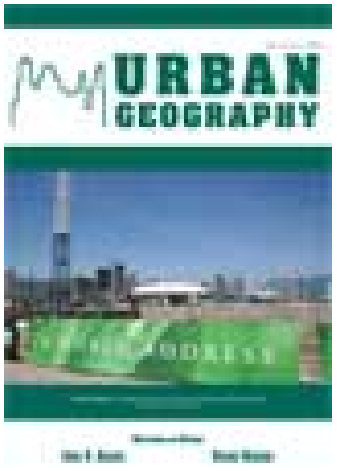

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Urban agriculture and the sustainability fix in Vancouver and Detroit

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Urban agriculture and the sustainability fix in Vancouver and Detroit

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Both Vancouver, British Columbia, and Detroit, Michigan, have significant and growing urban agriculture movements. In this article, I follow recent work investigating the connection between urban agriculture and neoliberalization to determine how these local governments have used urban agriculture in narratives of economic development to selectively pursue a sustainability fix. I analyze how different regimes of local governance have influenced the urban agriculture movements, leading to local, hybridized fixes that adapt to different material and discursive contexts in each place. I argue that in both cities, urban agriculture has radical potential as a grassroots response to economic and environmental injustice, but has also been enrolled as a device by the local state in which the primary goal of sustainability planning becomes enhanced economic competitiveness. Pursuing an agenda of food justice requires examining the larger context and effects of municipal involvement with food movements.

Keywords: Detroit; food justice; neoliberalization; sustainability fix; urban agriculture; Vancouver

Introduction

Vancouver, British Columbia, and Detroit, Michigan, are 1,962 miles away from each other in traditional Cartesian space; in the conceptual economic and social space of the world's cities, they are even farther apart. Although both are North American cities colonized by Europeans, they are currently located in very different socioeconomic space. Detroit is renowned as one of the world's former industrial giants, where the American Dream of automobile-centric urban sprawl was born. It has seen all of the major American urban transitions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries play out in microcosm: industrialization, unionization, the rise of the middle class, racial segregation, suburbanization and white flight, post-industrial economic decline, race riots, the neoliberal retrenchment of the 1980s and 1990s, the foreclosure crisis of the late 2000s, and perhaps even a glimpse of America's urban future with the city filing for Chapter Nine bankruptcy on 18 July 2013, becoming the largest American city ever to do so (Sugrue, 1996/2014).

Vancouver stands in stark contrast to the shrinking Eastern city of Detroit as a rapidly growing Western city (Figure 1). While Detroit is often highlighted as an example of a city with very low population density (though see Clement, 2013, pp. 66–67), Vancouver's dense downtown residential development makes it a star example of planners' recent obsession with density (Quastel, Moos, & Lynch, 2012). Today the cities of Vancouver and Detroit have similar populations (603,502 and 701,475, according to the

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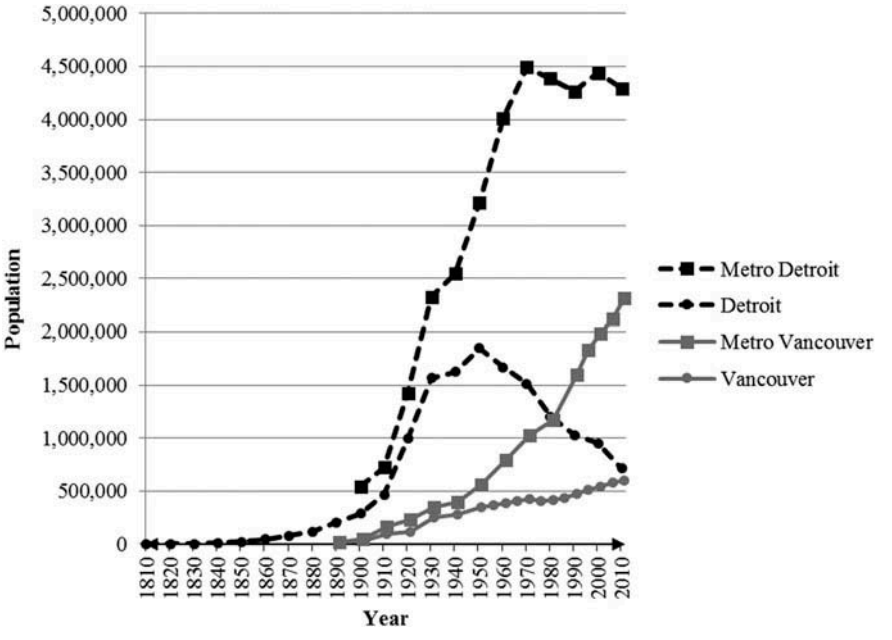

Figure 1. Populations of Vancouver and Detroit and their metropolitan (statistical) areas, 1810–2011. Source: United States and Canada censuses.

United States 2010 Decennial Census and Canada 2011 Census respectively), but must be placed in their regional context. Detroit's metropolitan area is the 14th largest in the United States, with just under 4.3 million people, and although Vancouver is Canada's eighth largest city, it boasts the third largest metropolitan area with 2.1 million people (2011 and 2010 Censuses). Additionally, the City of Detroit itself is 142.87 square miles, while Vancouver has only 44.39 square miles (Statistics Canada, 2012; United States Census Bureau, 2010). Therefore, measurements of density focusing on the city as a whole do not fully capture the urban form of these cities, with Vancouver having average levels of density and single family housing outside its downtown core and Detroit having many dense areas scattered across its metropolitan area, with sprawl and depopulation being two sides of the same coin (Clement, 2013, pp. 66–67).

