their internal rules, and vegetables are grown exclusively for self-consumption. In addition to the plots, the gardens often have some sort of communal building for training activities and small social events. In regards to their economic management, when located on publicly owned land, the services (water, land, electricity) are provided by the City Council, but the gardeners themselves cover these and other general costs with a monthly fee of between 6 and 10 euros. The gardeners organise themselves as a community to make these payments and manage other communal services.

Table 1. Basic data on urban gardens.

Community Garden	Total Area (m ²)	Average Allotment/Plot Size (m ²)	Total Allotments/Plots	Gender (Proportion of Men)	Mean Age	Year Built	Gardeners Interviewed
Hacienda Porzuna	9000	64	36	76%	58	2012	9
La Vaguada	16,500	55	138	81%	64	2015	20
San Jerónimo	12,853	86	71	72%	62	1995	11

Source: Adapted with the permission of Reference [38]. Copyright 2017 Ayuntamiento de Sevilla.

2.2. Methods and Techniques

The Theory of Social Practice is a useful tool to analyze the relationships between humans and nature, and more specifically, the ways of consuming, producing and feeding on nature's products in a sustainable way [39]. This theory is a field of increasing expansion, which starts from deep-rooted theoretical contributions, such as those of Giddens [40] and Bourdieu [41]. On a methodological scale, this approach seeks to transcend traditional dichotomies (such as individual/society, or social/material) in its analysis of the practices of social actors [42]. This implies its growing application in areas of social research such as environmental sociology, consumer sociology, political science, or historical studies, among others [42,43].

Our research method focuses on the study of practices. These can be defined in two simultaneous ways: as performance and as an entity [35,44]. As performance, the practice is evidenced through its concrete realization: it is the observable, contingent behaviour, connected with individual choices. As an entity, the practice transcends its specific performance, presenting a social nature. In addition, it presents a temporal trajectory prior to each execution, as it is associated with shared social meanings [44]. Under this last approach, the practice is conceived as "a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other (. . .) (forming) so to speak a 'block' whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements" [45] (p. 249). These interrelated elements can be grouped as material resources, competencies and meanings. The meanings, on which we focus this work, refer to the cognitive and affective aspects of the practices. This includes the assessment of the activities, beliefs and emotions associated with the practices by those who perform them. All of this represents a clear methodological challenge. It must be taken into account that feeding practices, beyond being understood from the perspective of simple ingestion, have a "compound" character [46]. This means that eating, conceived as an entity, involves the intersection of several integrative practices. In the field of UA, this implies, specifically, including activities of food production, processing, and consumption.

Our way of dealing with this complexity is to aboard it from a qualitative approach, seeking to deepen the sense that market gardeners confer on their practices. Qualitative methodologies have shown a relevant sensitivity to face the complexity of social phenomena, revealing the cultural values of social behaviour and, in general, the nuances of human activities [47,48]. Through ethnographic fieldwork carried out over 12 months, between 2018 and 2019, the aim was to span the entire agricultural cycle and related activities. As a result, in-depth interviews were conducted with the gardeners and informal discussions were held with them on their allotments. In addition, participatory observation work was carried out, sharing time with the gardeners in these community gardens, seeing their practices and social relations in situ, and participating in some of their social events, assemblies, and meetings.

The sample of interviewees consists of a total of 44 people, 32 men and 12 women, of various ages, although with an average age of approximately 60 that basically reflects, as mentioned previously, the typical profiles of these gardeners. They were approached during their moments of rest between tasks, informed about the purposes of the study, and guaranteed complete anonymity in their responses. The interviews were based on thematic scripts, asking them about various aspects (see Appendix A). As they were semi-structured scripts, the questions asked could be flexible and sensitive to those contributions that the interviewees or interviewers considered of interest. The basic topics covered in all cases included: motivations for accessing these allotments, growing practices, most frequently grown plants, organic techniques for fertilising and combating pests, social relationships associated with the community garden, and, more intensively, eating habits and processing of the produce grown on the allotment. These conversations, which lasted on average between 50 and 70 min, were subsequently recorded and transcribed. With this we tried to respond to the two mentioned research objectives:

To find out the meanings attributed by the gardeners to their practices of consuming food from their plots, we asked about the changes in their diet due to gardening, culinary techniques, processing and conservation, among other aspects. Given that production and consumption were conceived as two interrelated spheres, questions on productive aspects were also addressed to this objective. In addition, to know specifically their interpretations on ecology and nature, we asked about various aspects such as growing practices, cultivated plants and advantages and disadvantages of growing in an ecological way. Some aspects of consumption, such as their assessment of the organic production obtained, or the consumption of organic products outside the garden, also provided information on this point.

