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Garden and Gardening Culture: A Study on White-Collar Professionals' Search for Belonging

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Abstract

This study focuses on the motivations of white-collar workers toward garden and gardening culture. The aim of the study is to identify the fundamental reasons for interest in gardening among white-collar workers. Today, significant recent changes in the dynamics of white-collar workers' working lives indicate a need for their perspectives on gardening. The research is designed using a qualitative method to explore the experiences of white-collar professionals with gardening and gardening culture. In this study, which employed a phenomenological design, in-depth interviews were conducted with 15 participants, including 8 women and 7 men, using purposive and snowball sampling. A semi-structured questionnaire was used as the data collection tool, and the data were analyzed using thematic analysis in Maxqda

2024. Based on the analysis of garden and gardening culture, three themes were identified: "the meaning of being white-collar and the garden," "motivation for turning to the garden," and "garden and gardening culture." According to research findings, the impact of the interaction of various factors, such as health motivation, investment potential, mutual aid networks, and the development of belonging, as well as the dynamics of working life, on the appearance of garden culture has been understood. It was concluded that the gardening activities, initiated to escape the density of the city center, were a unique experience with economic, social, spatial, and psychological dimensions.

Keywords: garden culture, white-collar, qualitative research

1. INTRODUCTION

The garden, an open space, gains cultural and social significance by providing a foundation for gardening activities. Gardening is a field primarily studied in landscape architecture and ecology. Rather than focusing on these areas, which emphasize the garden's physical aspects, this study examines garden and gardening culture from a sociological perspective through the eyes of white-collar professionals.

Individual gardens located outside the city center and often associated with rural areas are a form of expressing socio-spatial identity. The World Health Organization expects that over 55% of the world's population lives in urban areas, and this proportion is expected to rise to 68% by 2050. It states that 91% of people living in cities breathe polluted air, and individuals exposed to air and noise pollution are vulnerable to diseases [1]. It is stated that the dynamics of urban life and the intensity of working conditions negatively affect individuals' health, putting them at risk [2]. It is known that cities have become vulnerable with the capitalist urbanization paradigm in the 21st century [3]. The focus of urban policies on rent directly affects urban structures through competition and modernization [4]. In the globalized world, gardening and horticulture are often a refuge for individuals in urban areas, helping them escape a challenging environment. It is known that the unpredictable working hours of white-collar professionals in particular increase mental fatigue [5] and trigger negative health problems in addition to their occupational fatigue [6]. The challenging work climate, which also affects the intention to leave the job, impacts individuals' psychological well-being [7]. Gardening and horticultural activities, seen as one of the coping mechanisms for problems, have positive effects such as reducing depression by positively impacting individuals' psychological well-being [8], and increasing life satisfaction and community belonging [9].

One of the significant problems facing modern society is the decline in quality of life and social isolation. Because gardening and horticultural activities increase social interaction, they strengthen social bonds [10]. It is known that social adaptation is difficult for individuals in societies dominated by the global economy. At this point, gardening demonstrates its functionality. It is stated that individuals who turn to gardening integrate with nature and, rather than making a profit, derive personal enjoyment from engaging in small-scale production [11].

Recently, there has been an increase in people's interest in gardening, as they seek to connect with nature. Concerns about future food security, sensitivities regarding human health, and the use of agricultural pesticides [12] are driving the growth of gardening [13]. The garden is a space that embodies the interaction between humans and nature. The role of nature in improving individuals' physical and mental health and quality of life is emphasized. It is said that even a view of nature from a workplace window increases individuals' well-being [14]. Gardens have both individual and sociological dimensions, given their benefits for human health [15] and their role in transmitting socio-ecological memory in food production [16]. Zhao & Amat [17], emphasizing the integration of traditional garden culture into urban landscape areas for cultural sustainability, valued gardens for their role in expressing cultural identity. The garden, which enriches urban areas and strengthens identity, also serves as a carrier of cultural heritage.

The Covid-19 pandemic has also increased individuals' interest in gardening in the city center. As remote work became widespread during the pandemic, white-collar workers found it harder to establish a healthy lifestyle profile due to increased workloads and experienced a loss of motivation. Eşici et al. [18] note that remote white-collar workers struggle to achieve work-life balance, citing conflicts that can arise between work culture and home life. These challenges may lead to situations that negatively impact psychological well-being, such as anxiety, stress, and depression. The importance of institutional support becomes clear here, as these factors directly shape white-collar workers' attitudes toward work life [19]. In response, white-collar workers' interest in gardening has grown, both as a hobby and a stress-reducing activity. The desire to be in nature, prompted by the challenges of working life, has led many to engage in gardening and horticultural activities. Gardening offers individual and social benefits, such as spending quality time with family, increased physical activity, and reduced time spent on technology [20]. Alongside the house, known as the private space, the garden also serves as a place reflecting individuals' identities. Garden culture is thus closely linked to identity, class, and social structure, extending beyond being an individual activity.