Vancouver has actively pursued "world city" status, especially since the late 1990s. Hinging a booming tourism industry and a globalized real estate market on the aesthetic attractions of its Pacific Northwest environment has made Vancouver a global consumption city (Siemiatycki, 2013). Regularly high rankings on interurban league tables measuring sustainability and livability are an asset highly valued by the City government, which has actively marketed Vancouver as a place ideal for a cosmopolitan upper class. This trend largely reflects the decrease of resource-based economic activity in the Lower Mainland and the rise of consumption-based—and to some degree, creativity- or knowledge-based—industries. While often presented as a paragon of 21st century urban planning and development (Harcourt & Cameron, 2007), Elliot Siemiatycki (2013) shows that the much-praised model of Vancouverism ultimately rests on significant and often unjust changes in the urban economic order.

This juxtaposition begs the question, what do these two cities have in common? One commonality to be explored here is their growing urban agriculture movements.[1] In the

summer of 2013, newspapers in both cities excitedly proclaimed the new trend (Gabriel, 2013; Harbottle, 2013; Hotte, 2013; Satyanarayana, 2013). Additionally, both cities were featured as case studies in a report by the American Planning Association on urban agriculture (Hodgson, Campbell, & Bailkey, 2011). In this article I ask: how is urban agriculture promoted by the state as a sustainable solution to the very different social, economic, and environmental problems faced by these two cities? Drawing on Nathan McClintock's (2011, 2014) theorization of urban agriculture's radical/neoliberal "Janus face" and While, Jonas, and Gibbs' (2004) concept of the "sustainability fix," I aim to better specify the role of the state and interurban competition in driving urban food production's incorporation into strategies of neoliberal urbanism. I briefly examine the different historical trajectories that have led to urban agriculture's recent visibility and illustrate how the local state has selectively enrolled it as part of an urban sustainability fix. Through a comparison of urban governance and document analysis of Vancouver's *Greenest City 2020 Action Plan* and Detroit's *Detroit Future City*, I argue that while the current conditions of possibility for the urban agriculture movement are decidedly neoliberal, more attention needs to be paid to the role of differently neoliberalizing states in directing the growth of the movement. In the discussion, I address the relevant differences and similarities of how this process occurred in each place. Here I draw out the way that the "strategic selectivity" of local states (Jessop, 1990) leads sustainability policies like urban agriculture to be adopted as fixes that are both discursive and material, seeking to both position cities favorably in competitive place-marketing *and* to address the material political economic circumstances structuring urban development. This approach brings together regulation-theoretical approaches to the sustainability and environmental fix—which tend to emphasize the political economic crises shaping (and being shaped by) state action (e.g. While et al., 2004)—and the more discursive and policy-focused work on the sustainability fix and policy mobilities (e.g. Temenos & McCann, 2012). The cases of Vancouver and Detroit show that pursuing an agenda of food justice requires examining the larger context and effects of municipal involvement with food movements.

Theorizing urban agriculture

In this section, I draw on insights from urban political ecology and environmental economic geography to provide the theoretical groundwork for my empirical investigation. Specifically, I draw on the literature on urban agriculture and neoliberalism (McClintock, 2011, 2014), the urban sustainability fix (While et al., 2004), and the environmental fix (Castree, 2008a, 2008b).

Urban agriculture and neoliberalism

The recent boom of research on urban agriculture (reviewed in Tornaghi, 2014) has seen a debate connecting the practice to the processes of neoliberal urbanism and governance. A central point of contention here concerns the ability of urban agriculture to change the environmental and economic aspects of urban social relations. The literature supporting urban agriculture often touts its benefits for building community, providing healthy food and recreation, beautifying neighborhoods, and making productive use of vacant land (Hodgson et al., 2011), repeating a number of long-standing claims that reflect the history of urban agriculture as a favorite project of liberal urban reformers (see Lawson, 2005). A number of more radical proponents argue for the potential for local, often communal, production of food to decommodify land, labor, and food (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011;

Levkoe, 2011), produce post-capitalist alternative economies (Cameron & Wright, 2014; Dixon, 2011), or simply as a limited survival strategy of marginalized urban populations (Draus, Roddy, & McDuffie, 2014). Critics of urban agriculture also approach the topic from diverse political positions, with some pragmatists dismissing it as idealist and elitist environmentalism (Oosting, 2010; Whitford, 2009) and more left critics pointing to the limited or problematic race and class makeup of certain alternative food initiatives (Guthman, 2008; Holt-Giménez & Wang, 2011), the difficult structural barriers to change faced by grassroots activism (Alkon & Mares, 2012; Ghose & Pettygrove, 2014), and the ways that "garden projects" can produce "responsiblized" neoliberal subjects (Pudup, 2008) and justify state retrenchment (Rosol, 2012).

One of the most developed projects in this literature comes from Nathan McClintock (2011, 2014), who draws on urban political ecology's theorization of metabolism and circulation to explain how urban agriculture arises historically. From the point of view of the circuits of capital, the "demarcated devaluation" of North American inner city land through processes of redlining, white flight, and deindustrialization creates abandoned space that can be harnessed by those exploited by the capitalist space-economy to regain a measure of self-reliance or community organization (2011). Urban agriculture is also fundamentally a response to metabolic rifts: the gaps in ecology's circular metabolism of inputs and outputs created through humans' impact on the environment. McClintock (2011) draws on Foster's (1999) eco-socialist reading of Marx to identify these rifts as ecological, social, and individual. The ecological rift occurs through industrial agriculture's rescaling of metabolic relationships, including spatial (e.g. global commodity flows; see Smith, 2008) and temporal "subsidies" (e.g. the use of fossil fuels; see McClintock, 2011, pp. 23–24) in the food chain. The social rift is caused by the commodification of land and labor, both historically through primitive accumulation and contemporarily through accumulation by dispossession (Harvey, 2003). Finally, the individual rift occurs through a dual alienation: not only are modern city dwellers separated temporally and spatially from the socionatural systems that produce their food, but in a system of wage labor they are also separated from the products of their labor through the appropriation of surplus value (McClintock, 2011, p. 32). McClintock claims that truly radical urban agriculture needs to address all three rifts.

