

## Philosophy of the City

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# Growing Resistance to Systems of Oppression: An Exploration of the Transformative Power of Urban Agriculture

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**Abstract:** Today the relationship between food and cities is revitalizing urban areas, as food production practices transform locales one block and one neighborhood at a time. The key catalysts of this transformation include the commitment to address the root causes of inequalities within food systems and the desire to increase local control over food systems that have been increasingly industrialized and globalized. These goals, encapsulated by the terms “food justice” and “food sovereignty,” play major roles in guiding local food initiatives in cities today. This study explores how justice-oriented urban agriculture projects transform city contexts in ways that reduce regulatory barriers – barriers that, when left in place, could perpetuate systems of oppression. The study ends with the argument that, by removing regulatory barriers, urban agriculture projects are transforming cityscapes in ways that cultivate justice at the system level.

**Keywords:** Philosophy of the City, Urban agriculture, Philosophy of food, local food movements, food sovereignty, food justice

Local food projects are transforming contemporary cities across the globe.<sup>1</sup> These ventures could potentially impact more than half of the world population, as rapid urbanization transforms cities from Seattle to Madrid. According to United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), population in cities are projected to grow to 4.97 billion by 2030, as approximately 1.3 million people move into cities each week.<sup>2</sup> This change correlates with a wide range of negative social impacts, such as rises in poverty rates, pollution levels, and unemployment as well as increases in cases of malnutrition and food insecurity.<sup>3</sup> In this context, urban agriculture (or urban farming) is often characterized as an opportunity to address these and other challenges facing urban population.<sup>4</sup> This commitment to addressing pragmatic concerns

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1 DeLind, “Are Local Food and the Local Food Movement Taking Us Where We Want to Go? Or Are We Hitching Our Wagons to the Wrong Stars?,” 273–83; Martinez et al., *Local Food Systems Concepts, Impacts, Issues*; Noll, “Food Sovereignty in the City: Challenging Historical Barriers to Food Justice,” 95–111.

2 UNICEF, *Agenda Item 1: Population Growth and Rapid Urbanization: Food Insecurity on the Rise in Urban Settings*.

3 Orsini et al., “Urban Agriculture in the Developing World: A Review,” 695–720.

4 It is often useful to distinguish between the term “city” and “urban area,” especially in academic work in philosophy of the city. An urban area is often understood as the human-dominated environment that includes urban morphology, such as towns, suburbs, and cities; whereas the term “city,” which is a part of urban areas, is typically reserved for the built environment where there is concentration of human structures. However, as urban agriculture projects are being implemented in cities and urban areas, for the purposes of this study, the terms will be used interchangeably.

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is a key aspect of urban food projects. As many of these challenges can also be understood as justice issues, urban agriculture initiatives are also driven by normative commitments.

The dedication that urban food initiatives have to normative stances is clearly expressed by those who adopt “food justice” and “food sovereignty” orientations. Food justice signifies a broad understanding of food, where both consumable products and food systems, more generally, are bound up with wider human rights concerns.<sup>5</sup> As Glennie and Alkon so eloquently note, food justice advocates seek “to understand how inequalities of race, class and gender are reproduced and contested within food systems.”<sup>6</sup> Another normative orientation guiding urban agriculture is called food sovereignty.<sup>7</sup> Similar to projects guided by food justice, urban food initiatives committed to food sovereignty attempt to address a wide range of distributive injustices, including racial, gender, and class injustices. However, it should be noted that the historical development and goals of these two orientations are distinct. In particular, food sovereignty grew out of “the struggle of peasant farmers in the global south to resist the dominance of global agribusiness” and stresses the importance of local control over food system choices.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, food justice grew out of the United States environmental justice movement and stresses the importance of addressing distributive injustices in the allocation of environmental hazards in cityscapes. With this being said, there is considerable overlap between “food justice” and “food sovereignty” orientations in urban agriculture. According to Clendenning et al., while many urban agriculture organizations “do not use the language of food sovereignty explicitly, the motives behind urban food activism are similar across movements as local actors draw on elements of each in practice.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, both food justice and food sovereignty play key roles guiding local food projects in city contexts. As both are committed to addressing injustices, this study will use McClintock’s inclusive terminology of “justice-oriented” urban farming projects to signify projects guided by either framework.<sup>10</sup>