2. METHOD

This research aims to present the perspectives of white-collar professionals on garden and gardening culture. It seeks to benefit from the experiences of professionals who have a garden in addition to housing and who actively engage in gardening. The research is designed to understand the motivations behind gardening among white-collar professionals. A qualitative research method was used. Qualitative research highlights individuals' perspectives and explores their perceptions and experiences in depth [21]. The study adopted a phenomenological design because it focused on these professionals' gardening experiences. The aim of this design is to understand the basis of the experiences of individuals who have deeply experienced a specific phenomenon [22]. Phenomenological design offers a more detailed understanding of situations and perceptions encountered in daily life that are not fully known [23].

The research study group includes 15 white-collar professionals who own gardens and live in Konya in 2025. Snowball

sampling, a purposive technique, was used to explore the phenomenon for discovery. Participants were selected for their rich experience with information sources, ensuring a deep understanding of the subject [24]. Inclusion criteria were being a university-educated white-collar worker, owning a garden, actively engaging in gardening, and willingness to participate. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 participants—8 women and 7 men. Interviews ended at data saturation, as no new codes emerged and data began to repeat [25]. Five researchers initially agreed to interview, but later declined due to work or vacation.

Data collection for the research was conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire. In addition to sociodemographic questions, the questionnaire includes 17 questions about participants' experiences with gardens and garden culture. The study sought to answer two main questions. What are the motivations of white-collar professionals for turning to gardening and horticulture? What are the experiences of white-collar professionals with garden culture? The questionnaire was developed by reviewing the working lives and challenges of white-collar professionals. Then, a national and international literature review was conducted, focusing on their search for belonging and their relationship with gardening culture. The created questionnaire, along with an explanation of the research's purpose and method, was shared with three sociologists for expert opinion. After revisions suggested by the academics, the questionnaire was finalized. In addition to the interview, data diversity was achieved by providing observation opportunities through the researcher's visits to participants' gardens. A detailed, comprehensive data-collection method was used. An observational process in a natural environment allowed a participatory approach to understanding culture [23]. Some discussions took place directly in participants' gardens. This was useful for understanding the dynamics of garden culture. Difficulties were encountered in reaching the research target audience during the course of the study. The demanding work lives of white-collar professionals, the busy gardening season, and the timing of summer vacation led to the field portion of the research taking longer than expected. Some interviews took place in the garden. The need to schedule interviews based on the researcher's and participants' availability also prolonged the process. All interviews were conducted face-to-face. The use of the observation technique enhanced the research's validity. In-depth interviews lasted between 39 and 102 minutes from 07/05/2025 to 08/30/2025. Informed consent was obtained from participants before each interview. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the KTO Karatay University Human Research Ethics Committee on 20.06.2025, with approval number 2025/06/10. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. To ensure reliability, this study followed the peer review and member checking criteria of Lincoln and Guba [26].

The research data analysis began with the transcription of the interviews, resulting in 175 pages of documentation. Interviewees were labeled in the Table 1 and in the findings section at the end of participant statements according to the order of the interview (P1, P2, P3, ...), gender (Male: M, Female: F), and duration of gardening experience (1 year, 2 years, ...), as required by the principle of confidentiality. Maxqda, a qualitative data analysis program, was chosen for analyzing the research data. The analysis was conducted following the steps of reflexive thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke [27]. The transcription of the audio recordings, the creation of codes, the reaching of categories, and the generation of themes were finalized with the data review and analysis reporting stage.

Table 1. *Characteristics of the research participants*

Participant	Gender	Age	Level of Education	Profession	Garden Experience Duration
P1	Male	65	Doctorate Degree	Academician	25 years
P2	Male	48	Master's Degree	Manager	15 years
P3	Female	50	Doctorate Degree	Academician	12 years
P4	Female	30	Bachelor's Graduate	Lawyer	5 years
P5	Male	31	Master's Degree	Financial Advisor	6 years
P6	Female	44	Bachelor's Graduate	Doctor	10 years
P7	Female	46	Bachelor's Graduate	Teacher	20 years
P8	Male	50	Bachelor's Graduate	Engineer	15 years
P9	Female	40	Doctorate Degree	Academician	6 years
P10	Female	32	Bachelor's Graduate	Lawyer	5 years
P11	Female	31	Bachelor's Graduate	Manager	9 years
P12	Male	55	Bachelor's degree	Engineer	20 years
P13	Female	35	Master's Graduate	Manager	12 years
P14	Male	49	Master's Degree	Doctor	15 years
P15	Male	55	Doctorate Degree	Doctor	20 years

3. FINDINGS

The findings regarding the garden and gardening culture of white-collar professionals are presented in the Table 2 and analyzed under three themes: “the meaning of being a white-collar worker and the garden,” “motivations for turning to the

garden,” and “garden and gardening culture.”