However, this is not a simple task due to the historical development of the movement. The political potential of urban agriculture also needs to be understood dialectically:

> not one or the other, radical or neoliberal, but, rather, a Janus face, simultaneously a radical counter-movement and an actually-existing form of roll-out neoliberalization existing in dialectical tension. Indeed, contradictory processes of capital both create opportunities for urban agriculture (on land left vacant either via the retreat of capital or via speculation/monopoly rent) and impose obstacles to its expansion (such as increased competition for funding, environmental contamination externalized from production, and rising land values once sites are improved and gentrifiers move in). (2011, p. 6)

McClintock's formulation avoids unhelpful generalizations—an issue especially prominent in critical social science analyses using neoliberalism as a framework (2011, p. 8). Instead, by tracing the mechanisms through which the urban agriculture movement has been part of local state policy and viewing its development as dialectical, I follow McClintock in revealing urban agriculture as politically contested and the product of a particular nexus of historical forces. However, while the concept of the "Janus face" is a useful heuristic, further work is needed to identify how different forms of neoliberal urbanism selectively promote or block urban agriculture. McClintock's thesis was forged

in the flatlands of Oakland, California, an area that has seen similar deindustrialization as other major United States cities like Detroit. However, the introduction of Vancouver to my analysis—as a city in a different national and economic context—illustrates how urban agriculture can be enrolled in other discourses of interurban competition. Due to my focus on the role of the state, I provide more evidence for the neoliberal rather than radical side of the Janus face of urban agriculture. This is not to deny that there is important work being done by urban agriculture activists in both cities or that city officials blindly follow neoliberal ideology. Rather, I take this approach to emphasize that food justice activism must take into account the powerful forces shaping urban governance in order to develop effective political strategies.

The sustainability fix and the environmental fix

In order to do this, I bring McClintock's (2011, 2014) work into conversation with the urban and environmental geography literature on the sustainability and environmental fixes. Urban geographers studying neoliberalization have stressed that the relationship between national-level economic reforms and local economies is complex; this is why neoliberalization must always be treated as a process, and one that has diverse but interlinked effects at different scales (Peck & Tickell, 2002). In this article, I follow arguments that any manifestation of neoliberal ideology in urban environmental policy is necessarily hybrid (Raco, 2005), contingent (Wilson, 2004), and variegated (Brenner, Peck, & Theodore, 2010). Building on this insight, one of the most effective critiques of liberal sustainability discourse has come from the regulation theory-based literature on the "sustainability fix," starting with While et al.'s (2004) study of Manchester and Leeds, which found the selective uptake of certain aspects of sustainability discourse, policy, and planning to be a key strategy for securing investment in the context of fierce entrepreneurial competition between British cities under neoliberalism (see also Harvey, 1989).

The urban sustainability fix is a subtype of David Harvey's (1982) concepts of spatial, temporal, and spatio-temporal fixes, whereby crises of overaccumulation are provisionally abated by the spatial expansion of capitalist markets or temporal deferral. Bob Jessop (2006) stresses that the material aspect of spatiotemporal fixes is in fact a *secondary* response—often engineered by the state—to what is first and foremost *political* contestation over the crises and contradictions of capitalism. While et al. (2004) position their notion of the sustainability fix within Harvey's framework to highlight the strategies employed by the local state in dealing with the devolution of economic and ecological management under neoliberal ecological modernization. The crucial point is that in addition to being forced to create environmental policy by this devolution (often with meager resources due to austerity measures), cities also use their sustainability programs as yet another indicator in the league tables that characterize interurban competition. Therefore, the sustainability fix addresses crises and attempts to "fix" the material, discursive, and political order of the city along the lines of green capitalism.

Although the original formulation of the sustainability fix was developed in the United Kingdom, the concept has since seen application elsewhere, including Vancouver (Kear, 2007; Quastel, 2009; Quastel et al., 2012; Rosol, 2013) and other cities (e.g. Krueger & Gibbs, 2007; Long, in press; Temenos & McCann, 2012). Despite differences in the specific contours of the competitive interurban environment and the relationship between national and subnational governance, the sustainability fix remains a useful concept. However, since While et al. (2004) original formulation, this concept has seen little interaction with the concept of the "environmental fix" as proposed by Noel Castree

(2008a, 2008b). Castree summarizes the "neoliberal natures" literature as presenting empirical cases of a more general neoliberal environmental fix that "constitutes a way of achieving strategically a core objective for capital and/or the state" in the face of "the continuous challenge of achieving and then sustaining accumulation in the face of countervailing forces that are internal and external to the capitalist system" (2008a, p. 146). He specifically identifies a "state-environmental fix" (2008a, p. 149) in which the state devolves or privatizes environmental regulation or governance in the face of fiscal, rationality, and legitimation crises. Here I understand the sustainability fix as a particular kind of state-environmental fix.

In this article, I compare the different ways that urban agriculture functions as a fix for Vancouver and Detroit. By viewing each through the lens of the sustainability and environmental fix, I bring together the material, discursive, and political elements of these fixes to show how neoliberal ideology appears in hybrid form in projects of urban sustainability by the local state. The "sustainable development paradox" identified by Krueger and Gibbs (2007), in which the pursuit of sustainability often disguises or displaces the reproduced injustices of the capitalist status quo, is key in evaluating the political economic context within which urban agriculture movements have entered public view in Vancouver and Detroit. In different ways in each city, urban agriculture development and policy is employed both as a tool of the entrepreneurial city and as a grassroots response to urban environmental injustice.

Methods

The comparison of the cities presented in this article is based on fieldwork conducted in June 2012 for Detroit and September 2012 through February 2013 for Vancouver. While my larger research project involved conducting interviews with urban agriculture movement participants and conducting a GIS-based analysis of the city's food access by neighborhood, this article presents the results of document analysis based on governmental publications concerning urban agriculture and primary and secondary literature on the cities' economic development planning and urban agriculture movements. Due to space constraints, the historical account presented here does not present the wider histories of colonization, industrialization, and regional political economy that are part of the emergence of urban agriculture. Instead, I focus on the role of the municipal government in selectively fostering today's urban agriculture movement. Additionally, I do not elaborate on the complex class, race, and gender politics of the urban agriculture movements in each city.

