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On *Babushkas* and Postcapitalism: Theorising Diverse Economies from the Global East

Lucie Sovová

Rural Sociology Group, Wageningen University & Research, Hollandseweg 1 6706 KN, Wageningen, The Netherlands and Community Economies Institute, PO Box 274 Chewton, VIC, 3451, Australia, lucie.sovova@wur.nl

Ottavia Cima

Community Economies Institute, PO Box 274 Chewton, VIC, 3451, Australia, ottavia.cima@posteo.net

Petr Jehlička

Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Sociology, Jilská 1 110 00, Praha 1, Czech Republic, petr.jehlicka@soc.cas.cz

Lilian Pungas

Institute of Sociology, Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Leutragraben 1 07743, Jena, Germany and Department of Environmental Sciences and Policy, Central European University, Quennestrasse 51 1100, Vienna, Austria, pungasl@ceu.edu

Markus Sattler

Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography, Leipzig, Germany, m_sattler@leibniz-ifl.de

Thomas S.J. Smith

Community Economies Institute, PO Box 274 Chewton, VIC, 3451, Australia and Department of Geography, Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich, Munich, Germany, thomas.sid.smith@gmail.com

Anja Decker

Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Sociology, Jilská 1 110 00, Praha 1, Czech Republic, anja.decker@soc.cas.cz

Nadia Johanisova

Community Economies Institute, PO Box 274 Chewton, VIC, 3451, Australia and Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic, johaniso@fss.muni.cz

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Sunna Kovanen

Brandenburg University of Technology, Chair of Regional Planning, Konrad-Wachsmann-Allee 4 D 03046, Cottbus, Germany, sunna.kovanen@b-tu.de

Peter North

Community Economies Institute, PO Box 274 Chewton, VIC, 3451, Australia and Department of Geography and Planning, School for Environmental Sciences, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK, p.j.north@liverpool.ac.uk

Lucie Sovová and Ottavia Cima share first authorship.

Abstract: As transformative visions for more just and sustainable societies multiply around the globe, the Diverse and Community Economies approach presents one of the most influential strategies to advance postcapitalist visions. In this paper, we contribute to this project based on our research and activism in the Global East, intended here as Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. We argue that engaging with the Global East is not only a matter of epistemic inclusivity but also a (too-often-neglected) opportunity to learn from a region with a history of dramatic economic transformation and diversity. We highlight examples of community economies already contributing to more-than-human wellbeing, and we present emerging theoretical insights concerning temporality, the multi-sitedness of the enterprise, and diverse economic subjectivities. With that, we articulate our ongoing research agenda and advance conversations with postcapitalist scholarship and politics.

Keywords: Global East, diverse economies, epistemic inclusivity, postcapitalist politics, community economies, postsocialism

Introduction

This paper explores what we can learn if we think about economic transformation from and with the Global East,[1] and what political possibilities emerge in this process. While transformative visions for more just and sustainable societies multiply around the globe and draw inspiration from a wide range of knowledges, the Global East remains underrepresented in these debates. We write this paper as the Polička Collective: a group of scholars whose personal and academic biographies cover a large diversity of Eastern contexts. Our observations are based on our ongoing collective and individual work[2] and the rich—although often neglected—scholarship on sustainable livelihoods in the region. While our reflections draw primarily from conversations within the Diverse and Community Economies (DCE)[3] scholarship, we believe that they hold relevance for related debates on postcapitalist possibilities worldwide, for instance within the degrowth movement (Johanisova et al. 2013; Pungas et al. 2024), the social solidarity economy (Johanisova and Vinkelhoferová 2019), critical and ecological economics (Hanaček et al. 2020), and other initiatives concerned with enacting a more habitable Anthropocene.

The Global East as a Blind Spot

Ambitions to radically change the ways humans sustain their livelihoods are becoming increasingly vocal. To enable the survival of life on Earth, we need not only to transform unsustainable and exploitative economic relations, but also to rethink the very concept of the economy and, with it, understandings of growth (D'Alisa et al. 2015), development (Kothari et al. 2019), entrepreneurship (Johanisova et al. 2013; North 2016), wellbeing (Fioramonti et al. 2022), livelihoods (Miller 2019), and community and the commons (Community Economies Collective 2019).

In the search for existing practices that are already contributing to living well together, knowledges from regions and social groups that have long been marginalised attract growing attention (Gibson et al. 2010; Wright 2010). An increasing number of ideas originating in the Global South populate global visions for liveable futures: from Buen Vivir to Ubuntu or ROSCAs (Hossein and Christabell 2022). Post- and decolonial theory and activism push for the recognition of traditionally marginalised contexts as sources of inspiration for better worlds (Gahman et al. 2022; Pollard et al. 2011). What is more, they call for the colonial biases of knowledge creation to be rebalanced (Connell 2007; Naylor and Thayer 2022). Epistemological inclusivity constitutes an indispensable element of justice: it demands the provincialisation of theory originating from the Global North and the commitment to theorise from the margins (Chakrabarty 2000; Hanaček et al. 2020; Radcliffe 2017).

In this drive towards a more pluralistic epistemology, however, a blind spot persists: knowledges from the Global East rarely figure among the inspirations for transformative world visions. To cite just one telling example, the "broad transcultural compilation" in the edited volume *Pluriverse: A Post-Development Dictionary* (Kothari et al. 2019:xvii) only counts two entries related to Eastern experiences out of 108 (Chertkovskaya 2019; Johanisova and Vinkelhoferová 2019). If this is startling, given the varieties of economic experiences in the region, it is not surprising if we consider the systemic marginalisation of the Global East in academic theorisation (Jehlička 2021; Trubina et al. 2020). While knowledges from the Global South are slowly acquiring more legitimacy, the Global East remains largely invisible, falling "between the cracks" of the North–South binary (Müller 2018:735).[4] Apart from plausible practical reasons (e.g. access to funding or language proficiency), a key cause of the neglect of the Global East in global knowledge creation is its location outside the axis connecting former metropoles and former colonies (Jehlička 2021). In this paper, we contribute to the growing and multidisciplinary scholarship seeking to emancipate knowledge from the Global East (e.g. Jehlička et al. 2020; Mälksoo 2021; Rekhviashvili et al. 2022) and argue for a deeper inclusion of the region in the development of transformative economic practice and theory.