Table 2. Main and Sub-Themes Regarding Garden and Gardening Culture of White-Collar Professionals

Theme	Sub-theme	Categories
The Meaning of Being a White-Collar Worker and the Garden Under	Difficult experiences in working life	Loneliness
		Mobbing
	Intense work pace	Harmony with plaza rhythm
		Performance race
The burden of social pressure and norms	Societal perception/neighborhood pressure	
Motivation to Turn to the Garden	A healthy life expectancy	Soil contact
	The search for a natural environment	Place of peace
	Organic food production	Increased physical activity
		Stress reduction
	Escaping the city’s chaos	Changes in social interactions with age
		Anxiety about the future
	Investment potential	Escape from site life/
The housing units are unable to meet individual needs		
Garden and Gardening Culture	Strengthening solidarity networks	Mutual aid
		Ground table
	Eating and drinking habits	Challenging gardening tasks
		Fear of insects
	Invisible workload	Stepping out of your comfort zone
		The flow of time
Developing a sense of belonging	Relaxation area	
Garden routine	Increase in land value / decline in purchasing power	

3.1. THE MEANING OF BEING A WHITE-COLLAR WORKER AND THE GARDEN UNDER

In this theme, participants shared their experiences of actively participating in the modern workplace. While expressing their intensity alongside continuous performance criteria, they began by focusing on getting and keeping the job, and then discussed the difficulties they faced.

“Our work is not physical; it’s done purely with brainpower, meaning the fatigue is entirely in our heads. So, I’m not using any physical strength or force, or doing any physical labor, but I can describe it as a job where I earn money entirely by using my brain, my mind, and my education.” (P9, F, 6 years)

“The white-collar worker has a work life burdened with too much responsibility and stress. So, when you look at them, society sees them as people with high status, high incomes, and a lot of money, living extremely comfortably. But beneath that lies a lot of workload, a lot of stress, and a lot of responsibility. No matter what industry you’re in, you’ll inevitably experience bullying depending on the character of the people you encounter and their status.” (P11, F, 11 years)

“White-collar workers are experiencing ‘hierarchy fatigue.’ They’re constantly in a race in the plazas. Bullying is knee-deep, and most people experience loneliness at the end of the day.” (P10, F, 5 years)

Mental fatigue stands out in the work experiences of participants with higher education, a fundamental criterion for becoming a white-collar worker. The fact that work is carried out within a systematic structure in which hierarchical relationships are classified, and units are divided into sub-units was a point participants found noteworthy. This situation shows that statuses are sharply defined, and it can be said that it affects the work environment and well-being of white-collar professionals [28]. Employer demands, expressed as job-specific factors, can also create workplace inequalities [29]. Organizational factors such as working hours and workload in the workplace performance competition bring about workplace loneliness [30].

“For example, when you’re a blue-collar worker, there’s a time to rest when you go to bed in the evening. But for those of us who have jobs, like me, there’s this situation that I’ve heard from my friends and experienced myself. There’s never a time when that brain can rest. We call this burnout. So, those things are constantly on your mind 24 hours a day. You can’t disconnect, so it’s always work, even when you’re eating, you’re thinking about the tasks you need to do, and even when you’re sleeping, it’s on your mind. Should I stay up and keep working on that, or should I do this instead? We don’t have a concept of overtime, unlike blue-collar workers. Sometimes I always say, if we were blue-collar workers, at least after 5 PM you could sit down, relax, and clear your head, but as a white-collar worker, I don’t get to experience that much.” (P5, M, 6 years)

"I'm proud to be a teacher, but our work often follows us home. Document preparation, meeting minutes—these tasks end up happening after hours. Now, with everything online, work and home have blended. Friends suggest meeting at 10 PM, and we can't refuse; we must follow the administration's orders. Even when schools are open, home life mirrors these demands. If a student has a problem, I worry about it and discuss it with my family. Work issues naturally become part of our family conversations." (P7, F, 20 years)

The differences in working hours and overtime between blue-collar and white-collar workers are noteworthy. Over time, a legal basis is usually standard. Working hours during the day are legally defined, and any time exceeding this limit is considered overtime and is compensated. The fact that K9, an academic, has work on his mind even during non-work hours, social gatherings, and rest periods, and spends the entire day focused on work, is significant in demonstrating the intensity of a white-collar worker's life. The lack of a physical work schedule for participants who are constantly working leaves them emotionally exhausted. Emotional exhaustion, an extension of chronic fatigue and loss of motivation, is observed in white-collar workers under intense working conditions [31, 32].

"Society views white-collar workers as superheroes. Hardworking, an unattainable rank, looking with a respectful eye." (P3, F, 12 years)

"Being a white-collar worker ensures that society respects you. But it's very difficult. Both your family and your relatives have expectations of you. You have to meet those expectations. This also causes you to work harder. That's also causing you stress." (P6, F, 10 years)

White-collar workers gain a respected position in society due to their intellectually demanding skills. P3, an academic, states that respect is measured by academic success, which is seen as a product of education. Engineer participant P8, who stated that he gained prestige from his profession, expressed satisfaction with the value he was accorded by his social circle, but also highlighted the difficulties in meeting expectations. In addition to providing individuals with social standing and respect, trust, competence, and reputation are indicators of social capital [33]. It is possible to see the professional positions of white-collar workers who have earned society's approval and admiration on their social networks.