To gauge the preponderance of the communicative or technical-rational dimension, questions were asked about the production (for example, advantages and disadvantages of cultivating gardens) and consumption (such as the description and assessment of their eating habits, or the assessment of their intake of organic products).

Evidently, not all questions included in the script were connected with these objectives. Some were informative or complementary. In addition, since it was a semi-structured script, part of the answer to these objectives was covered in the course of the conversations with other questions. This is the product of this open structure of the interviews, in which the gardeners responded in a relaxed way, emerging relevant questions not raised a priori in the script, or responding to questions provided for other objectives.

Given the size of the sample, no software was used to process and analyse the information obtained. This analysis was carried out on the basis of basic descriptors related to the main items of the study, present in the aforementioned thematic script. Finally, some of the conclusions of the study, especially those relating to nutritional habits, were shared with the gardeners in group sessions during the final phase of the study, sharing their overall vision and impressions on organic and healthy eating.

3. Results

3.1. Initial Skills and Knowledge for Urban Agriculture

As we saw earlier, in Spain, the percentage of the population involved in some form of agricultural activity barely exceeds 4%, far from the global figure of 26.5% [49], so this is a marginal activity in quantitative terms. There is, therefore, little proximity generally among the population to the world of agriculture, with a significant lack of knowledge of techniques, know-how, and means of agricultural production.

The agricultural tasks and activities carried out in these gardens, although contextualised as leisure time activities are a contrast to such trends. Such practices, therefore, imply an unusual way of approaching food production and consumption within the sphere of self-consumption. This implies a direct connection to the food life cycle through specific activities, such as planting, harvesting, processing, and cooking food, supported by knowledge of materials and techniques. The result is the development of specific competencies, but also a series of social implications that emerge when gardening and consuming the produce grown. To be able to enter this world about which few have in-depth knowledge, some use media searches (internet, blogs, etc.) or even adopt a trial-and-error approach. In two of the community gardens (Hacienda Porzuna and San Jerónimo), the authorities organised some courses to train gardeners in organic farming techniques. However, the most common practice is to obtain information by asking more experienced fellow gardeners: “I look here and there, I experience a bit... but above all ask the elders. They spend many h in the garden and have experience, they know...” (Man, 53 years old).

In this process of learning, there is a high level of commitment in terms of bodily attitudes and skills, with their corresponding emotional implications, such as those associated with memories. For some gardeners, these emotions are closely connected with childhood memories of bonding with nature. Many of the gardeners report having had contact in the past with agricultural work or with the natural environment. Experiences and memories that explain in some cases their motivation to access these gardens now they are older

and reinforce this association of food with what they have grown: My grandfather and father have always had a vegetable garden and we have always eaten what the land has given" (Man, 68 years old). "I really like the countryside. I grew up on a farm and we had vegetable gardens there. (. . .) That's why I wanted to have this garden because I remember that, when I was young, we ate what we grew in our garden and it's completely different to what you can buy" (Man, 45 years old).

