

Socialist Herbalism: Histories and Practices of Care in Eastern Europe & the Baltics

2nd Gathering

19-24 September 2023

Massia (massia.ee)
Massiaru Village, Estonia

- * meet in a community-run space and co-live / share domestic space
- * exchange on what Socialist Herbalism means historically, and in the present, in the Eastern European & Baltic contexts
- * share practices & knowledges of medicinal plants and their histories
- * consolidate a research network for ongoing collaboration
- * make a critical mini-atlas and maps of plant histories and plant uses

histories of socialist soil science

cultivation & wild medicinal plants

plant medicine against extractive living

knowing & feeling
into herbal
practices

queer and trans plant medicine

EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST

If you would like to attend the gathering in person, please send a max 200-word paragraph about your practices/ research/ research-as practice / practice-as-research and how you resonate with the larger project and the intentions of the gathering by 15 August to m.brebenel@soton.ac.uk.

Proposals for circles/guided sessions:

* **care work medicine** (reflect on making group, acting like slime mold or otherwise risking extractive hypervisibility; close reading of sections of 'Care Work' by Leah Lakshmi Piepzinha Samarisingha). **Questions:** WHAT movement is possible in contexts flooded by eco-colonial, etnonationalist and white supremacist histories & current climate disasters? WHO can we temporarily be - somatically, pod-like, mingled, emergent? WHAT unlearning is possible during this second Socialist Herbalism gathering?

* **medicinal histories** (close reading of work by Aurora Levins Morales - 'Medicine Stories' section "The Historian as Curandera"). Follow a set of 16 instructions/guidance notes we can think-with/through/apply/translate/transmute and find responses together, to the **question:** WHAT are the histories of European Socialist Herbalism? HOW are they positioned in global histories of oppression, colonial struggle, attempts at (often misplaced and misaligned) Internationalist solidarity?

* **queer and trans plant medicine** - Making plant remedies, queering monographs and building stories, or worldbuilding around our experiences with healing herbs from histories of repression and extraction and presents who provoke more violence. **Questions:** WHO are qt plant allies? WHAT do we know about them? WHAT relation are we in with them?

* **soil science and embodied knowledges** - WHAT categories of soil, growing, and extractive visions of plant medicine have been historically created through a specific kind of Western scientific models in Socialist histories? HOW can we work with abolitionist practices, on our own internalised ableist shame, white saviourism, the overdrive for 'making it right' and 'fixing things'? **Close reading** and **practice** based on materials on soil science, practices of cultivation of medicinal plants, with a focus on a number of Atlases and Geographic Monographs from the Socialist period. On WHAT lands and under what laws, in what relation to scientific epistemologies, extractive pharma-industry practices, property, enclosure, inheritance are we able to meet? HOW are we each and together taking up space and speaking with/for/along/in tandem/over others & HOW could we be listening deep and somatically, with awareness of potential spiritual bypassing, overruling, not receiving in full?

more info:

This gathering is connected to an extended research project started in 2019 and currently being developed by Miha Brebenel (Winchester School of Art). This project imagines a long-term collaboration with Massia and the emergence of a collaborative research network. This is a second Gathering (after May 2023) and it is intended to continue a conversation on histories of Socialist Herbalism in Eastern Europe and the Baltic region, in a self-organised space, where practices of communal living and working are part of the process of being in a temporary collective formation, and sharing can happen in the kitchen, in the garden, whilst handling medicinal herbs from the apothecary, whilst doing some of the never-ending reproductive and care labour that soil, plants, human-made environments with roofs, and our own bodies need.

details about the research project:

This collaborative and interdisciplinary project engages with contemporary feminist, queer and disability-informed questions of care, healing and the more-than-human in artistic and community living and practice. It investigates historical European Socialist visions of the environment, science, and the use of alternative medicines, and sets these in conversation with global queer and feminist modalities, imaginations, and practices of care, which revisit herbalism as a community practice. This geographical and historical area is of particular interest first due to the role of the Socialist states in extraction and economic value-production around medicinal plants, echoing the colonial European extractive drive toward plant matter and plant knowledge. Secondly, most of these practices and healing modalities are pre-socialist and stem from a variety of cumulative knowledges about more-than-human entities, about healing of the human body and a relationship to land and landscape. This present is inextricably embedded in white supremacist and ethno-nationalist processes of nation-building, as much as unacknowledged forms of oppression of human and plant life. A clear example of these oppressive histories is the 19th century Romanian history of enslavement of Roma peoples, and the simultaneous extraction, dismissal and punishment (as witchcraft) of medicinal knowledges and practices belonging to Roma communities.

The project wants to ask questions about the scales of these histories and their co-presence with state violence, as well as their role as modalities of healing, by holding a number of Herbal Gatherings on the topic, bringing together academic researchers, artists and curators, herbalists, environmental scientists, and ethnobotanists.

COSTS:

There is no charge for attending this gathering, funding is being sought out but not secured, so you would need to be ready to cover your own travel and the costs of staying in Massia for the period (15 euro/night) plus a 12 euro membership fee (valid for 12 months). We can organise communal food buying and preparation (this can come up to 35 euro/person).

ACCESS:

Travel info is accessible on the Massia website massia.ee/getting-here/. Unfortunately, the building is not barrier-free and doesn't meet accessibility standards for wheelchair users. There are no ramps and no elevator. To enter the building, one needs to climb 6 steps, followed by 3cm high thresholds, which are part of the door frames. On the ground floor there are bedrooms, studios, the theatre hall, toilets and a shower. The kitchens are both located on the upper floor. To get to the 1st floor one needs to climb two flights of stairs.

We aim to make the Gathering accessible in terms of needs around food (dietary requirements, preferences, times of meals), needs around sleeping arrangements, sensory needs, social time/spending time alone, schedule of activities and timings for these, other commitments that need attended to. We will try to make these decisions together in the time leading up to the meeting and in the first days and allow for flexibility in the schedule we decide on. If you would like to communicate any access needs, please include these in the expression of interest.