"I think the garden is a return to oneself. Like leaving it behind and running away. Most people aren't even aware of this. So, the essence can be any kind of essence, like the essence of coming from the earth. This could be the essence of meeting with me, or an internal dialog. So, you're basically on your own there, to be honest. I can't feel much here. This is in the city. I feel this more in an isolated place." (P3, F, 12 years)

"The most important thing here is that the world is changing. It's like they say, "I'm going to a different dimension." You're going to a different dimension. Did you understand? It has this size. Or, you know, you go to class. You know how there are breaks between classes. The garden is like a break from work life. You go there and rest. You find peace there. The truth is, everyone is seeking refuge, looking for a safe haven, and that place is a safe haven, a place of refuge for you." (P8, M, 15 years)

"The garden is an area where more healed and intimate relationships revolve. With a smaller group. You can't accept everyone either. It's not a place where everyone just comes and goes like that. It's a place with a group of no more than 5-6 people. We've been going every Friday for a long time. Summer or winter, unless something very important happens. We're going through snowdrifts and things like that, and we light the stove and sit down." (P14, M, 15 years)

For white-collar professionals, the garden means escaping the city's dynamism. It offers access to the comfort of a private space. In this setting, people display natural, unmasked, and confident behavior with their close circle. At this point, Goffman's [34] backstage metaphor is meaningful. Behind the scenes, without performance pressure, people behave more relaxed and unrestrained. The "break" metaphor for the garden, seen as an escape from daily life and intense work, can be explained in a similar way. The garden is a place for relaxation and is considered a private space. Intense interaction in small groups takes place there, making the garden a space that provides privacy.

3.2. MOTIVATION TO TURN TO THE GARDEN

The influence of working conditions on white-collar professionals' inclination toward gardening has been frequently mentioned. Specifically, highly educated white-collar workers who rely heavily on mental rather than physical skills experience mental fatigue, prompting them to seek relief in gardening. Furthermore, structural aspects of office environments, such as screens and radiation, contribute to this tendency. Alongside these factors, the growing demand for organic food and healthy living makes the garden increasingly attractive. As a result, all participants living in the city center turned to the garden as an escape from the city's tiring rhythm.

“We’re just sitting around all the time, we’re on screens. There are instructions from managers, there are changing systems, so we constantly have to keep up with something. Our jobs aren’t guaranteed either, and our careers are on edge. The system is draining people’s energy and power. Stress never ends. Being in contact with the earth helps to relieve mental fatigue.” (P2, M, 15 years)

“Gardening extends one’s life by providing physical exercise and an opportunity to regroup mentally. In the garden, you are in the heart of nature, away from the crowded city and everyday stress. White-collar workers, in particular, benefit from gardening, which offers an escape from stressful, isolating city life. The garden becomes an answer to the mental and spiritual fatigue that working life can create.” (P8, M, 15 years)

The central argument is that the garden provides a necessary healthy space for white-collar professionals, addressing both physical and mental well-being. K8, who has a history of cancer, emphasizes the garden’s health benefits. White-collar workers, challenged by the demands of the neoliberal economic system, are making extra efforts to improve their skills and overcome insecurity [35]. K2 noted negative physical health effects from primarily sedentary work, leading them to use the garden for increased mobility. Research by Amatori et al. [36] confirms that prolonged sitting increases health risks. Additionally, factors like heat, noise, and urban density push people to seek respite in the garden.

“There’s no traffic noise. Clean air. I was there almost every day this summer, especially during the very hot periods. This place is also a bit high up. It’s a place very close to the center, 10 kilometers away. My main motivation here is to escape the city’s oppressive atmosphere. He has a motivation to calm down a bit, to become more serene.” (P13, F, 12 years)

“I’m resting in the garden because I work in a crowded environment. Now we can set up our hammock and lie down. Since we live on the site, the garden gives us the opportunity to do things we wouldn’t be able to do here. You can’t have a barbecue on the site. Or, I don’t know, when you’re bored at eleven at night, and you say you want to eat, you can’t set up a table on the balcony. There will be the sounds of glasses and plates. Or you can’t laugh. Here, the next-door neighbor is asleep so as not to disturb them. We wash our car there. In the garden, everything I’ve mentioned is free.” (P4, F, 5 years)

“I live in this complex. I’m not free there, so there are rules. The site has rules. I sleep with them. Traffic, noise, and crowds – perhaps this is the charm of the center. I can’t move around comfortably in the center, but I’m free in the garden.” (P8, M, 15 years)

Limited space in people’s work and living areas motivates them to seek out gardens. Urban plans, designed for cohabitation, create boundaries that increase this motivation. As a result, participants view the garden as a place of freedom and peace, assigning it positive meaning. The garden’s environmental qualities, which extend beyond the city center, allow individuals to escape time and space constraints, thereby increasing their interest in it. Additionally, the pandemic has intensified both the desire to own a garden and the emphasis on individuality.