Vancouver

The City of Vancouver and urban agriculture

The Lower Mainland's contemporary food supply is characterized by "short seasonal abundance, significant offseason imported product flows, and exports in periods of seasonal excess" (SMC & ZAEC, 2009, p. viii) and is the result of the industrialization of agriculture that represents a shift away from what was once nearly self-sufficient local production and the emergence of regional agricultural trade, starting with rail connections to the Prairie breadbasket in the 1880s (Harris, 1996, p. 245, chapter three). Urban agriculture has long been part of the fabric of Vancouver (see Buswell, 1980/2003a, 1980/2003b), and the influence of prominent nonprofit City Farmer (the oldest urban

agriculture support organization in North America, see http://www.cityfarmer.org) along with numerous other factors (see Mendes, 2006) has supported a large community garden system (currently with 80 gardens) in the city.

Despite the presence of community-led urban agriculture, the City has not always been supportive of such efforts (see, e.g. Kellhammer, n.d.). However, recent shifts in local political economy have seen a resurgence of interest in growing food in the city. This is due in large part to changes in the political orientation and planning style of the City. Over the decades, Vancouver has made a shift from the center-right governance of the Non-Partisan Association (NPA) to a more social democratic regime under the left Social Democrat Coalition of Progressive Electors (COPE) from 2002 to 2005 and the center-left green liberal Vision Vancouver from 2008 to present. Vision Vancouver certainly retains some social democratic heritage; however, much of the economic development pursued under Vision has taken an entrepreneurial bent through a feel-good triple bottom line sustainability lens, influenced by a more competitive climate for federal and provincial funding and a national discourse of economic austerity as much as environmentalism (Stoymenof, 2011). The political shift that took place in Vancouver through the 2000s had a significant effect on the City's pursuit of environmental reforms, but as I discuss in the rest of this section, it did not represent simple support of the existing urban agriculture movement, but rather a selective uptake of features of it.

With an electoral victory over the NPA in 2002, COPE pursued the development of a City-mandated food policy framework. This framework began in 2003, with a City Council vote to commit to a "just and sustainable" food system in Vancouver, a commitment which eventually became policy through the creation of an Action Plan by the end of the year. As Wendy Mendes (2006, pp. 106–149) illustrates, grassroots community organizing and the Vancouver Food Policy Council was instrumental in forming connections between grassroots activists, nonprofit actors, and food producers and securing this translation into state action. Perhaps most influential to the food policy efforts of the local state is the City of Vancouver's sustainability plan under Vision Vancouver and Mayor Robertson, which is called Greenest City 2020. The focus of the program is to make Vancouver "the greenest city in the world by 2020," a rather ambiguous goal made real through interurban league tables such as Siemens' Green City Index (2014). Since its inception in 2009, a *Greenest City 2020 Action Plan* has been created for the program and contains ten smaller plans, each with long-term, quantitative targets that the City aims to reach by 2020. The goals range in focus from creating green jobs, to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, to improving access to nature, clean water, and clean air (City of Vancouver, 2011). It also includes food-based targets: goal ten of the Plan reads, "increase city-wide and neighborhood food assets by a minimum of 50% over 2010 levels" (City of Vancouver, 2011, p. 65), with a food asset being defined as "resources, facilities, services or spaces that strengthen the city's food system"(City of Vancouver, 2011, p. 69). Subgoals were also set for increasing urban agriculture (City of Vancouver, 2012). As of the summer of 2013, this goal has almost been met. In addition to the progress made under these priority goals, the *Greenest City 2020 Action Plan* builds on a number of urban agriculture initiatives that have already been accomplished under the Greenest City rubric, including an initiative to create 2010 new community garden plots by 2010, Greenest City Grants in support of urban agriculture, and the Greenest City Action Plan Local Food Area. Along similar lines as Detroit, Vancouver's urban agriculture movement finds its origins in citizen activism, but more recently has been actively supported and managed by the City. Indeed, Vision Vancouver's support of the 2010 community garden goal stems from its inception with NPA councilor Peter Ladner in 2006 (a strong supporter of urban

agriculture, see Ladner, 2011). I argue in the next section that this shift is largely due to the urban and regional adoption of sustainability initiatives as part of a strategy designed to improve economic competiveness.

The Greenest City? Vancouverism's sustainability fix

Numerous scholars (Kear, 2007; Peck, Siemiatycki, & Wyly, 2014; Quastel, 2009; Quastel et al., 2012) have identified Vancouver's sustainability policy as a fix designed to preserve economic growth while selectively pursuing environmental and social sustainability. In this section, I provide context for Vancouver's sustainability fix before illustrating the pertinence of urban agriculture to this discussion. The key point made by these authors is that the branding of Vancouver as a sustainable and livable city—and the preservation of the particular kind of growth machine oriented around upper-middle class urban consumption and luxury real estate that it requires—has become central to its economic competitiveness. As Siemiatycki (2013) points out, the style of planning now known as Vancouverism has positioned the city as an "exceptional" case among post-industrial and global cities (Tom Hutton quoted in Bula, 2011). Vancouverism is exemplified by dense downtown mixed-use development coupled with design features playing up the mountain and ocean views and incorporating recreational features in public space (see Boddy, 2005). Indeed, the city has been catering to an upwardly mobile, young, middle class population interested in downtown living for decades (Ley, 1996).