Diverse and Community Economies and the Global East

Since its emergence in the mid-1990s, DCE has provided one of the most productive conceptual frames inspiring scholars and activists to enact better worlds. This

approach proposes a set of strategies to radically rethink the economy by decentring capitalism. First, it makes visible the variety of practices that constitute localised economic systems (*diverse economies* [Gibson-Graham 1996]). Second, this inventory helps identify practices that already enable the negotiation of collective wellbeing (*community economies* [Gibson-Graham 2006]). Third, postcapitalist politics (Alhojärvi et al. 2023; Gibson-Graham 2006) strengthens community economies by cultivating subjects attuned to the better worlds that already exist, and creates space in which new possibilities can emerge (Gibson-Graham 2008). Knowledge creation is thus explicitly conceived as a political and ethical project with performative power. Indeed, DCE's strategies and vocabulary have helped amplify and nurture sustainable and just practices across the globe (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013; Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010).

The core of the DCE approach first emerged in the Global North in the context of declining industrial capitalism and the onset of neoliberalism. Participatory action research was undertaken in the USA and Australia in areas that experienced massive deindustrialisation in the 1980s and 1990s (Gibson-Graham 1996). The theorisation of economic diversity emerged as a response to the distress of communities losing what they saw as their main source of not only material wealth, but also of personal identification and belonging. Challenging the position of capitalism as the only alternative, DCE provided the courage and tools to recognise, enact and imagine alternative worlds in the here and now.

These tools have since been applied in and adapted to various contexts. The project of postcapitalist politics found fertile ground within other communities in the Global North deceived by capitalism's unfulfilled promises. It also resonated in the Global South, especially in South Asia and Latin America (Heras and Vieta 2020; Lahiri-Dutt 2016). Here, the critique of capitalism's pervasiveness and the attention to economic diversity complemented local resistance to colonialism and developmentalism (Demaria et al. 2023; Escobar 1995; Gibson-Graham 2005), and it resonated with well-established but often threatened indigenous cosmologies (Gibson et al. 2010; Wright 2010). Mirroring decolonial efforts to localise theory, DCE's weak theory approach focuses on situated knowledge. It resists the pull of strong theory to align facts into familiar explanations based around dominant structures. Instead, it opens space for noticing difference and possibility (Gibson-Graham 2008, 2014).

DCE thinking is equally powerful when making sense of the economic landscapes of the Global East, as is confirmed by our research, as well as other work in the region (for a comprehensive review, see Cima and Sovová [2022]). DCE's commitment to weak theory challenges the grand narratives that dominate the imaginary of and in the Global East, namely the transition discourse envisioning a linear shift from a socialist planned economy towards capitalism (Pavlovskaya 2004). As scholars working at the rare intersection of DCE and the Global East, we are indebted to DCE for strategies to re-read and re-shape the worlds we care for with more openness and hope. Similar to the accounts of our colleagues from "developing" South-East Asia (Liu et al. 2020:445), we experienced first-hand how DCE's anti-essentialism dignifies the diverse ways in which people —in the Global East as in the rest of the world—sustain and care for their

communities and environment (Cima and Sovová 2022). Adding DCE to our conceptual toolkits enabled us to notice practices that are commonly overlooked and to reappraise the specific richness of Eastern economies in contrast to their dominant, capitalocentric, and pejorative representation.

While our research testifies to the relevance of DCE for postcapitalist politics in the Global East, we are also keen to explore this cross-fertilisation in the opposite direction, by asking how Eastern experiences can contribute to DCE thinking. We see this step as the reaffirmation of DCE's commitment to situated theorising, reinvigorated by recent conversations between DCE and decolonial approaches (Naylor and Thayer 2022), as well as broader calls to provincialise Northern theory (Chakrabarty 2000; Radcliffe 2017). At the same time, we believe that a deeper engagement with Eastern experiences enriches DCE not only in terms of epistemological inclusivity but also with regards to enhancing its conceptual toolkit. The Global East has historically represented a laboratory of economic experimentation for solidarity economies, more and less democratic forms of (state) socialism, and, more recently, variations of global capitalism (Gagyi and Slačálek 2022). The entanglements of these diverse economic forms can and should enrich the theorisation of economic diversity and sustainable livelihoods.

In this paper, we present some insights from our attempts to think about economic transformation from and with the Global East. In what follows, we elaborate our reflections around three specific topics. First, the non-linear temporalities of the Global East add new nuances to the critique of developmentalist understandings of progress. They also show—as we illustrate with the case of DIY in Czechia—how economic practices are valued differently due to their genealogies. Second, the complex interactions of multiple economic forms found in Armenia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan enrich the understanding of diverse economies as plural and interdependent. Tracing the processes of production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus beyond the enterprise and into wider relational webs advances the theorisation of economic entities as always multi-sited. Third, community economies practitioners in the Global East—such as Estonian *babushkas*[5] and many others—embody a range of subject positions, some of which might seem incompatible with transformative economic visions. The Eastern context reveals how even neoliberal or entrepreneurial subject positions might be conducive to community economies, paving a way to truly inclusive postcapitalist politics involving unlikely actors.