“We started by saying, “Let’s grow our organic tomatoes.” As these tomato seedlings grew, the garden turned green. If we want to eat fresh produce, having a garden is a big advantage. Every day, we see news around the world about chemicals contaminating food. We wanted access to natural, additive-free food.” (P10, F, 5 years)

“For example, I really enjoyed his trip abroad. If I had the means, I would definitely go once a month. But that’s not happening either. Since we didn’t have the financial means, we naturally wanted to have a garden where we could relax within the city limits. This desire for relaxation at home, perhaps intensified during the pandemic, has always been present.” (P9, F, 6 years)

Among participants with a high level of awareness, P10 shares their sensitivity toward pesticide-contaminated food, which they follow through international news. The emphasis on reliable food remains relevant today, especially given the increasing use of pesticides. Especially after the COVID-19 period, the sensitivity of white-collar professionals regarding food, coupled with the climate crisis, has increased their interest in gardening [37]. This situation also allows inference about the cultural capital of participants with high health literacy. Similarly, the fact that P9, who is an academic, chose to own a garden because he couldn’t travel abroad regularly can be considered a white-collar professional’s habitus.

“Most white relatives have a village connection rooted in their parents or childhood experiences. This connection leads to their ongoing involvement, while those without it remain uninvolved and unaware. Thus, owning a garden naturally follows from this village tie.” (P1, M, 20 years)

“Only those with a village background or knowledge of the land show interest in gardens, due to experience and a fondness developed there. In contrast, those lacking this background are uninterested, seeing gardening as tedious.” (K4, K, 5 years)

Familiarity with gardening culture motivates white-collar professionals to take up gardening, particularly when such traditions exist in their families. This family's experience with gardens creates a cultural predisposition that shapes the participants' choices. Participants highlight that these habits stem from family traditions, reinforcing that having a garden is often more about class habitus than individual preference. As a result, the inclination toward gardening is strongly influenced by inherited cultural codes and working life dynamics. Thus, participants' family gardening backgrounds exemplify a middle-class habitus that sustains this tradition.

"For example, if we're going to dry tomatoes or prepare for winter. We're doing it in the garden. We're boiling the sauce in the garden. No exhaust, no smoke. No one is shaking anything off of it." (P11, F, 9 years)

Since it's not possible to prepare food outdoors in modern urban structures, as P11 mentioned, traditions are maintained in the garden. The continuation of rural family members' cultures is also a result of intergenerational cultural transmission. In addition, P15 emphasizes that the inclination toward gardening increases with age, noting that preferences change in parallel with people's life cycles.

"As people age, especially after forty, they tend to avoid crowds. I notice my younger friends don't mention this; they're focused on traveling and shopping. When in their 20s and 30s, they want social activities like malls or cafes. But after forty, priorities shift. Some of us want a garden and to plant something, seeking relaxation and a connection to the earth, following the saying, "We came from the earth and to the earth we return." (P15, M, 20 years)

"During your 20s, you may focus more on socializing, but as you age, your interest in outside friendships and social events may wane. When you reach your 40s, expectations and desires can narrow, leading to more time spent alone and an increased interest in activities like gardening. This personal space, marked by simple routines like tea or hookah, often reflects a preference for solitude and quiet." (P14, M, 15 years)

Participants who emphasize age state that individuals' desires, preferences, and expectations shift over time. Additionally, it is observed that the motivation to avoid being alone increases interest in the garden. For some participants, the tendency to spend time in the garden with a smaller group indicates that the need for socialization has been replaced by individualism. Furthermore, P5, who has a young child, mentions a garden trend to avoid screen addiction. In this context, it is important that the child experiences a natural life by interacting with the soil.

"When we go to the garden, the child ignores the phone, even if it is offered to them. Instead, they become absorbed in chasing butterflies, following ants, or mixing water and soil to discover mud and create their own games. These experiences are only possible in the garden, and I believe this environment is essential for encouraging time away from screens." (P5, M, 6 years).

Smartphones, which play an important role in daily life, are used less frequently in the garden alongside plants, soil, and natural areas. It is also seen as a garden investment with potential, with direct and indirect positive impacts on people's lives. There are also participants (P12, P9) who emphasize the garden's high profitability in the long run. For example;

"This is a forward-looking investment. Now, places that were initially gardens and orchards are later developed and become more valuable. Garden investment is an investment you can use. An investment that you can benefit from while waiting for its value to appreciate. It's not like buying a plot of land and waiting for it to appreciate in value. He'll enjoy using it, and it will also be a profitable investment for the future." (P12, M, 20 years)

"Now that I've reached a point where I understand I can't make ends meet financially with my salary, I've also started to worry about the future. That's how artificial intelligence is developing so much. These professions will soon disappear. And there are also doomsday scenarios; they say, "May your land be blessed." Honestly, that part affected me too. Whether it's land or extra income, that anxiety really triggered me. I said, "Let me have my own land, plant vertically, and secure my future." (P9, F, 6 years)

White-collar workers with high financial literacy view the garden as a means of economic value. In addition to gardening activities, the potential for higher future earnings also explains the participants' strategies for evaluating their income. P9 also highlights the changing dynamics of working life, mentioning the garden trend as an argument for combating uncertainties.