3.2. *Benefits and Advantages of Gardening*

As we say, this phenomenological approach to the way the gardens are run also picks up on emotional implications as one of the most apparent results. These implications affect gardeners both in their production and consumption activities. Many of the subjects analysed highlight the feeling of well-being created by physical work, contact with the land, and satisfaction with the production obtained. This practice personalises the close relationship with the products of nature. Recognising the beauty of what they have grown, being surprised by natural phenomena, or seeing their plants grow day by day are signs of this state of satisfaction. For example, some gardeners claim to talk to their fruits and vegetables, in a personalised approach that clearly exemplifies this emotional relationship with the production-consumption process: "Yesterday I picked a few beans that I am going to cook today. It even helps to stimulate your appetite. Because you know that you planted it, you watered it, you picked it . . . you've even spoken to them... and in the end, you have to eat it . . . " (Woman, 60 years old). "Many of the jobs you have to do are hard work, but I don't see it as work, on the contrary, I like doing it. I enjoy the whole process from planting, to how the crops grow until I harvest them, and all the jobs in-between" (Man, 55 years old). Contact with nature is thus one of the fundamental substrates that provide physical and emotional well-being. There are recurrent testimonies referring to the therapeutic potential of this contact with nature, improving self-esteem, concentration or helping to disconnect from everyday problems and crises. Located in an environment full of urban landmarks, in the community gardens, these gardeners also find a bubble of "healing nature" in the middle of the city. This can lead to the development of tactics to create and recreate nature, some of which are seemingly contradictory. For example, we observed that shade-giving trees had been planted in communal areas in some gardens, as part of making the community garden more pleasant and "green", and not just to cope with the hot summer weather. At other times, decorative plants or parterres are planted in communal areas, with more aesthetic than functional implications. These practices have in some cases generated conflicts due to their demand for irrigation water (also affecting nearby plots with its roots or its shadow or damaging water pipes), but they point to an effort to make the gardens "look natural". Other cases are somewhat striking in this recreation of nature. In the San Jerónimo community garden, for example, faced with the constant noise of traffic from a nearby road, one of the interviewees told us that he had managed to isolate himself from this unpleasant noise in a unique way: he decided to imagine that what he actually heard was the distant crash of ocean waves. Thus, he managed not only to relax but to assimilate in a rather pleasant (and creative) way into the rigours of a "naturalised" urban environment.

Finally, one of the advantages commonly reported by market gardeners is related to social well-being. The community sense of the garden leads to a continuous process of social interrelation that occurs from the moment they join the community garden. This process covers the exchange of seeds, support in the face of unforeseen events (watering a fellow gardener's allotment if they are unable to come for any reason), gifts or exchanges of surplus production, the organisation of community tasks (cleaning up—composting), and the management of shared expenses. Although, as in any social group, there may be minor disagreements or conflicts of interest at times, the primary and most evident outcome is a social effervescence that becomes one of the intangible benefits highlighted by gardeners.

3.3. Obstacles and Disadvantages of Gardening

Gardeners' health and enjoyment arguments generally outweigh costs and efforts. Thus, other aspects, such as calculating the economic implications, seem to be in the background. Lack of confidence to address financial issues in-depth, or reluctance to recognise economic weakness, might also explain the scarcity of testimonies such as that of a 71-year-old gardener who told us she is not spending as much on vegetables at the market "... you might not think so, but when it comes to shopping... It makes a difference. Of course, it makes a difference". Thus, the budget needed to maintain the garden is rarely spoken about, although in practice it is not very high, as monthly fees are affordable. In addition, other costs, such as the purchase of natural fertilizers (manure), which are often bought communally, are also not significant, costs which often decrease when they make their own compost.

Calculating the number of h spent on the allotment is a different matter. In relation to this point, some gardeners are aware of the poor "return" on time invested, arguing that "if you look at the h you've worked, having this garden does not add up." However, this does not seem to be the norm in these gardens. Rather, the accounts reflect an absence of time considerations, which ties in with the fact that most of the gardeners are retired: "Time here doesn't exist... this moment is my moment, time I enjoy completely, I am very happy spending my time on this" (Man, 63 years old). "One of the reasons for being here is to fill your time, because what do you do? Do you retire and stay at home on the sofa? (...) I spend my time here and I absolutely love it. It's one of the best things I've done" (Man, 64 years old).

Within the group of gardeners "having an attractive allotment" (that is, not only in a good state of production but pleasant to look at, clear of weeds, with neat and tidy furrows, etc.) is an indicator that things "are going well". This aesthetic result is also often considered a sign of the gardener's constancy, effort, and daily work, and also of their "affection" for the allotment. As a result, some gardeners who are unable to follow this ideal model (due to a lack of time, training, or skills) may also experience some discomfort. This situation is more common among younger people or those with other daily obligations. For these gardeners, the community garden gives them a feeling of satisfaction, but within a general framework of disappointment as they are not able to participate as they would like. While this profile is not overly common, one recurring fact is still significant. Despite the feeling of disappointment, it is compensated by the happiness experienced during the harvest: "This has been a dream for me... The problem is that it's too much for me because I can't spend as much time as it needs. I have four children, and one of them has a disability. I have to dedicate a lot of time to her because of her condition, as I do for the rest of my family. I have to attend to more things than just the allotment and I even consider giving it up sometimes... The plot is never the way I would like it, with no weeds, all neat and tidy, like other gardeners here whose allotments are beautiful ... and that overwhelms me a little ... but well, I am happy to be able to spend some time on it because when I see the fruits of my labour, I am really glad" (Woman, 48 years old).