Aware of the always contextual nature of research, in the conclusion we proceed to a further conceptual step by highlighting the broader implications of our reflections for the three key elements of the DCE approach, namely practice, theory, and politics. We note that theorising DCE from the Global East brings trouble, as we are forced to confront our own (often unconscious) biases on what we expect community economies to be, realign our ethical commitment to collective wellbeing in locally sensitive ways, and review our conceptual tools and vocabularies accordingly. Engaging with this trouble, as proposed by Haraway (2016) and recently revisited in DCE literature by Alhojärvi (2020), reaffirms DCE's commitment to openness and "not knowing too much", ultimately strengthening the theoretical foundations on which better worlds are built.

Diverse Temporalities: Complicating Time Ontologies

Conceptions of time and temporality emerge prominently in DCE thinking through the embrace of postdevelopment and decolonial stances towards the hegemonic project of development (Gibson-Graham 2005). Originating from activism and critical scholarship in the Global South, these stances undermine a simplified linear temporal trajectory—from developing to developed, or traditional to modern—where the future is automatically associated with "progress" and capitalism. Postdevelopment scholars point out that this modernist temporal ontology has resulted in a hierarchical othering, through which specific practices or groups are framed not only as underdeveloped, but also as backward and associated with the past (Escobar 1995). This temporal othering discredits the relevance of certain practices and excludes them from a role in shaping the future (Cima and Sovová 2022; Fabian 2014). In this section, we explore the diverse and complex forms that temporal othering takes in the Global East. We show that lived and perceived temporalities play a key role in the valorisation of economic practices, and that temporality can thus be seen as another dimension of economic diversity (see also Vincent and Feola 2020).

In mainstream economic perspectives, the Global East—like the Global South—is seen as "naturally" evolving towards full-fledged capitalist modernity. Other temporal frames, however, are also associated with the Global East. Examples include representations of stuckness and stagnation, where the reification of the socialist past as the defining feature of the region makes it fundamentally impossible to move on, trapping Eastern societies in a permanent and futile struggle to catch up (Müller 2018). Another example is the temporal portrayal of the Global East as moving backwards, as the transition from a socialist modernity to a capitalist one undermines linear theories (both Marxist and neoliberal) of social development (Groys 2002).

As these representations suggest, the past—including state socialism and beyond—entangles with the present in very specific ways in the Global East (Hörschelmann 2002). One particularity is the reduction, in both popular and academic discourses, of the presence or absence of particular economic practices to a legacy of the socialist period. Traditional practices which foster collective well-being outside the market realm are either not recognised at all, or they are viewed as coping strategies, associated with prior periods of deprivation and shortage, and hence expected to disappear with the transition to modern market economies (Kornai 1980). This discourse has performative effects, particularly when adopted by local decision makers. For instance, a growing body of research has documented food self-provisioning as a locally widespread form of community economy. Nonetheless, urban policy and spatial planning often displace gardening communities, framing them as remnants of the past which hinder modern development (Pungas 2024; Smith and Jehlička 2013; Sovová et al. 2021).

We identify the practice of do-it-yourself (DIY) as another form of community economy in the Global East that holds relevance to temporal questions. Contemporary research from the Global North and South alike touts DIY practices as novel or cutting-edge (Gauntlett 2011), as countercultural or anticapitalist (Kohtala et al. 2020; Orton-Johnson 2014), or even as manifestations of Silicon

Valley-type entrepreneurialism (Kohtala et al. 2020). Until recently, however, the Global East has been remarkably absent from such discussions, with DIY in this space implicitly reduced to a practice grounded in shortage or making do (Gibas et al. 2025; Kreis 2025).

Emerging research on ubiquitous DIY practices in Czechia (Gibas 2019; Gibas et al. 2025), on the contrary, sheds light on the multifaceted historical and contemporary significance of self-directed manual activities related to decorating, building, or making repairs in the home or garden (Hodúlová 2020). Rather than being anachronistic, fundamentally needs-driven, or residual of the socialist experience, Czech DIY practices—known colloquially as *kutilství*[6]—emerge from this nascent literature as something creative, expressive, and deliberately frugal in how they meet household needs. Freed from being defined by the past, these practices ingeniously engage with leftover materials and tools. The examples mentioned by Hodúlová (2020) and Gibas (2019) include greenhouses built from recycled windows or pickle jars, care for non-humans through homemade birdhouses created out of scrap, or a DIY lawnmower using the repurposed motor of a disused washing machine.

The relationship of *kutilství* to both capitalist and socialist modernity is more complicated than often portrayed, showing much overlooked temporal continuity and discontinuity. Its roots precede the state socialist period, reaching back at least to the industrialisation of the early 20th century (Gibas et al. 2025). Its practice took a distinctive form after World War II, particularly in the decades following the quashing of the Prague Spring in 1968. At this time, it was simultaneously seen as being part of an ideal socialist society (e.g. developing a balanced, skilled, and creative subject [Reid 2014] who has plenty of leisure time) and—on the part of more orthodox Marxist economists—already a backward relic which would wither away when confronted with development in the form of consumer abundance and rational planning by the socialist state (Gibas and Šima 2020; see also Gerasimova and Chuikina 2009). While ordinary citizens under socialist regimes are often portrayed as passive recipients of totalitarian state action, DIY and vernacular[7] improvisation were an integral part of life—compensating for the imperfections and shortcomings of socialist "total modernisation" (Gerasimova and Chuikina 2009; Reid 2014:97).