3.3. GARDEN AND GARDENING CULTURE

The garden is more than just a production space for growing plants; it is a ground for interaction. The garden, which embodies its own culture, demonstrates its sociopsychological aspect by offering individuals aesthetic pleasure. While gardening is fundamentally understood as the care of plants (vegetables, fruits, trees, etc.), it is not limited to the garden in its reflection on life practice. In a healthy lifestyle profile, participants who value gardening and horticulture believe that gardens protect private spaces. It is observed that along with production, spiritual satisfaction is achieved, and a sense of belonging is developed. In the garden where the practice of mutual aid is evident, participants are expressing the function of a support mechanism.

“Even if you don’t want to, you might receive a seedling from your next-door neighbor; for example, he may bring over a handful of leek seedlings—one of the greatest gifts. In this environment, a culture of mutual aid forms spontaneously. When I went away for a week, the neighbors watered the garden without being asked. These acts of kindness happen without expectation.” (P10, F, 5 years)

“Similarly, neighbors bring their first crops for me to taste, creating a sense of community. My close relative—someone I know—might buy the garden nearby, allowing familiar and hometown relationships to continue. That’s why it’s beautiful too. This sense of connection also brings a feeling of safety. Neighbors can call me at the slightest problem. Sometimes, they spray and prune the vines without telling me. Since the neighborly relationship continues, they’re not charging me a fee either.” (P14, M, 15 years)

The garden, located outside residential areas, is a space where individuals do not spend their daily lives. Although the time spent in the garden is relatively short, neighborly relations develop, and social capital strengthens through these interactions. The support the garden owners give each other demonstrates collective organization. Furthermore, gardening is a space where trust relationships are built, mutual aid occurs, and solidarity is embodied. Finally, it is important to note that garden culture has been considered a complement to rural origins.

“There are no table manners in the garden. What’s there? There’s peasantry, there’s rural life. We are experiencing rural life. Sometimes I wear rubber shoes. There’s sitting cross-legged. There’s food on the ground. Here you take off your socks. As far as I can remember, I never stepped on the ground barefoot. But when I go to the garden, I step on the soil barefoot.” (P8, M, 15 years)

“For example, we eat practical meals in the garden. If the point is to fill your stomach, you quickly do so and get back to work. We don’t spend three hours on a long meal. That’s not a Michelin-starred restaurant, after all.” (P5, M, 6 years)

“Expanding on these differences, the garden is more primitive and traditional. Normally, if you were at home, you would serve everyone and give separate presentations. In the garden, however, the culture is different—people can eat from any plate, the glasses do not need to match, and there is floor seating.” (P11, F, 11 years)

Eating and clothing styles, which play significant roles in daily life, take on unique forms in the garden. Participant 5 (P5) uses the phrase "Michelin-starred restaurant" to convey that garden dining is simple. This example from P5, aiming to highlight ordinariness, illustrates the white-collar professional typology. Likewise, "yer sofrasi" (ground table) shows that garden cultural dynamics align with traditional ways of life. Participant 3 (P3), who links garden ownership with rural life, further expresses it as follows:

“I guess I have a bit of a rural streak. Rather than see grass, let there be trees, let the wind blow, let us eat the fruit, and if we don’t eat it, let the birds eat it. For people to turn to the garden, they must either be born into that culture or grow up within it. Giant trees like these, cicadas will chirp. I love an atmosphere like this, with nightingale sounds and things.” (P3, F, 12 years)

Peasantry, which symbolizes a unique way of life, fundamentally describes the close relationship with the land. Participant 3’s discussion of the impact of a rural mindset on an individual’s upbringing, and his equating owning a garden with being a villager, are significant in showing the white-collar worker’s perspective on rural life. Additionally, Participant 10 depicts the classic white-collar typology with the statement, “You can’t dig with manicured hands, you can’t walk in heels. The culture of the garden is its own.” At this point, the difficulties of the work in the garden were mentioned. For example;

“You’re getting physically tired—seriously tired. Gardening requires physical strength, time, and money, and as your available time dwindles, your whole weekend is slipping away. If you want to eat naturally, you won’t

be counting the cost; however, a significant budget still needs to be allocated. In this sense, it's an expensive pleasure, isn't it? (P3, F, 12 years)

"Gardening is actually quite tiring. When you work in the garden, either your arm or your back will hurt for a week—there is that side to it. While the pleasure of picking fruit from the tree is nice, it also requires good physical effort. You'll be bending and straightening constantly, which means, ultimately, gardening requires a fit body." (P10, F, 5 years)

Gardening requires white-collar workers to perform intense physical labor unfamiliar to their routine, highlighting an overlooked aspect of the garden experience. The economic and physical effort needed exposes the dual demands—both structural and individual—of gardening. This activity, with its focus on health and rigorous pace, fosters a distinct gardening culture. Adapting to this culture depends on the individual's capacity and personal differences.