Siemiatycki (2013, pp. 88–95) also effectively points to three reasons that urban planning and policy are so important to this particular global consumption-oriented city. The first factor is the importance of real estate to the local economy. The decoupling of the local housing and labor markets, driven in large part by the globalization of Vancouver's property market, has had a significant effect on local planning politics as the city has become a desirable, cosmopolitan place to live (Moos & Skaburskis, 2010). The second factor identified by Siemiatycki (2013) is the branding of Vancouver as a "livable" city. As Hutton (2011) and Peck et al. (2014, pp. 396–403) illustrate, the livability discourse in Vancouver stems from anti-car, anti-pollution, and anti-freeway activism undertaken by The Elector's Action Movement in the 1970s. They also point out, however, that the environmentalist aspects of Vancouverism's livability (e.g. walkable neighborhoods, accessible public transit, etc.) are intimately connected to the redevelopment of the city along middle-class values and the resulting (unlivable for most) housing market. Therefore, one can observe how the concept of livability became a uniting focus of the amenity-driven downtown redevelopment and in the marketing of Vancouver as a wise real estate investment since the 1980s. The City prides itself on its ranking on the league tables of "most livable" cities, such as those published by *The Economist*, which ranked Vancouver number one every year between 2007 and 2011 (City of Vancouver, 2013a). While environmentalism has been part of livability in Vancouver since the inception of the environmental movement, recent years have seen a transition occurring as the City and the regional authority of Metro Vancouver have employed the language of "triple bottom line sustainability" in much of their planning (Quastel et al., 2012).

The final trend identified by Siemiatycki (2013) focuses on the importance of tourism to Vancouver's economy. In British Columbia, tourism is one of the largest industries in the province (Wilson, 2012). A large part of the City's economic strategy revolves around the attraction of tourists, seasonal residents, and international investment capital, and this emphasis is an integral part of Vancouver's development as a consumption-oriented city. It has also been integrated with the City's sustainability policy, albeit sometimes awkwardly:

in December 2012, an image of extremely energy-inefficient and consumption-oriented cruise ships was captioned as an example of local sustainable development on the City of Vancouver website. Although this image was removed at the request of Mayor Robertson (C. Smith, personal communication, 15 August 2013), the situation—intentionally or not—highlighted some of the fundamental contradictions of sustainable consumption in the city (see Longhurst, 2012).

In this context of consumption-oriented development, how does the City's support of urban agriculture through the Greenest City 2020 program contribute to a sustainability fix? Several aspects of government involvement are pertinent to this discussion. An initial connection is between the discourses of livability and sustainable tourism outlined above and the lifestylism and healthism common in the alternative food movement (see Guthman, 2011). Because a key part of Vancouver's marketing plan for attracting both migrants and tourists combines "natural amenities" such as the mountains, the ocean, and the temperate rainforest, with the cultural and entertainment amenities of a cosmopolitan consumption-oriented city, the pursuit of planning designed to increase local food production and provide recreational gardening opportunities is a perfect fit. The language used to support making Vancouver's food system "just and sustainable" fits comfortably alongside messages advertising a green urban lifestyle. In a recent article advertising summer events in the city, for example, the heading asks, "A small farm with your condo?" (Bula, 2013). Indeed, much of the success of the urban agriculture movement in Vancouver stems from the strong support it receives from foodies (and their civil society representatives) who value local, fresh, organic produce (see Fodor, 2011, p. 23; Mendes, 2006). The lifestyle element of this discourse tends to gloss over the food insecurities faced by many in Vancouver (Fodor, 2011).

Due to its high land values, securing space to grow food in Vancouver is a challenge. While most urban agriculturalists work on public land or negotiate sharing agreements on private plots (Schutzbank, 2012), the City has also supported property tax reassessment to encourage land owners to temporarily allow their vacant land to be used for urban agriculture (Williams, 2010). By changing their classification from business use (Class 6) to nonprofit or community use (Class 8), developers can pay a lower tax rate while waiting to develop the land. Although many choose to donate the saved money to "green" causes (see Vancity, 2012) and this process allows food to be grown on otherwise unused land, the reassessment strategy reveals the ultimate contradictions between the twin goals of economic development (in a consumption and housing-driven economy) and environmental sustainability (through local food production). As Quastel (2009) documents, while these plots can serve as community green space for a limited time, their ultimate fate is often a condominium tower.

The second major factor pointing to urban agriculture as a sustainability fix in Vancouver is the connection between local food production and the green economy. Although presumably presented in no particular order, the goals of the *Greenest City Action Plan* (City of Vancouver, 2011) do seem to prioritize the economic. The first goal is to "[s]ecure Vancouver's international reputation as a mecca of green enterprise" (p. 10). This goal sums up Vision Vancouver's "bright green" (i.e. ecological modernization) approach to environmentalism quite succinctly, making the "strong business case for going green" (p. 11). Their mission is supported by organizations like the Vancouver Economic Development Commission (2010). This section of the plan is central to Vision Vancouver's political and economic goals for the city. The success of Vision Vancouver is due in large part to its ability to garner young voters interested in the environment, while at the same time continuing an aggressive real estate developer-supported economic

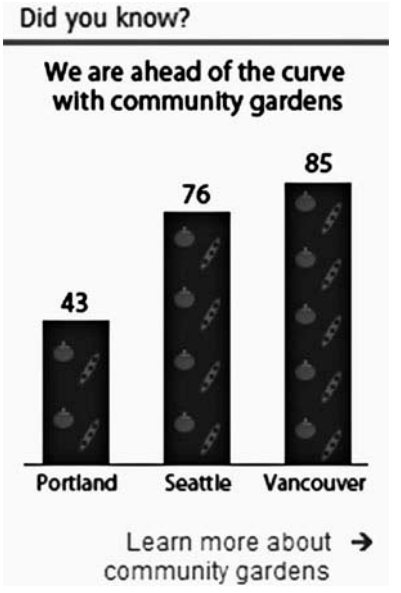

Figure 2. Chart from the City of Vancouver website showing the number of community gardens in Portland, Seattle, and Vancouver. Reprinted with permission from the City of Vancouver (2013b).

development plan that has resulted in Vancouver having of one the lowest business tax rates in the world (Crompton, 2011). Vancouver has proven especially adept at playing the interurban league tables, with consistently high rankings in international livability and sustainability competitions (see Melanson, 2012; The Canadian Press, 2012). This trend continues even in the urban agriculture movement; the webpage providing information about the City's community garden program displays a small graph (Figure 2) stoking the fire of the Cascadian sustainability competition.