While subversive DIY activities questioning consumer culture existed on the margins in Czechia during the socialist era, much *kutilství* revolved—and continues to revolve—around inconspicuous practices which may fulfil socio-ecological goals without being explicit about this. Contemporary participants quoted in Gibas (2019:70, 76) use phrases like "if the need is dire, I buy something new—but reluctantly" or "why should I pay for it if I can do it myself, and better?" Whether we talk of DIY or food self-provisioning, there is a slow, embodied, and inter-generational or cyclical temporality to these forms of "quiet sustainability" (Smith and Jehlička 2013); the chain of skills and knowledge, once broken, can be difficult to recover. In uncertain times, however, the tacit know-how which underlies these community economies can be recognised or revalued (Ferenčuhová 2022; Jehlička et al. 2019).[8]

While continuous with practices before the 1989 revolution, contemporary *kutilství* is not static. It takes on new characteristics, interacting in diverse ways with imported and internet-based maker and repair cultures, as well as marketised DIY (Gibas 2019; Gibas et al. 2025). Evolving practices of re-use, repair, and material skill are present in various forms in the Global East (Gerasimova and Chuikina 2009). However, current academic, policy, and media interpretations tend to overlook them in favour of formalised, top-down visions (e.g. circular and zero-waste economy) or conceptual frames deemed modern and imported from the Global North (Pungas et al. 2022). Notably, the history of these practices and the temporal frames they carry produce specific and often paradoxical valorisations. For example, while inexpensive materials such as Euro pallets used in *dacha* gardens in Estonia are considered cheap, messy, and inaesthetic garbage by observers, in community gardens the same materials are framed as recycling, zero-emission, and sustainable construction (Pungas et al. 2022).

Bringing a temporal sensitivity to the analysis of economic diversity allows us to understand the complex ways in which traditional practices interact with more recent examples of community economies. A weak theory approach can soften the temptation to overlook persistent practices written off as tainted by socialism, and to (often inadvertently) reproduce a future-oriented time ontology which sees the novel and emerging as inherently more interesting than the old and established. A focus on the temporalities of the Global East demonstrates that scholars can neither ignore the past by concentrating only on contemporary practices without understanding their emergence, nor simplify it by reducing the complexity of localised experiences of state socialism to a uniform socialist past (see also Pavlovskaya 2004). Uncovering these diverse temporalities can help to reframe overlooked community economies and broaden sources of inspiration for living well together in the Global East and further afield.

Thinking through temporalities in the Global East also makes us aware of the complications of the meaning and resonance of postcapitalism as a mobilising term in societies with very different cultural, economic, and political histories from those in the Global North. Therefore, the Global East reminds us, in line with DCE thinking (Alhojärvi et al. 2023), to read postcapitalism not as yet another step on a linear development trajectory, but as a space where care for the past and the future are intertwined.

Diverse Livelihoods: The Multi-Sited Enterprise

DCE's vocabulary of economic diversity has contributed to making visible the multiple and simultaneous ways—monetised and non-monetised, formalised and non-formalised, paid and unpaid, etc.—in which people provide for their livelihoods. The enterprise has constituted a preferred site where this diversity has been analysed and acted upon (Cameron 2020; Gibson-Graham 1996:174–205; Gibson-Graham et al. 2013:49–84). In DCE thinking, "enterprises are conceptualised as being composed of a range of actors producing, exchanging, sharing and selling goods and services in diverse ways" (North 2020:98). A rich literature within DCE has revealed not only the existing diversity of enterprise types,

including eco-social enterprises (Johanisova et al. 2020) and worker cooperatives (Heras and Vieta 2020; Safri 2020), but also the "multiple and competing logics, desires and ambitions" that characterise each enterprise and entrepreneur (Cameron 2020:31; North 2014, 2020). The enterprise is thus revealed as "a fragmented and decentered site rather than a presumptive unity" (Gibson-Graham 1996:187). In this section, we discuss how examples from the Global East enrich this conceptualisation by shedding light on enterprises as always multi-sited and embedded in wide webs of diverse livelihood practices.

Based on its roots in anti-essentialist Marxism, DCE has approached the analysis of enterprises as a process (rather than immutable entity) of production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus (Cameron 2020; Gibson-Graham 1996:174–205). This conceptualisation has allowed DCE scholars to identify multiple "flashpoints" where decisions can be taken in relation to surplus (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013:49–83). These concern in particular the survival–surplus nexus, i.e. the negotiation of so-called survival payments (usually in the form of wages) versus distributable surplus (Gibson-Graham et al. 2013:54).

Research informed by cases in the Global East expands this approach by looking beyond the enterprise as a single site (e.g. a factory where production occurs during working hours) and instead recognising that production of surplus always unfolds in relation to multiple livelihood practices. More broadly, analysing how these practices interrelate, constitute and feed each other in contingent ways strengthens our understanding of diverse economies as interdependent. The specificities of interactions in the Global East defy simplified transition narratives that gesture towards fully commodified and truly capitalist presents and futures, and thereby challenge narratives of capitalism as the only alternative (Pavlovskaya 2004).

Early research has explored the interrelations between diverse economic practices in the Global East from the vantage point of in/formality. Kornai's (1980) (in)famous theorisation of the "economics of shortage" portrayed the inefficiency of the socialist enterprise as being remediated by the informal exchange of resources outside formal accounting flows. Ethnographic research (Humphrey 1998; Verdery 1991) further highlighted how these exchanges interact with informal household economies through supporting *and* competing practices, such as the unregistered labour of workers' family members in enterprises or the illegal appropriation of enterprise materials for private needs. Extensive research on contemporary modes of informality in the region emphasises the interdependence of practices that are differently formalised and based on a variety of logics, including capitalist ones (Fehlings and Karrar 2020; Ledeneva 2006; Polese et al. 2018).

A DCE perspective on the diversity of Eastern economic practices resonates with these analyses while overcoming the residues of stigmatisation implicit in the notion of "shortage" and "informality" (Cima and Sovová 2022). Using the DCE approach, Smith and Stenning (2006), Smith et al. (2008), and Pavlovskaya (2004, 2013, 2015) showed how diverse livelihood strategies, including unpaid care work, remittances, and food self-provisioning, allowed people to meet their needs in the context of sweeping neoliberalisation during the so-called transition period. These authors underlined that, at the same time, such strategies might have

unintentionally enabled the privatisation and deregulation of markets and the dismantling of state social security.