"That area is mountainous, and if you are sensitive to nature—such as insects and bugs—it may not be somewhere you'll enjoy visiting. You need to relax, roll up your pants, and step onto the ground barefoot. If you find yourself saying, "the ants came," or "the bees left," then the garden might not be the right place for you." (P14, M, 15 years)

"For example, you have to wake up very early in the morning to swim. On other days, you might need to water at night, sometimes in the middle of the night, which means sacrificing sleep. The top is getting dirty. You're getting into a mess. You throw fertilizer, for example, and it smells. So, it's impossible to avoid getting my hands dirty. These are things we wouldn't normally accept. You need to step outside your comfort zone." (P6, F, 6 years)

Gardening is not part of white-collar workers' daily habits. When these workers, who work at the Plaza and live on the site, encounter the garden, they react to unfamiliar aspects such as its smell and insects. This shows they are stepping outside their comfort zone, especially for P6, who has a mid- to upper-class identity. The white-collar professional, known for his stylish image, comments on the garden "smell" and "dirty appearance" highlighting his distance from gardening. The phrase "normally" also shows he sees gardening as beneath his status.

"Life in the garden flows slowly. Here, we rush around, saying "Let's catch this, let's catch the traffic," but there's none of that in the garden. There, I have nothing to chase. Even the sense of time fades away." (P2, M, 15 years)

"People are overwhelmed by being stuck in chaos. Even when we drive in Konya, not just Istanbul, the inability to move creates a feeling of being stuck inside that car. You want to get to where you're going as soon as possible, and you want it to be over as soon as possible. It's not just our bodies that get tired. Our souls really do get tired. We're constantly going around in circles within something, always the same cycle. It's as if time stands still in the garden." (P7, F, 20 years)

Traffic congestion in the city center and the work system prompt individuals to speed up. It appears that the participants' perception of time slows down in the garden. It can be said that participants who found the city's rhythm tiring experienced time differently in the garden. Participants who enjoy being in the garden are also making recommendations to their social circles. For example;

"I recommend the garden to everyone because it's a wonderful escape where you can relax and enjoy yourself, especially with even a small group of friends. You don't need much—just eat cheese, bread, and tomatoes, have a biscuit, brew tea, sit down, and chat. I absolutely recommend the garden." (P13, F, 12 years)

"One thing you won't find in the city is loneliness. For him, the garden he bought brings peace, offering a way to disconnect from daily life. He feels that your wealth is the garden." (P1, M, 20 years)

For participants who frequently encounter responsibility, workload, and pressure in daily life, being in the garden is an emotional and social space. It can be said that individuals who are abstracted in the garden step backstage from the burdens of the modern world. Building on Goffman's concept of dramaturgy, which states that individuals perform roles in the social sphere, it can be said that in the garden, participants can be themselves and shed their roles. The garden, a private space where one can share with their close circle, is a reflection of belonging and trust. Schmelzkopf [38] states that the garden fosters a sense of nature and belonging among its residents and is interpreted as a safe haven. In addition, it was emphasized that owning a garden is difficult in the current economic conditions.

"I think the garden will have a bit more of a family feel to it, because investing there from scratch to buy land and build a garden isn't an easy thing to do, because land is very valuable now." (P9, F, 6 years)

“Nowadays, buying a garden and gardening are probably very difficult under current conditions. It’s difficult for me to get it today, or for many people at my level. So, this comes after basic needs are met. The garden is transitioning into luxury. Normally, it’s actually a necessity. For a person to maintain their motivation, physical health, and mental well-being. I think the current garden owners bought them at least 10 years ago.”
(P11, F, 11 years)

Participants who expressed their wish for the purchasing power of white-collar workers in Turkey to decrease also mentioned the difficulty of owning a garden. He emphasizes the class nature of garden ownership by noting that the economic value of the land, a prerequisite for owning a garden, has increased. It is understood that owning a garden is accessible to the privileged class. Although P11 perceives the garden as a necessity, it states that it is no longer possible for white-collar workers because land has been commodified. Even tho it was possible to own a garden 10 years ago, the difficulty of access today also highlights a systemic disconnect in property acquisition.

4. DISCUSSION

White-collar professionals view gardening as more than a hobby—it relieves stress, fosters a connection with nature, and fulfills their need for belonging. They noted that while sports, art, and cultural pursuits offered some meaning, they did not satisfy them as fully as gardening did. For these professionals, the garden becomes part of their identity. Their engagement with gardening in urban settings signals a desire to connect with rural life. Balancing city living and gardening creates a cultural bridge between countryside and city [39].

It has been proven that people who are in contact with nature benefit their physical, cognitive, and spiritual health. Zhao et al. [40] state that individuals' social functioning increases as they interact with nature, and they emphasize the role of subjective experiences in the garden, away from noise pollution. It is said that, among individual factors in garden ownership, economic, cultural, and social capital become more decisive with age.