Within this direct participation in the "history" of the food, which culminates with the produce-food grown and at the same time savoured with pleasure, there are various different episodes and intermediate events. Unforeseen circumstances and unexpected events affect the production of gardeners who, as mentioned previously, are not generally experts in horticulture. Thus, following the guidelines of organic production means that crops are more prone to pests and smaller yields. Gardeners work strenuously in this battle, sharing methods and knowledge, exchanging seeds of different, more resistant varieties, or experimenting with new techniques. In many cases, poor results are accepted as part of the "natural" course of things: "Some years you have courgettes coming out of your ears and others you don't get a single one. Why ... well I don't know why. That's a mystery to be discovered because I have no idea. One year, your cauliflowers might be really small and another year ... it varies, things don't always turn out well year after year" (Man, 61 years old).

These discourses are maintained from diverse positions: gardeners who care more about “spending time” on the allotments; other cases (few in our study) that apply the foundations of respect of the “natural” rhythms; or others that, simply, claim they do not have time to think about alternatives, such as one 63-year-old gardener, who stated: “I don’t put anything on them (organic fertilisers) . . . because I don’t have time, and if I get the tomatoes I get tomatoes and that’s that”. In addition to this situation of unpredictability and naturalised development, the location of these gardens in an urban environment adds other problems and challenges, such as the theft of fruits and vegetables. Although these events obviously cause more upset among those who need the allotment to help cover their food costs, they are generally tolerated with a degree of patience: “I’ve had things stolen numerous times. Yes, all kinds of things (laughs). Yes, tools . . . In fact, my fellow gardeners say that I’m unflappable, because I don’t get cross . . . Although it’s true that some of them really need this. But I do it for fun . . . ” (Man, 59 years old).

3.4. *Changes in Diet Due to Gardening, Valuation of Organic Products Grown*

With regard to the consumption of the products grown on the plots themselves, the inclusion of such products in the diet of the gardener’s family is variable. Thus, taking into account the perception of the gardeners themselves about the quantitative presence of these products in their daily eating habits, we see a wide range of practices: from cases that claim to supply almost all the vegetables consumed by their family, to those where these products supplement their consumption. Let us not forget that these are small plots, with an average area of between 60–70 square metres, prone to the productive fluctuations of organic farming.

Qualitatively, gardeners often make a clear distinction in their discourses between “bought” and “grown” produce. It should be borne in mind that an organic approach has been taken in these gardens from the outset. In productive terms, although there are nuances in interpretations, there are not many major digressions on this issue. This is largely the case because organic farming is not an option, but rather part of the foundational requirements to be able to participate in these community gardens. In addition, gardeners often express their support for this type of organic production because of the comparative quality of their results. Thus, knowledge of the organic origin of their vegetables usually leads to a rejection of the “chemicals” or “the artificiality” present in supermarket produce. “Chemicals”, described as the application of fertilisers, pesticides, or herbicides, are understood to be an unhealthy acceleration of the natural process of fruit and vegetable growth: “When I was a girl there wasn’t so much cancer around, there was some, but it wasn’t . . . and it comes from growing with pesticides, insecticides, all those . . . chemicals . . . And here you plant whatever you want, and you eat it as soon as you’ve picked it . . . it has so many more properties than a week after it’s picked . . . you respect the ripening of the fruits, and the control of insecticides and pesticides . . . ” (Woman, 63).

This type of testimony relates “bought” agricultural produce not only with industrialised and depersonalised intervention but with negative health effects. Interviewees often attribute these products to an uncertain and unknown origin, saying things like “they are increasingly bringing things from further afield”, or “they clearly don’t respect the natural ripening times”. Set against this, the idea of controlling one’s own produce emerges, repeated in the discourses of the gardeners. Control is understood as a consequence of direct and close control over the production process. However, apart from this certainty created by proximity to production, the most cited indicator to emphasise the quality of their own produce is a quality physically perceived through consumption: taste. Flavour is usually the most important, but not the only, organoleptic quality of fruit and vegetables (together with texture, fragrance, and visual appearance) as emphasised in the accounts of the gardeners: “If you go to the market, for little money you buy what you grow here, but then you have the factor of enjoying doing this and of course the taste of the products” (Man, 61 years old). “It’s clear from the taste, texture, shape, and even size. Sometimes

you get smaller vegetables than you can find in a supermarket but then they have so much flavour" (Man, 60 years old).