These ambiguous interdependencies, and more specifically the embeddedness of enterprises in wider relational webs, are evident in our own experience in Armenia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan (Cima 2020, 2021; Sattler 2023, 2024, forthcoming)—three countries that rushed through a "shock therapy" of simultaneous liberalisation, privatisation, and deregulation in the 1990s. Entrepreneurs' revenues and workers' salaries (the survival payments) are often insufficient to secure survival in the form of access to basic goods and services. However, as DCE highlights, other forms of livelihood generation beyond formal employment allow workers, their families, and larger communities to actually make a living. These diverse livelihood strategies stretch across geographical space and scale, from the household to international networks.

With regard to livelihood strategies at the household scale, we observe that garden plots in Armenia, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan provide a source of food to the rural and (through kinship-mediated links) urban population. Instead of the purchase of food as a commodity, it is produced and exchanged through multiple forms of intra- and inter-household cooperation, thereby enlarging the economic agency of financially vulnerable households (Cima 2020; Tadjiev et al. 2023). On an international scale, cash inflows from remittances are crucial for local livelihoods, as already shown by Smith and Stenning (2006) elsewhere in the Global East. Personal remittances from the large Armenian diaspora constituted up to 20% of GDP after independence, in recent years decreasing to a still above-world-average 10–13%. In Kyrgyzstan, the percentage has been about 30% for the last 10 years. The remittance share in Georgia has overtaken the Armenian one in recent years.[9]

Food self-provisioning and remittances are just two examples of diverse livelihood strategies, which can also include unpaid care work, informal side business activities, or (by now rather meagre) state transfers. We observe that, as under former state socialist regimes, enterprise resources and structures are fluidly (though not necessarily illegally) used by workers for private purposes. At the same time, enterprises—and the people constituting them—are driven by logics well beyond profit maximisation (Cima 2020; see also Rogers 2006). In Georgia, employees consume crops grown on enterprise land and entrepreneurs deploy labour and tools to support other enterprises as well as to give back to workers and communities (Sattler forthcoming). Agricultural businesses may lend tractors to employees or even non-employee residents who might return the favour in another form in an unspecified future. Finally, some enterprises partake, without direct financial compensation, in activities such as the collection of waste disposed of by residents or help-out befriended enterprises during peak harvest seasons.

Our research engagements with Eastern enterprises and diverse livelihoods broadens the DCE theorisation of the survival–surplus nexus by situating the production, appropriation, and distribution of surplus of an enterprise (or of a household, for that matter) into the wider webs of economic relations in which they are embedded. In our enterprise analysis, focusing on the intra-firm survival–

surplus nexus is an incomplete endeavour. As in Gibson-Graham's (2005) enterprise analysis in the Philippines, there is often little surplus to dispose of (Johanisova 2005; Sattler 2024, forthcoming). Rather than lamenting this absence, we prefer to investigate what survival encompasses. Once turning to survival, we can appreciate the multi-sited interactions of enterprises with diverse livelihoods that allow for wages as "below-survival payments".

Framing the diverse livelihood practices occurring outside the formal enterprise as its constitutive elements provides leverage to re-conceptualise the enterprise as multi-sited (Mauksch et al. 2017). The household plots on which employees grow food are in some way part of this "site"—albeit not formally. Whether consumed, shared, bartered, or sold, food mediates how much money employees require to meet their survival needs, as do remittances. These and other diverse practices feed into the survival–surplus nexus of enterprises and directly overdetermine survival payment levels. Food grown on household plots thus emerges as a constitutive element of an enterprise without appearing in any balance sheet. Without integrating these practices into our analyses, we are unable to understand the survival payments that workers are willing—or forced—to accept. Conversely, wage levels help to understand, for instance, decisions on household plot cultivation or migration. Beyond the focus on the enterprise, we emphasise the general importance of considering multi-sited interactions, and the shortcomings of analytically isolating economic practices from their embeddedness within diverse economies.

A strong theory might assert the sophisticated ways in which capital preys on diverse livelihoods (remittances, food-self provisioning, care work, etc.) to deliberately lower survival payments and maximise profits. We acknowledge that some enterprise practices, in the Global East as elsewhere, are indeed a source of immiseration and need to be denounced and fought. In tune with weak theory and the DCE ethos, however, we resist the universalising pull of such assertions. We seek instead to carefully assess the complex interactions between enterprises, diverse livelihoods, survival and surplus by also examining more reciprocal forms of multi-sited interactions.

A DCE perspective deems that diverse livelihood practices should not be reduced to their function *for* capital accumulation. Low wages need not necessarily be equated with exploitation, and enterprises can contribute to reconfiguring livelihoods beyond the increase of wages or distributable surplus (Sattler forthcoming). The interrelations of many livelihood forms with the enterprise blur the lines between activities inside and outside the enterprise (Cima 2020). Our analytical focus on interdependencies therefore also renders the distinction between noncapitalist and capitalist increasingly problematic. For instance, classifying household plots cultivated for food self-provisioning as noncapitalist sites tells us little about their multiple functions and interrelations with other economic forms. In fact, "noncapitalist" practices like food self-provisioning might be a privileged site for understanding "capitalist" practices of surplus production within the enterprise. These complex interactions among diverse livelihoods partly explain the multiplicity of subjectivities that we explore next.

Diverse Subjectivities: Expanding Possibilities of Economic and Political Identity

The anti-essential subject is one of the key tenets of DCE. The (economic) subject is understood as overdetermined, co-constituted by, and interdependent with (economic) practices, other subjects, and the non-human world (Gibson-Graham 2006:49–51). Since identities are understood as processes, and identity positions as plural and fluid, "diverse and contradictory class and non-class subject positions" can "coexist side by side in a landscape of heterogeneity" (Healy et al. 2020:393). The proliferation of subject positions engendered by this understanding serves as the basis for DCE's "politics of the subject" (Gibson-Graham 2006:49, 127), a core element of postcapitalist politics. If we all already occupy multiple subject positions, including noncapitalist ones, we are never fully subjugated by capitalist structures. Rather, we are already enacting alternatives.