While the Vancouver urban agriculture movement as a whole shows the ambiguity of the radical/neoliberal Janus face, it is crucial to recognize the role of the state in presenting barriers to its growth and transformative potential based on economic development. Although this tendency is by no means universal, food activists need to recognize the way their local actions are articulating with neoliberal governance at the urban, regional, and national scale. The comparison of Detroit in the next section illustrates that the powerful forces of interurban competition are felt just as strongly in cities that do not regularly land near the top of positive city rankings, and this too affects the development of local urban agriculture movements.

Detroit

How does the experience of Vancouver as a consumption city yearning for global status through sustainability compare to that of Detroit, perhaps the quintessential post-industrial North American city? In this section, I show how—despite a very different political economic context—Detroit has similarly pursued the integration of urban agriculture into its economic development plans. However, as will be highlighted in the conclusion, important differences remain in the nature of the sustainability fix.

The City of Detroit and urban agriculture

The massive industrialization that is the hallmark of Detroit's national image belies the recent prominence and ongoing importance of agriculture in Southeast Michigan. Farmland has decreased rapidly as the sector underwent processes of specialization, commercialization, and—to a slightly lesser degree—agglomeration as Detroit became one of America's major cities (Schaetzl, 2000; Figure 3). The gradual loss of farmland and the focus on export agriculture shows that Michigan mirrors the larger national trend: although there have been recent increases in small farms and farmgate sales in the state as a whole, Detroit and its metropolitan area have an even larger local food gap than Vancouver (Walker, 2013, p. 121).

As a city with a history of relatively less dense residential development, a temperate climate, and a significant boom-bust economy centered on automobile manufacturing, Detroit has characteristics that make it amenable to urban agriculture. In contrast to Vancouver, Detroit has a significant history of government-led urban agriculture, including Mayor Pingree's "Potato Patch Program" following the Panic of 1893 (Detroit Food Policy Council [DFPC], 2013), his daughter Hazel Pingree Depew's Thrift Gardens during the Great Depression (DFPC, 2013), and like Vancouver, significant gardens during both World Wars (Shattuck, 2003). Most significantly for the purposes of this article is the Farm-A-Lot initiative started by Mayor Young, Detroit's first Black mayor, which allowed residents to grow food on vacant lots ("Farm-A-Lot Program," 1981). In 1975, approximately 3,000 people worked on 525 lots and produced food that aided subsistence and was donated to local community organizations (Bearre, 1976). Young was able to establish his program in large part due to the availability of federal funding under the Urban Garden Program, which distributed $1.5 million to Detroit and five other cities

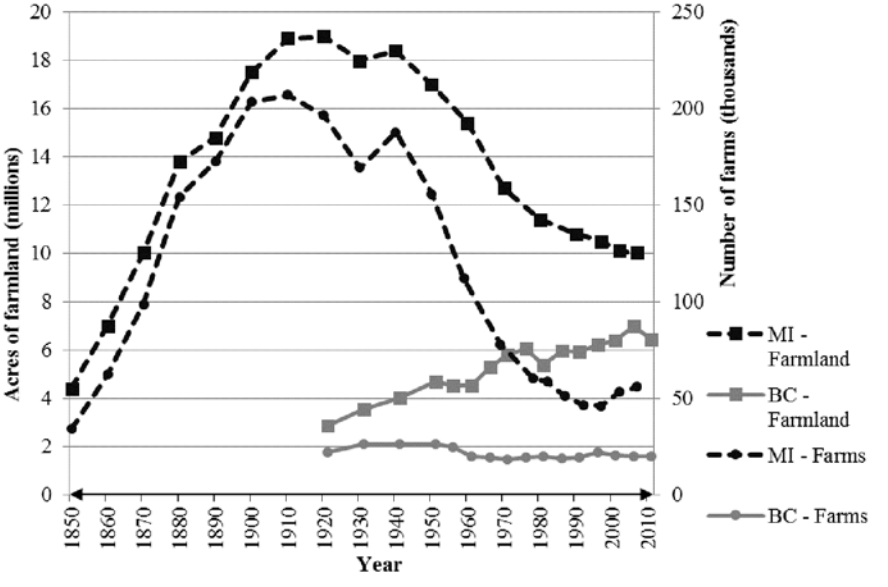

Figure 3. Acres of farmland (improved or unimproved) and number of farms in British Columbia, Canada, and Michigan, United States. Note that while there are slight differences in the classification of farm operations over census years, the overall trend remains valid. Source: United States and Canada Censuses of Agriculture.

in 1976 to encourage urban agriculture as community economic development (Lawson, 2005).

When the federal Urban Garden Program—and subsequently Farm-A-Lot—was discontinued in the 1990s, the impetus for food security fell back on community members and activist organizations. By this point, Detroit had been facing economic hardship for decades and had some of the highest poverty and crime rates in the nation. Under conditions of major cutbacks in federal assistance to cities and an increasingly austere neoliberal regime of urban governance, the city government did not prioritize social programs like urban agriculture or food security and instead focused on cutting government services and attracting investment. Under these conditions of neoliberal urbanism (Peck, Theodore, & Brenner, 2009), urban agriculture emerged as a common strategy employed by community groups to encourage neighborhood social interaction, reclaim and beautify vacant urban space, and foster livelihoods for the unemployed. Numerous groups played a role in the formation of this movement, and it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a comprehensive analysis of its development. However, it is important to note that its emergence was influenced by many factors, including the presence of gardening and farming knowledge held by migrants from the rural South (Stone, 1995); the history of Black nationalism and self-determination epitomized by the Black Panther Party's Free Breakfast for School Children Program (Tippett, 2012); and civil rights and environmental justice activism (Boggs, 2009).