Since the fruits and vegetables grown on these allotments are for the gardeners' own families, they generally report a widespread change in their eating habits since they began working on their allotment. However, this change is closely associated with an improvement in the perceived quality of the product. Additionally, the perception of a quantitative increase in fruit and vegetable consumption reported by the vast majority of subjects is also significant. This change is less evident among those who previously consumed lots of fruit and vegetables, for various reasons: people who were previously aware of healthy eating, were vegetarian or advocates of organic farming, or people with a pre-existing health condition, such as diabetes or high blood pressure: "Before (my diet) was good because of my condition and I had to and have to take care of myself. Picking something almost every day and eating it at home and always having plenty makes you eat better" (Man, 69 years old). "It's not changed... my diet has always been very healthy. It's a philosophy of life" (Man, 45 years old).

However, even in these cases, we also found increases in average vegetable consumption since working on their allotment: "I have always been concerned that I and my family should have a good diet. So we're not healthier now just because we have the allotment; we were already healthy before that. We have always eaten very healthily; the thing now is that we harvest a lot and we're not going to throw it away... We use more vegetables in cooking" (Woman, 54 years old).

In any case, fruit and vegetables are seen as the ideal complement to other foods that make up the diet. Hence, there is a general perception that their diet is more balanced and healthier: "You eat healthier. Although you eat other foods like chicken, beef or pork, fish, etc., your side vegetables come from here. You cook with the vegetables you grow on the allotment" (Man, 61 years old).

3.5. Basic Eating Habits

When asking the gardeners about the composition of their daily diet, there are certain contradictions that need to be contextualised. Thus, previous consumption habits contrast with other habits that, in accordance with strictly nutritional criteria, could be described as "less healthy." The general lack of whole wheat flour in their diet, the regular consumption of spreadable fats, cured meats, cakes and pastries, and the consumption of alcoholic beverages are some examples reported by the gardeners themselves. The cultural roots of these habits must be examined in greater depth if we want to gain a better understanding of the meanings that the gardeners attribute to their nutritional behaviours.

Thus, we see that in many cases, the allotment gardeners classify these products as "healthy" or "quality" because of their direct link to the origin of the product. These are "locally made cakes and pastries" or "traditional country" sausages, products purchased in small villages or in nearby rural areas. Although many of these products tend to be handmade, many traditional bakery products are made using sugars and animal fats. In these cases, the nutritional value (measured by the presence of sugars and fats) is not an argument to consider them unhealthy and remove them from the diet. Other more forceful arguments emerge, such as the absence of "chemical" additives or the lack of "industrial" processing, but above all, the fact that they are bought from nearby villages or family-owned businesses: "I left my village more than 30 years ago and I still bring back things from there that I know for certain are made without any chemicals" (Woman, 54 years old).

Similar reasoning is applied to the consumption of alcohol and some cured meats. These types of foods and drinks tend to be widely consumed with friends and acquaintances during social events. "Tapas" and the consumption of alcoholic beverages are a widespread social practice in many areas of Spain. Low to medium strength drinks are usually consumed, typically a glass of wine, or more frequently beer. As stated before, this consumption is very closely linked to social relations with friends and family. They also

usually occur outdoors, in bar terraces and other places for social gatherings. As part of the sociocultural substrate, expressions such as “getting together for a beer”, “going to a bar for tapas”, or “going out for a few beers” are regularly heard in conversation. In any case, these habits, which are generally in step with social engagements, can occur with different levels of frequency or at varying degrees, depending on the subject: “Alcohol... Not that much. Well, I like the odd glass of wine. But always with a meal, if I get together with my brother, I might have a couple of small glasses, of ‘mosto’. And that’s it . . . onwards and upwards” (Man, 91 years old). “I love having tapas... (...) I like beer more than water . . . So now, when I leave here... I’ll meet up with my son and daughter-in-law. (...) we start talking and have three or four beers each. (...) then with lunch I’ll have another beer, and of an evening I’ll have another beer. Maybe that’s a little bit more than I should... That’s five or six beers. A day. That’s on weekends. During the week, I don’t go near it. With lunch, I’ll drink water or red wine with soda and that’s it...” (Man, 61 years old).