DCE's strategy to overcome capitalism is thus to "cultivate" those subjectivities that are conducive to community economies, those which "desire and enact non-capitalist and communal ways of being in the world" (Healy et al. 2020:394). In this section, we discuss how seemingly neoliberal subjectivities tuned to individualism and entrepreneurialism might still match this definition as they strengthen resilience in place-based communities. We argue that cautious or subversive forms of resistance might hold as much transformative potential as more vocal activist subjectivities (Vorbrugg 2022).

Engaging with the subjectivities of the Global East helps sharpen DCE's conceptualisation and politics of the subject by urging us to reflect on a series of challenges that a truly inclusive postcapitalist politics faces. DCE emphasises that all subjectivities that contribute to community economies should be equally valued, including the most inconspicuous ones. Indeed, previous research provides examples of subjectivities attuned to collective wellbeing that are not explicitly anticapitalist (see Gibson-Graham's [1996:206–237] analysis of class processes in Australian mining towns), but rather traditional and indigenous (Dombroski et al. 2022). The Global East can further proliferate the possible subjectivities worth cultivating as it provides numerous examples that—despite not being intentionally anticapitalist or noncapitalist—commit to the communal and collective, e.g. through informal and spontaneous acts of solidarity and cooperation within trusted networks. We thus strive for a further inclusion of ambiguous subject positions that may be inadvertently overlooked by DCE research despite being conducive towards community economies.

While DCE scholarship praises noncapitalist and anticapitalist subjectivities, it can at times be suspicious with regard to neoliberal and entrepreneurial ones (Gibson-Graham 1996; Healy et al. 2020:394, although see North 2020). The latter are associated with "a sense of self pervaded by market logic that reflects a consumerist mindset, accepts the retrenchment of the state from its former social welfare responsibilities, and embraces the ideals of individualism, choice, entrepreneurship, and self-help" (Barron 2017:1146). However, cases from the Global East demonstrate how an emphasis on personal responsibility can be interconnected with mobilising a variety of resources to defend and guarantee livelihoods

(Decker 2018; Pungas et al. 2022) and lay foundations for a community economy that does not rely on the state or the market.

Pungas (2023) explored how, during the 1990s, the Russian minority in Estonia not only suffered from economic restructuring, unemployment, and a loss of status/citizenship, but that such suffering was further reinforced by the prevalent neoliberal narrative that socio-economic hardship was self-inflicted and a matter of individual responsibility (see also Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020:129). As the state could not be relied upon, an entrepreneurial spirit and individual notions of agency emerged and consolidated, as reported by various interlocutors (Pungas et al. 2022). The *babushkas* rationalised their food self-provisioning with the Russian proverb "A food garden is a woman's income" (Огород—бабий доход) and reported confidently how the informal sale of the garden produce generated additional income. They manoeuvred with creative entrepreneurial spirit in order to expand their scope of action and proudly regarded themselves as self-made and self-reliant agents.

Decker's (2017, 2018) research in rural Czechia revealed similar attitudes. Here, food is foraged and produced by households for domestic consumption and to be distributed in the form of gift, barter, or sale. In the context of precarious and ill-paid employment as well as expensive commuting, these practices generate complex affects, including the experience of autonomy, self-efficacy, and stewardship. Decker's interviewees considered themselves as relatively better off than others who shared their condition of working poor. They presented themselves as subjects able to toil, to endure hardship, and to secure resources for household food production (e.g. foodstuffs, agricultural inputs, labour, access to cultivable land) through inventive strategies beyond the market.

The subjectivities related to these practices incorporate what Bröckling (2015) labelled the entrepreneurial self. Yet, they have little resemblance to neoliberal profit-maximisation. Rather than cherishing capitalism, they display the creative resourcefulness that households and individuals resort to when faced with social insecurity and precarity (see also Stenning et al. 2010). Our DCE-informed research in the Global East shows that individualistic solutions to economic vulnerability can contribute to community economies, even though these might often stay limited to trusted networks. When rural and urban dwellers gift, share, or sell their homegrown products to counter increasing costs of living, they simultaneously reduce (food) waste, shorten food miles, and provide others with access to affordable, nutritious food outside capitalist markets (Jehlička et al. 2019; Pungas 2019; Sovová et al. 2021).

Another subject position frequently cast as desirable in DCE scholarship is that of the anticapitalist activist who explicitly engages in politics of opposition, makes their voice heard, and openly struggles for socio-ecological justice and solidarity (Healy et al. 2020:394). Research in the Global East expands notions of political action by attending to modalities beyond outspoken activism. Scholarly analyses tend to depoliticise civic engagement in the region, presenting it as individualistic self-help that only mobilises when facing a threat to one's own private sphere (Leipnik 2015). Because opposition in postsocialist civil societies tends to be more cautious—for understandable historical reasons—it is often perceived as not

radical enough by scholars and activists from other contexts (cf. Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020; Mamonova 2015). In the Global East, the Left is likely to be associated with a stigmatised socialist past, while liberalism—and hence neoliberalism—tend to be seen as anti-authoritarian and thus progressive. Consequently, anti-neoliberal stances by the elderly are branded in popular discourse as "*Ostalgie*" and discredited as a "Soviet mentality".