During the growth of this grassroots urban agriculture movement, economic development from Mayors Coleman Young (1974–1993) to Dave Bing (2009–2013) took a relatively orthodox neoliberal Rust Belt approach, focusing on major downtown construction projects—like General Motors' modernist Renaissance Center headquarters, numerous arenas and casinos, the use of tax breaks and incentives to attract corporations downtown, and the reduction or privatization of public services (Clement, 2013). Under this regime of economic development, the state had very little involvement with the urban agriculture movement.

The relationship between the city government and the alternative food movement shifted in the mid-2000s, when in Detroit—as in Vancouver—the excitement around food and sustainability in planning and policy circles provoked the involvement of municipal governments in sustainable food systems planning (Pothukuchi & Kaufman, 1999). In this respect, Vancouver and Detroit share a common genesis to their food policy development, which was spurred by community groups, concerned citizens, and activists approaching their respective City Councils and creating municipal food policy. Through the work of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN), the Detroit Food Justice Task Force, and other actors, the City of Detroit moved towards establishing food policy initiatives, including urban agriculture.

Detroit Green City: austerity's sustainability fix

While the activist groups involved in advocating for urban agriculture have a wide array of goals, the way the City of Detroit has planned for urban agriculture shows its more narrow pursuit of sustainability as economic development. In this section, I argue that the *Detroit Future City* (*DFC*) planning framework shows that the City is enrolling urban agriculture in a sustainability fix meant to attract capital.

It is impossible to separate current City involvement with urban agriculture from the changes to neoliberal governance being instituted in Detroit. The central aspect of this governance was established in March of 2013, when Republican Governor Rick Snyder

appointed Kevyn Orr as Emergency Manager (EM) of the City. As EM, Orr is granted veto power over any decision made by the City Council or the Mayor, effectively removing democratic accountability from city governance in the name of economic crisis. The appearance of EMs in Michigan—which now rule over 49% of the state's African American population (Clement, 2013)—is closely tied to both the expression of power by right-wing interest groups (see Akers, 2013) and the decrease of state and federal revenue sharing, an obvious connection between neoliberal state retrenchment and elite anti-democratic maneuvering (Peck, 2012). Detroit itself is owed $220 million in revenue sharing and between $433 and $508 million in lost income taxes after a 1998 agreement with the state (Ashenfelter, 2013).

The connection between City support for urban agriculture and neoliberal austerity measures emerged on the national scale with the release of the *Detroit Future City* (*DFC*) planning framework in December 2012 and an updated second edition in 2014. This book-length document is the first major deliverable of Mayor Bing's troubled Detroit Works planning project. Other authors (Akers, 2013; Clement, 2013; Howell, 2013) have documented, explored, and critiqued the Detroit Works planning process, so in this section I specifically address the urban agriculture component of the plan. Generally, the emergence of the Detroit Works planning process is rooted in the political economic situation faced by Detroit during the 2000s. With an economy that had been depressed for decades, particularly acute repercussions from the mortgage crisis of 2007–2008, and the 2008 resignation of Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick following a corruption scandal, the City turned to philanthropic organizations like the W.K. Kellogg, Kresge, and Skillman Foundations for help (Clement, 2013).

With funding primarily from the Kresge Foundation, the Detroit Works planning project seeks to drastically revision the city. In the early stages, Mayor Bing and associates were frank about their "planned shrinkage": in order to get the best return on investment for place-based philanthropy, the city would have to shrink. Despite a significant public backlash to Bing's announcement of forced relocation, the framework released in *DFC* has only hidden the opaque language of relocation behind a veneer of incentives and strategic targeting of investment and services. While it paints an optimistic picture for the city with its 50-year forecast—and contains a considerable amount of sustainable planning techniques—the plan as a whole rests on a simple, troubling, premise: "to unlock the vast potential of the city's land assets [t]hrough preferential zoning, targeted infrastructure investments, attraction of new capital into the city, and innovative approaches to address the under-utilization of land" (Detroit Works Project, 2014, p. 103). The plan identifies seven employment districts for targeted investment where job and population growth is already occurring and builds the entire framework around the idea of creating a network of transit and neighborhoods with these districts as the nodes. The vision of the city that emerges is a twenty-first-century planner's fantasy: areas of high density, mixed-use development connected by rapid transit placed atop vast green spaces. However, the process by which such an urban utopia is to be created is less benign. The city will only be able to target investment in these districts by retreating from everywhere else: city services like lighting, trash collection, policing, and firefighting will be withdrawn or privatized and tax or "home swap" incentives will attempt to convince homeowners to relocate. In fact, this process is already occurring, with the creation of a quasi-governmental Public Lighting Authority in 2012 that is using taxpayer money to selectively target (dis)investment for Detroit's failing public lighting system.

Urban agriculture plays a relatively understated role in the *DFC* document, but the framework is in fact *reliant* on the growth of the urban agriculture movement, both as

an *economic strategy* to create scarcity in the urban land market and a *political strategy* to present an environmentally friendly face to its plans.[2] One of the key implementation strategies presented by the plan is to create a typology of neighborhood types based on market and vacancy characteristics (see Akers, 2013; Detroit Works Project, 2014, p. 51). Areas with the highest vacancy rates and lowest incomes become part of the "Landscape land use typologies" to be converted to green space with various functions (see map in Detroit Works Project, 2014, p. 59). These areas make up 29% of the total land use in the 50-year land-use plan and form a rough belt of neighborhoods stretching east-west through the center of the city. Within the Landscape typology, the "Innovation Productive" land use is strictly designated for local food production and along with "Innovation Ecological" will require the gradual decommissioning of city services to encourage current residents to migrate or seek employment in agriculture. Creation of these open spaces is required for the targeted investment and densification of the seven employment districts that are central to the framework.