3.6. *Changes in Culinary Techniques Due to Gardening, Processing and Conservation Techniques*

As for the processing of these foods, consuming more vegetables does not necessarily lead to innovation in their preparation or processing. This lack of interest in cooking ties in with the profile of the gardeners, mostly older men, with a degree of rigidity in the assignment of gender roles, finding that women generally take care of food preparation. However, some men report that they are beginning to take more of an interest in such tasks, partly as a result of exchanges of information and experiences with their fellow allotment gardeners. Among the younger gardeners and the women, there has been some expansion of their daily recipes, given the availability of a large volume of the same product in each season. This need to “break with the routine” is also more pressing among gardeners whose allotments are not very diverse in terms of the number of different species grown.

In addition, we also noted that food processing is strongly affected by a minimalist approach in general. In this sense, we see that cooking is dependent on the quality of the product. In accordance with the idea of “respecting the vegetable” so as not to alter its flavour, intervention is minimal, usually just boiling, grilling, or cooking in a simple stew: “Because... almost everything is better eaten the way it is You know what I mean? Except for beans, chard Chard, for example, is really good with prawns, the stalks are really good sauteed. But here almost everything is better eaten fresh, most things . . . I eat lots of cauliflower raw, in a salad. Fresh...that’s the good thing” (Man, 59 years old). “I haven’t changed much about the way I cook vegetables... I still cook them the way I always have. Although I do steam vegetables a bit more because that way, they retain their flavour better and it’s also a much healthier way to eat them” (Man, 65 years old).

With regard to the processing of products for conservation, few gardeners said they used freezing or vacuum packing. In addition to the factors mentioned previously, this is largely influenced by the small size of the allotments, with high levels of crop diversity and, above all, the tendency to distribute the surplus to friends, family, or fellow gardeners. This also ties in with the idea of enjoying the gardens and allotments without the drive to produce, which can cause stress, provided they are able to take such an approach. “This (the allotment) is all about coming here to enjoy it, not to give me work to do at home. You know? . . . unless someone in the village asks you to bring them some aubergines . . . ” (Man, 59 years old). “It’s also a way for us all to get along . . . , here the beauty of all this is ‘I’ll give something to you, and you give something to me’, what we’ve got extra of . . . ” (Man, 68 years old).

3.7. *Consumption of Other Organic Products (Not from the Garden)*

Finally, the consumption of organic foods (obtained from outside the allotment gardens) is not widespread among these gardeners. Only a small percentage, around 10% approximately, reported consuming such foods, with the high cost of these products being the most often put forward argument. In other cases, they talked about the lack of organic shops near where they live, and their doubts about whether these foods are “truly” organic,

as part of their logic of giving credibility to purchases made at local shops. In any case, those who claim to have consumed these organic products stated that they found similarities with those grown on their own allotment. In this way, they reaffirm the differences between their organically grown vegetables and non-organic production, both in price and, as stated earlier, in taste: “Actually yes, because you can really tell the difference in the flavour between organic things and the ones you buy in the supermarket. The thing is, also, that you go to the supermarket and start looking... when it comes to buying organic things, the difference in price is huge” (Woman, 50 years old). However, this contact with their own organic production can give rise to paradoxical situations. In this regard, the taste argument as an indicator of vegetable quality can turn against the consumption of products grown on their own allotments. This occurs sometimes when the “genuine” flavour of a vegetable is discovered when they first taste its “organic version” grown on the allotment. The result can be a reluctance to consume this product. This is the case with certain particularly intense flavours they are unaccustomed to, such as cauliflowers: “I love cauliflower. But my wife cooked it once and we had to throw it away, because the smell was so strong and the taste was too strong, and I said to my wife, ‘You see? (. . .)’ but it had such a strong smell it was unbearable, you couldn’t eat it, same thing with the taste. And so, I said, ‘into the bin it goes...’” (Man, 61 years old).

4. Discussion

The discourses reported by the allotment gardeners generally point to an expansion in the meaning of food consumption, incorporating elements of production and social reproduction. In other words, it is not just about eating food, but about experiencing the production process from start to finish, sharing it in acts of production and consumption, on the allotments and beyond. Through our observations of these experiences, we have seen how community allotment gardens favour a temporary configuration of practices attached to the agricultural cycle and the evolution and continual flow of natural phenomena occurring in the gardens. Working on the allotment becomes a continual stimulus for sociability, physical activation, and contact with the environment. It is a dynamic that is apparently incompatible with imbalance or haste and provides therapeutic and pleasurable results. All of this is consistent with the literature, which highlights these benefits for gardeners when cultivating their gardens [19,50,51].