Gardening and horticulture have cognitive, physiological, and sociological implications for individuals, fostering a sense of belonging [41]. As frequently visiting participants also mentioned, the garden is a space where a sense of belonging develops. It is known that people who make their gardens aesthetically pleasing attribute more emotional meaning to their own gardens than to urban botanical parks [42]. In addition to belonging being a fundamental human need, Allen et al. [43] emphasize its temporality, highlighting that individuals' sense of belonging is fluid and transient. As the participants also stated, gardening is an area of focus that comes with age. Belonging is a feeling that develops from shared experiences. Belonging, an important element for the continuity of interpersonal interaction, finds its place within the framework of garden culture. It should not be forgotten that the social support networks of garden neighbors play a significant role in individuals developing a sense of belonging to the garden [44]. Participants are seeking help from their garden neighbors as they learn gardening activities. This situation shows that gardening is a tool that strengthens social belonging. The culture of gardening strengthens collective identities and helps white-collar workers shape their identities as social actors [45]. Different socioeconomic groups interact through garden neighborliness, revealing the garden's potential for social capital and its unifying function [13]. Participants feel comfortable in the garden, which serves as a private, home-like space where they can engage deeply with their surroundings. Bellows [46] highlights that gardening fosters social life and mutual assistance, making it a high-potential area for solidarity. The social capital networks of participants who share their garden produce with others become stronger. For those who maintain a culture of solidarity, a collective feeling develops. Outside the home and workplace, the garden becomes a new space where close social connections form [13]. People involved in gardening experience better social relationships and emotional well-being, reflecting the positive effects of green spaces [47]. Being outdoors directly benefits mental health and supports the continuity of the gardening culture [48].

Draper & Freedman [49], who emphasize the garden's potential to sustain intergenerational relationships, also note the hidden benefits of gardening. In the modern world, white-collar professionals in the workplace face intense uncertainty and bullying, despite the opportunities and possibilities available to them. Against this backdrop, participants who evaluated the benefits of being outdoors compared to the sedentary lifestyle of an office environment emphasized the positive impact of gardening on healthy living. Furthermore, the limited physical activity in the work lives of white-collar workers, who are considered desk-bound, is a determining factor in turning to gardening. In this context, participants who enjoy gardening as a hobby frequently mention the advantages of owning a garden. Additionally, gardening has been shown to increase individuals' well-being [50] and reduce fatigue, stress, and depression [51]. Research has also observed that individuals who consume fruits and vegetables grown in their own gardens have a healthy eating pattern and can protect their children from obesity [52]. Finally, gardening activities, also considered a measure against the food crisis [16], can be understood through Beck's conceptualization of the risk society [53].

In addition to participant expressions describing the garden as an integration with nature, it is also necessary to mention the difficulties of owning a garden. Garden ownership, which is not accessible to all social classes, is closely related

to modern economic systems. Given the economic crisis and difficulties in Turkey, the challenges faced by white-collar workers in owning a garden are highlighted. The fact that the garden owners stated they had purchased their gardens long ago and that their budgets would be insufficient under current economic conditions underscores the reality that owning a garden is exclusive to a certain class.

5. CONCLUSION

In recent years, food-based social movements, food costs, and the issue of reliable food have frequently come to the forefront. Nowadays, owning a garden can be analyzed from cultural, economic, and political perspectives. The garden becomes a special place. Participants can develop a sense of belonging by personalizing it. Those who have developed a sense of belonging to the garden through working with the soil and growing plants can express their subjectivity. This stands in contrast to the structured process of working life.

The garden is a leisure activity for white-collar professionals and symbolizes the modern individual's escape from the discipline of urban life. White-collar workers are motivated to turn to garden culture due to the long hours they work. The tendency to spend time in the garden also increases as people age. In youth, social practices usually occur within friendships. During middle age, gardening and horticulture provide an 'escape to nature' and offer a more isolated life.

Owning a garden and engaging in gardening activities are associated with positive effects on physical and mental health. Gardens foster close social interactions while protecting privacy. They create distance from screens and online applications that dominate daily life, helping individuals form real relationships. This highlights the benefits of gardening for overall health. However, good health is necessary to participate in gardening, as its physical demands may exclude those with health issues, especially as these increase with age.

Gardens not only connect individuals to nature but also influence social dynamics. Gardening supports sustainable living and may help address social problems. Yet, owning a garden is not affordable for everyone, reflecting class division. Gardens are often inaccessible to many in society, and in this study, garden ownership is viewed as a marker of identity and status. It was concluded that, under current economic conditions, white-collar professionals generally cannot afford to own a garden.

Private gardens are outside detached houses and have no commercial purpose; they represent a specific group. This study shows that white-collar professionals own these homes and belong to the middle- to upper-class. Research indicates that people do not value the economic value of garden products. Instead, they focus on keeping their gardens neat and well-maintained, suggesting the aim is enjoyment rather than food necessity. Hedonism, or Epicureanism, is part of garden culture, making gardens a visual escape from the city center.

White-collar professionals' interest in garden culture suggests an upper-middle-class nature romanticism or the commodification of nature. Gardens can be seen as investments, a new way to seek profit in cities. Having a garden requires socioeconomic power and leads to class and spatial segregation. Garden ownership reflects a specific lifestyle and quality of life. Now, having a garden and gardening are also signs of symbolic capital.

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