Writing on Eastern Europe and Eurasia, Rekhviashvili (2023) cautions against the merging of all political subjects into a particular understanding of civil society. Building on Chatterjee's (2004) concept of political society, she reminds us that not all political subjects (in the Global East as elsewhere) are recognised and treated as rights-abiding citizens. This is especially important in relation to minorities, persons with weak or no citizenship, and groups regarded "as actors of a past epoch, ideologically at odds with the societal changes and political order" (Leipnik 2015:80). This applies well to the Russian minority in Eastern Estonia, where approximately 80,000 people (mostly elderly) still lack citizenship. Russian-Estonian *babushkas* do not meet the usual criteria defining subjects of a political opposition, as they do not publicly rally against the status quo. Instead, their prevalent forms of civic engagement are rather informal, small-scale, and quotidian, such as spontaneous self-organisation or foot-dragging (Pungas 2023; see also Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2020; Jehlička and Jacobsson 2021). The Global East thus provides a range of examples of subversive and oppositional strategies whose subjects do not label or perceive themselves as political, and even less as anticapitalist. Instead, they might even defend the prevalent economic order while engaging in quiet everyday resistance in the form of various noncapitalist and anticapitalist practices (Pungas 2019; Scott 1985).

The sphere of community food economies—which includes quiet food sovereignty[10] alongside imported models such as Community Supported Agriculture and farmers' markets (Fendrychová and Jehlička 2018)—is a relevant site to understand diverse subjectivities. Decker's (2017, 2018, 2021) research in rural Czechia explores interactions between traditional food self-producers and lifestyle migrants identifying with the alternative food movement. These include pragmatic cooperation (informal help, lending of equipment, pooling products for sale) as well as a sense of shared values and practices (appreciation of homegrown food, everyday enactment of food sovereignty, experiential knowledge, and informal distribution). At the same time, encounters also provoke mutual irritations, e.g. over differing moralities around animal husbandry, consumption practices, and meat-eating, and divergent stances towards conventional farming and the transformative potential of community food economies. This confrontation reinforces exclusionary social distinctions based on a perceived dichotomy between "unreflexive" rural food self-producers and "morally advanced" political subjects engaged in the alternative food movement.

By understanding the interactions, hierarchisation, and mobilisation of diverse subjectivities in the Global East, we can broaden the repertoire of economic and political identities on which a truly inclusive postcapitalist politics can build. Identifying the subjectivities worth cultivating on the basis of their intentionality might inadvertently reinforce a hierarchy between desired and less desired (incoherent,

inappropriate) ones. The Global East forces us to recognise the complexity of subjectivities (and of the related practices) and invites us to embrace their ambiguity, incoherence, and paradoxes. This fluidity does not prevent, and might in fact enable, a valid contribution to community economies.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper argues for a fuller inclusion of the Global East into transformative economic practice and theory, epitomised by—but not limited to—DCE. We believe that broadening the geographical range of relevant experiences not only enriches the search for more sustainable futures, but also presents a matter of epistemological justice. In this, our efforts parallel and follow up on decolonial scholarship and activism (Connell 2007; Hossein and Christabell 2022; Naylor and Thayer 2022) as well as emerging dialogues between postcolonial theory and critical readings of postsocialism (Koobak et al. 2021; Vilenica 2023). Furthering this research agenda, we show that an engagement with the Global East productively troubles transformative world visions and can contribute to: (i) enlarging possibilities for community economies; (ii) advancing the theorisation of economic diversity; and (iii) enhancing the inclusivity of postcapitalist politics. In what follows, we synthesise how these three points sharpen the respective tools of DCE.

First, our research of the heterogeneous economic landscapes of the Global East reveals a number of inspiring practices that contribute to sustaining life in the Anthropocene. The community economies we presented in this paper include food self-provisioning, DIY and repair, reciprocal ties and mutual help, gifting, sharing and various forms of exchange. Other examples that merit attention include the tradition of foraging (Grivins 2021), informal mobility (Rekhviashvili and Sgibnev 2020), or historical practices of organised volunteer work (e.g. Subbotniki or Action Z). While some of these practices have been institutionally, materially, or discursively related to (certainly problematic) state socialism, a DCE analysis can help understand these entanglements and eventually revalue them for contemporary relevance (Pungas et al. 2024). These forms of community economies are particularly visible in the Global East, but they arguably contribute to living well in other places too. Making them visible, here and elsewhere, can reinforce this contribution.

Second, tracing some common features of community economies in the Global East productively troubles what it means to live well in the Anthropocene and sharpens the theorisation of economic diversity. Many Eastern community economies can be characterised as quiet, informal, taken for granted, or invisibilised. These practices (such as *dacha* gardening or *kutilstvî*) are not grounded in explicit political activism but instead "rely on effects of actions and behaviours at a personal level that are motivated by virtue ethics and by caring for others" (Jehlička and Jacobsson 2021:8).

Our findings highlight that community economies in the Global East are often subject to multiple and intersectional othering processes. In addition to being part of the informal and non-monetised economy and taking place in private or semi-public spaces, they are also related to a specific temporality which connects

them with past, failed regimes. This brings attention to the role of time in valuing diverse economic practices, reinforcing DCE's suspicion of a linear time ontology. While DCE scholars have paid attention to indigenous practices, the Global East sheds light on the in-between category of traditional practices that are discursively linked to negatively perceived histories and that are only slowly being reclaimed and revalued. Cooperatives and collective enterprises exemplify a form of community economy re-emerging from such complex local histories (Cima 2021; Johanisova et al. 2020).[11]

The nonlinear trajectories of Eastern economies also invite renewed attention to the ways in which capitalist, noncapitalist, and alternative capitalist practices and subjectivities are overdetermined and interdependent, as people move across diverse activities and subject positions seamlessly in their daily lives. A practice like food self-provisioning can simultaneously and inadvertently enable neoliberalisation and state roll-back, fulfil material needs, and nurture conviviality, environmental care and a sense of empowerment. Community economies practitioners in the Global East often present complex subjectivities which include entrepreneurialism and neoliberal discourses and therefore do not neatly dovetail with more deliberate performances of postcapitalist politics. The subjectivities of *babushkas* and indeed many other actors (Gibson-Graham 1996; Healy et al. 2020) are entrepreneurial, attuned to degrowth, and imbued with environmental care, and more, all at once. The particular entanglements of diverse practices and subjectivities in the Global East strengthen DCE's commitment to embrace these complexities and ambiguities, shedding new light on the troubles of life in the Anthropocene (Alhojärvi 2020; Haraway 2016).