However, in this article, we propose an advance in the understanding of the vision that gardeners have of their own practices. This affects their assessments of issues like nature and ecology. With regard to the first, we have seen how the productive experience becomes particularly enjoyable insofar as it is embodied within a strongly “naturalised” space. That is, with specific meanings of nature attributed to different means, places, and contexts [32,52]. This implies as we have seen, employing sometimes forced, sometimes imaginative and creative solutions to the recreation of nature. As a consequence of this productive evolution and progression attached to naturalised references, food is not only linked to a territory; it not only tastes different. It also has “history”: there is a great deal invested in it, after many h of work on the allotment. Above all, they have seen the food born, grow, and be harvested. There is a kind of parent-child relationship between gardeners and the food they produce, as we have seen.

One consequence of this intensification of the man-nature (and gardener-food) relationship is greater control by gardeners themselves of the process by which food is produced and consumed. This agrees with what has been addressed in other studies [30,53]. If industrial foods are increasingly ethereal, more detached in their production from concrete experience, closeness to food emerges here through its production, not through mere consumption. Furthermore, the establishment of a community imprint in these gardens permeates some of the logic of reciprocity by which means, knowledge, and capacities are shared. This contrasts with an increasingly widespread global trend, due to the impact of urban and agri-industrial dynamics. A dynamic, whereby, as Fischler [54] states, the existence of “pure consumers”, detached from knowledge of the real origin of food and

how it is processed and distributed, is widespread. The gardeners interviewed here are not completely immune to this dynamic, as they themselves recognise, insofar as they acquire many ingredients for their usual diet outside of the community garden. At the same time, however, other practices such as the recovery of production knowledge and techniques or increasing the range of plants grown through the use of unexploited variants are oriented in other directions. For example, the allotment gardens play a strong albeit indirect educational role by raising awareness of the less sustainable implications of the development of the agro-industrial produce market. Therefore, apart from the discreet quantitative impact that such experiences may have on this global dynamic, they represent a strategic space for education and awareness of environmental sustainability, as other studies recognize [55].

The literature on UA highlights the multifunctionality of urban gardens, responding to multiple social demands [19,27,30,33]. The community gardens analysed here are basically for leisure and pleasure. Due to the slow pace of life to be found on the allotments, in time with the phenomena of nature, gardeners find a place for “productive relaxation”. As we have seen, the “low” yields characteristic of organic cultivation do not seem to be of particular concern to these gardeners. However, these problems (as well as greater impatience with regard to results) affect those who have less time to spend on the allotments or less technical training. In any case, they are more a cause for concern when the gardeners are interested in higher yields rather than relaxing leisure time. This is consistent with a growing framework in the use of these allotment gardens seeking these ends, given the growing food crisis, as other studies have analysed [14,25,26]. In our work, the profile of the participants in the study (largely older retired people) has been decisive in guiding the results in this regard. Even so, there could be undetected economic difficulties among the gardeners analysed, as this is sensitive information that they did not wish to share.

As Ingold [36] points out, the social dynamics of production can be understood through two dialectically related perspectives: the perspective of dwelling and the perspective of the commodity. This latter perspective, while not particularly developed in the field described, has a clear presence in some subjects, and could be studied in subsequent research. The perspective of dwelling seems to be more present, embodied in this case in the enjoyment of nature resignified, in the mental balance attained, contact with others or, simply, by seeing plants grow day by day.

The practices of the gardeners analysed here tend to present fewer rational or technical implications (to use Leach’s terminology, [37]), strengthening their culturally defined communicative meaning. In any case, any action combines these two dimensions, rational-technical and/or communicative. However, in their reflections on the meaning of their practices, the gardeners tend to favour the communicative dimension. This applies, as we have seen, to the productive side, with the so-called naturalised implications of the act of growing fruit and vegetables. As some of the participants acknowledge, time keeps a different pace on the allotments; either it rushes by or simply stands still. This absence of clock-watching could not be more unproductive according to the rationalising canons of an industrialised society.

Moreover, the technical-rational account of the connotations of horticulture depicts a strong investment of time (and sometimes resources) to obtain a crop, subject to the unpredictable ups and downs of each season, which have an even greater impact because of the organic methods used. However, rarely do these gardeners have a clear estimate of the economic profitability of their allotment. Theft and the gifting of surplus deepen this extra-economic dimension. Ownership of the produce grown on the allotments fluctuates; it comes and goes. One might think that this only affects older retired gardeners, who are detached from the working and productive horizon. However, the act of growing can convey other meanings in communicative terms to other collectives. We are referring here, within the dual dimension of meanings (perceived by practitioners and transmitted by them through their practices), to this latter dimension. This could be the case of a person who is unemployed or growing fruit and vegetables due to economic necessity. Someone

who grows fruit and vegetables is, in the eyes of others, “working to produce”. This representation could, in the first instance, help to reverse the closed-minded image that stigmatises the unemployed. Or, at least, to oppose through symbolic activation the easily recognisable idea of an unemployed person who does not act “productively” to resolve their situation.