The goals of establishing an Innovation Productive zone are laudable: environmental benefits of clean air, water, soil; economic benefits of creating jobs and fresh local produce; and social benefits of providing recreation and increasing property values (see Detroit Works Project, 2014, pp. 206–207, 265–266). However, local urban agriculture activists are right to question the process and aim of the Detroit Works Project as a fundamentally unjust sustainability fix engineered by elite interests. Similar to the mid-century plans for slum clearance and urban renewal (or "Negro removal" as it was cynically referred to in Detroit, see Williams, 2011, p. 70), the *DFC* planned shrinkage framework seeks to redesign neighborhoods by disadvantaged citizens in the name of economic development. As Daniel Clement (2013, p. 76) has shown, the districts targeted for inclusion in "Innovation" land use types under the plan have rates of poverty, female-headed households, less than high school education, and African American population higher than the city average. While Mayor Dave Bing eventually backed down from statements implying that eminent domain and forced relocation were options in this plan, the use of tax incentives and selective retraction of public services are still powerful tools the city might use to implement its vision.

It is therefore questionable that *DFC's* vision for the future of Detroit will be helpful to the vulnerable populations who have survived the city's decline, but instead appears to be targeted at mobile newcomers and their capital. Based on the City's plans for economic development, these targets seem to be creatives looking for Rust Belt grit (see Clement, 2013; Williams, 2013) or those with significant investment capital like John Hantz, who in December 2012 purchased 1,500 lots (or 140 acres) on Detroit's east side from the City at below market value. He intends to use the land to grow Christmas trees or possibly food, but local urban agriculture activists maintain that he is simply speculating on the land (Holt-Giménez, Wang, & Shattuck, 2011).

Discussion

Comparing the rapidly growing city of Vancouver to the shrinking city of Detroit yields several insights into the ways in which environmental projects such as urban agriculture become enrolled in economic development. A key similarity is the discursive and material use of urban agriculture as an indicator of interurban competition and a target for investment in the green economy. However, the specific political economic circumstances of each city have resulted in different fixes for each place.

Vancouver seeks to solidify its international reputation as a cosmopolitan green city by encouraging urban food production, while simultaneously developing its tourism and investment-oriented real estate industries by marketing itself as an environmentally friendly, consumption-oriented destination. The measures by which livability and sustainability rankings are determined no doubt greatly reflect positive goals for cities: who would not want to live in a place dense with social activity, employment and education opportunities, and clean and safe environments in which to enjoy recreation and leisure? However, through the lens of food justice, measures of urban success must start from a position of distributional and procedural justice and be designed with the most disadvantaged urban residents in mind, not the class of cosmopolitan creatives that usually serve as the target for such entrepreneurial activity. In this sense, neoliberal logics enter Vancouver's food policy not through the usual, more direct channels of privatization, commodification, or marketization, but are most prominently displayed in the city's discursive sustainability fix that focuses policy on creating a green, global, consumption city.

The City of Detroit's strategy for incorporating urban agriculture into its economic development as represented by the *DFC* planning framework also highlights the importance of questioning the context and rationale behind municipal involvement with urban agriculture. As Shea Howell (2013) points out, the *DFC* framework is progressive in some ways, especially in its acknowledgement of planning for population loss or stabilization and its embrace of sustainability. However, while sustainability and shrinking city planning may currently be in vogue, the possibility of truly radical planning that abandons the idea of *economic* growth through uneven development does not appear in the framework. As Howell (2013, para. 8) asks, "for whom will the city be transformed? Whose interests will be given priority in the inevitable conflicts inherent in this or any plan for redevelopment?" The work of the DBCFSN and other grassroots urban farming organizations in Detroit not detailed here shows that the groundwork for a just food movement is already occurring in the city. However, under the regime of neoliberal austerity enforced through the EM and the nonprofit industrial complex perpetrated by powerful philanthrocapitalist organizations, the articulation of this movement with the municipal government displays profound tension. Therefore, Detroit also employs a sustainability fix, but one taking a more tangible material form, whereby market-driven investment structures public spending, nonprofit philanthropy takes over state functions, and land is discursively and materially mobilized to drive investment by any means necessary.

Conclusion

In this article, I have elucidated how urban agriculture is enrolled in sustainability and economic development planning in these two cities. By placing the recent developments of the urban agriculture movements in each city within the context of neoliberalization, I have sought to show how two very different municipal governments have selectively incorporated urban agriculture as a sustainability fix. This evidence illustrates McClintock's (2011) radical/neoliberal Janus face of urban agriculture: on one hand, many urban agriculture projects seek to decommodify land, food, and labor, but on the other, the state's role in supporting urban agriculture is selective and follows hybridized neoliberal logics. I found that Vancouver's inclusion of urban agriculture in its Greenest City 2020 project supports a sustainability fix selectively incorporating environmental goals in a project of ecological modernization, while the *DFC* plan uses urban agriculture as an environmental justification for planned shrinkage and state

retrenchment in the name of targeting investment under austerity. Academic research and food activism require examining the larger context and effects of municipal involvement with food movements, pointing to the importance of democratic organizing and engagement with the state beyond narrowly defined food issues to support a broadly conceived social justice (see DuPuis, Harrison, & Goodman, 2011; McClintock, 2014).

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Notes

1. I use the term "movement" here for the sake of simplicity, but recognize that there is no singular "alternative food movement" (see Alkon & Agyeman, 2011, pp. 1–20), and therefore no singular urban agriculture movement. In fact, my fieldwork highlighted that a diversity of politics, property forms, social identities, and economic relations are reflected in the wide range of urban agriculture practices (see also Eizenberg, 2012; McClintock, 2011). However, for the purposes of this article, I am examining primarily the structural factors influencing the development of *all* urban agriculture as a feature of the urban landscape through state policies and practices.
2. This fact supports Jessop's (2006) claim that spatial (and sustainability, in this case) fixes are fundamentally responding to the political crises of capitalism in addition to the material crises of overaccumulation.

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