Finally, these observations open a series of reflections about postcapitalist politics as a key commitment of DCE. We note that the economic landscapes of the Global East trouble the vocabulary used to theorise economic diversity. As DCE reaches a certain maturity, it seems tempting to use terms like postcapitalist, noncapitalist, or alternative capitalist as established categories. The fact that these terms do not fit comfortably with the realities of the Global East reminds us that these categories need to be understood as always fluid and partial, and that a dictionary of economic difference is permanently under construction (Alhojärvi 2020). This understanding lies at the core of DCE, together with the awareness that the words we use to make sense of the world have consequences for lived realities. A postcapitalist politics that takes into account the experiences of the Global East needs to consider the implications of making practices visible that are currently invisible and quiet. This process can produce opportunities (for coalitions or recognition), but also vulnerabilities (to cooptation, commodification, or even outright repression) which need to be carefully assessed in each case.

There is a risk of misrepresenting local community economies by approaching them from an understanding of politics and the political informed by experiences from the Global North. In the Global East, many tend to avoid what feels "political", be it due to the overpoliticisation of everyday life during state socialism (Gille 2010), authoritarian tendencies in some countries today (Gagyi and Slačálek 2022), or a general suspicion and distrust. This does not mean, however, that quiet forms of civic engagement are not political in a broader sense

(Rekhviashvili 2023; see also Scott 1985). A truly inclusive postcapitalist politics—a postcapitalist politics for *babushkas* (too)—needs to recognise and value these different forms of being political, and tread carefully in building inclusive alliances.

Revisiting DCE's agenda from the standpoint of the Global East reaffirms its ethical core. In particular, it reinforces the valuation of existing community economies as a way to counter the idea that capitalism is the only alternative. It also strengthens the commitment to cultivating an open attitude towards the multiple ways in which we can live well together in the Anthropocene. Engaging with the Global East significantly enhances DCE's reach and epistemic value as it enables a wider range of economic practices and actors to emerge and to be understood in a more nuanced way. We see the trouble and unanswered questions generated here as a productive part of this agenda and we hope to explore them further in conversations within and beyond the DCE community.

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Data Availability Statement

The data are not publicly available due to the privacy of research participants.

Endnotes

[1] We use the term Global East for the former Soviet Union and parts of Central and Eastern Europe that experienced state socialism. While these regions differ substantially in their

geographies and histories, within the scope of this paper, we focus on their commonalities and shared positionality. Our understanding of the Global East as an epistemological category draws from Müller (2018) but remains more territorialised in the postsocialist space (Cima and Sovová 2022; see also Aradau 2024; Chelcea 2023).

[2] The Polička Collective connected through the Community Economies Research Network in 2020 and has since organised several panels and workshops on the contribution of Eastern experiences to transformative world visions (Sattler et al. 2024). The theoretical points advanced in this paper result from individual and collective reflections emerging from empirical work in different parts of the Global East. We chose to illustrate these reflections on the examples of DIY and repair in Czechia (Smith 2020; see also Gibas 2019), rural livelihoods in Georgia and Armenia (Sattler 2023, 2024, forthcoming) and Kyrgyzstan (Cima 2020, 2021), and food self-provisioning and nonmarket food economies in Czechia (Decker 2017, 2018, 2021; Jehlička et al. 2019; Sovová et al. 2021) and Estonia (Pungas 2019, 2023, 2024; Pungas et al. 2022).

[3] We use the abbreviation DCE to refer to the dynamic body of more-than-academic knowledge following from Gibson-Graham's (1996) Diverse Economies theorisation. When referring to the objects of this knowledge, we use the term community economies for practices which support the wellbeing of more-than-human communities, while diverse economies refers to a multiplicity of economic relations.

[4] Despite their different positionalities, we see the efforts for more recognition and dignity for the Global East and South not as competing but as part of the same struggle. For a discussion of mutual alliances, see Koobak et al. (2021), Pollard et al. (2009), and Stenning and Hörschelmann (2008).

[5] The Russian word *babushka* translates as grandmother, and is understood in many countries in the region as referring to elderly rural women.

[6] *Kutilství* approximates something between DIY and bricolage in English. There are gender dynamics which are problematic in translating DIY as *kutilství* alone, however. The term usually refers to a male subject (*kutil*). In turn, domestic craft and DIY work traditionally associated with women is more likely to be referred to as *ruční práce* (hand work) (see also Kohtala et al. 2020).

[7] In Illich's (1981:24) sense of "homebred, homemade, derived from the commons, and that a person could protect and defend though … [they] neither bought nor sold it on the market".

[8] We acknowledge ambiguity in DIY and food self-provisioning related to, for example, inequitable gender dynamics, the use of chemicals by gardeners or DIY practitioners, or for-profit co-optation. Despite these risks, we maintain that an important sustainability aspect remains.

[9] All data from https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS?locations=AM-GE-KG (last accessed 9 September 2024). These data look only at formal remittances. Diverse practices of transfer payment are not included.

[10] Understood by Visser et al. (2015) as devoid of collective organisational basis and manifested instead in widespread bottom-up actions and localised, largely ecological, and quantitatively significant food production.

[11] While situated in a different context and history, Lyne and Rado's (2023) work on Cambodia reveals similar dynamics, confirming the broader relevance of our theoretical point.

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