The weight of this communicative dimension in the field analysed is applicable to the food consumption habits themselves, inseparably linked to their production. This is one of the main contributions of this research. In such habits, we have noticed the use of the “healthy” label attributed by the gardeners to some foods, within a diet developed within a sociocultural context. The importance of this context is still considered by few studies [28,32]. We have seen how gardeners perceive an increase in their consumption of fruits and vegetables, which is consistent with other studies [50]. Nevertheless, at the same time, we note that the peculiarities of this context involve certain practices related to the consumption of organic products, such as rejecting the consumption of some vegetables because of their excessively “natural” taste (with which, culturally, they are unfamiliar), or consuming other products deemed to be acceptable and desired on account of their rural location, understood as “near” and “trustworthy”, regardless of nutritional criteria. In other words, the consumption of products considered healthier because they are “rural” may lead to relativising the “nutritionist” logic to the detriment of rationality attached to sociocultural origin and location. In these same terms, because of the sociocultural implications of diet, the consumption of alcohol, cured meats and other products rooted in the traditions of sociability and social gatherings can be considered “healthy”. All of this reminds us, as other authors [56,57] have pointed out, that “eating is about more than nourishment” and that food health concerns must be combined with cultural constraints and socially produced needs. In any case, the link between food consumption and sociocultural context deserves to be developed in the future with new social agents. Further studies could broaden the focus of this research, for example, by sampling some consumer cooperatives or collective buying groups and comparing their findings to obtain the differences between the people in each group (gardeners, consumers, prosumers, etc.).

5. Conclusions

Studies on the meanings of urban agriculture reveal its great variability, from cases in which they attend to urgent food needs to others linked to social movements, concerns about health or the environment, among many others. This multifunctional and flexible character is one of the great qualities of UA, due to its adaptation to changing socio-environmental circumstances. In our qualitative analysis of the gardeners’ practices, a mixture of meanings is observed, with a preponderance of the reasons related to the enjoyment of leisure time. Although our emphasis is on feeding practices, we have also shown that these are complex practices that can be better understood by their integration with production, processing and consumption activities.

In the specific field of the consumption of organic products in the UA, some conclusions observed are derived from the analysis of the practices of the gardeners. In the first place, they refer to a feeling of control over the product and production, with strong emotional and experiential ties. Second, they state a relevant assessment of the quality of the product, closely related to the sensitive experience of consumption and the appreciation of its implications for their health. Thirdly, the effects on the diet are evident, with an increase in the consumption of vegetables by these gardeners, although this change is accompanied by locally defined dietary guidelines. We have seen how in these feeding practices a preponderance of the affective dimension can be deduced over the rational one. This means that the values of organic food can be linked to its healthy character, but at the same time, they can be determined by emotional and sensitive experience, as well as by the singularities of the local context of food consumption.

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Informed Consent Statement: All subjects involved in the study were informed about the purposes of this research, and guaranteed complete anonymity in their responses. Written informed consent was not required in accordance with the institutional requirements and national and local legislation.

Data Availability Statement: The original data can be accessed contacting the corresponding author.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Interview Script.

0.	Basic data: age, sex, profession, place of residence, place of birth
1.	Time cultivating the garden
2.	Initial skills and knowledge for urban agriculture
3.	Cultivation practices. Most frequently cultivated plants. Ecological techniques to fertilize and fight pests.
4.	Benefits and advantages of gardening (physical, mental, emotional, social, others)
5.	Obstacles and disadvantages of gardening (costs, efforts, challenges)
6.	Changes in diet due to gardening. Valuation of organic products grown
7.	Basic eating habits (consumption of: fruits, vegetables, meat. Consumption of fats and sweets. Personal assessment)
8.	Changes in culinary techniques due to gardening. Processing and conservation techniques
9.	Consumption of other organic products (not from the garden)
10.	Social relations within the garden. Friendships, informal relationships.
11.	Other comments and observations.

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