Section 1 of this study builds off of the growing literature analyzing the strengths and limitations of urban agriculture projects, with particular attention to McClintock’s analysis of the neoliberal and radical tensions in the movement.<sup>11</sup> Specifically, Section 2 explores how justice-oriented projects transform city contexts in ways that reduce regulatory barriers – barriers that, when left in place, perpetuate systems of oppression. This analysis begins by defining urban agriculture, including how food sovereignty and food justice frameworks influence urban agricultural initiatives. It then outlines how policy and zoning ordinances have been historically used to remove agricultural activities from cities. Drawing on the work of feminist theorists, Section 3 then connects these barriers to systems of oppression that have historically constrained population in unjust ways. Section 4 ends with the argument that, by enacting equity-focused regulatory change, justice-oriented urban agriculture projects are transforming cityscapes in ways that cultivate justice beyond food systems. In this way, justice-oriented urban agricultural projects are addressing food-related concerns, while also removing barriers that support systems of oppression in urban contexts.<sup>12</sup>

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5 Morales, “Growing Food and Justice: Dismantling Racism Through Sustainable Food Systems,” 149–76; Noll and Werkheiser, “Local Food Movements: Differing Conceptions of Food, People, and Change,” 112–39; Tolleson, “The Revolution Will Be Community Grown: Food Justice in the Urban Agriculture Movement of Detroit,” 45–84.

6 Glennie and Alkon, “Food Justice: Cultivating the Field,” 1–14.

7 Noll and Werkheiser, “Local Food Movements: Differing Conceptions of Food, People, and Change,” 112–39; Schanbacher, *The Politics of Food: The Global Conflict Between Food Security and Food Sovereignty*.

8 Glennie and Alkon, “Food Justice: Cultivating the Field,” 2.

9 Clendenning et al., “Food Justice or Food Sovereignty? Understanding the Rise of Urban Food Movements in the USA,” 165.

10 McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contractions,” 147.

11 Ibid.

12 It should be noted here that the analysis largely limits its scope to the United States, though insights could be applied beyond this context.

## 1 The urban agriculture movement in context

Before presenting this argument, however, it is important to briefly place the urban agriculture movement in historical context. The historical roots of the urban agriculture movement can be traced back to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as social reformers attempted to address horrific conditions correlated with the expanding industrialization in the cities.<sup>13</sup> According to Bellows and Nasr, there was an urgent call “for the transformation of modern cities through a rationalized system for producing built environments that can accommodate growing populations while improving living conditions.”<sup>14</sup> Part of this transformation included urban design interventions aimed at increasing “green spaces,” such as urban allotment gardens. These were thought to provide restful countryscapes and sustenance for the general population. However, it should be noted that this focus on agriculture was not new in urban contexts. Food has a long history of shaping city design, and food production plays a key role in early theoretical work on cities and land use.<sup>15</sup> Despite this history, urban contexts stopped being associated with food production during the birth of the “modern” city in the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup> A clear divide was cultivated between rural areas used as food production centers and urban environments, to the point where there is now a social, economic, and conceptual disconnect between the cityscape and food – A disconnect that helped to shape what Bellows and Nasr call “the urban century.”<sup>17</sup>

In the latter part of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, urban agriculture projects are beginning to push back against this divide as well as the industrialized system of food production that made the separation of agriculture from urban centers possible. Thus, we can think of urban food projects as initiatives co-currently guided by local food and urban agriculture ideals, as community and local food alternatives proliferate in cityscapes. Indeed, both movements are guided by the desire to address pragmatic problems faced by local communities and to address social justice concerns, such as problematic environmental, social, health, and economic distributions of harms and benefits of current food systems.<sup>18</sup> Today the relationship between food and cityscapes is revitalizing, as food production practices transform cityscapes one block and one neighborhood at a time. In this context, urban agriculture is taking on a multiplicity of forms, as there are many ways that projects form relationships between land, labor, production activities, and markets.<sup>19</sup>

## 2 Food sovereignty and food justice in the city

Two driving forces of this transformation are (a) the commitment to address the root causes of inequalities within the food system and (b) the desire to increase local control over food systems that have been increasingly industrialized and globalized since the 1940s. Both of these are encapsulated in justice-oriented projects guided by food sovereignty and food justice paradigms. Food sovereignty is indicative of urban farming projects committed to key justice claims as well as pragmatic food-related concerns.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Bellows and Nasr, “On the Past and the Future of Urban Agriculture: Reflections in Tribute to Jac Smit,” 17–39.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>15</sup> Steel, *Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives*.

<sup>16</sup> Noll, “Food Sovereignty in the City: Challenging Historical Barriers to Food Justice,” 95–111.

<sup>17</sup> Bellows and Nasr, “On the Past and the Future of Urban Agriculture: Reflections in Tribute to Jac Smit,” 18.

<sup>18</sup> DeLind, “Are Local Food and the Local Food Movement Taking Us Where We Want to Go? Or Are We Hitching Our Wagons to the Wrong Stars?,” 273–83; McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contractions,” 147–71; Noll and Werkheiser, “Local Food Movements: Differing Conceptions of Food, People, and Change,” 112–39.

<sup>19</sup> McClintock, “Why Farm the city? Theorizing Urban Agriculture through a Lens of Metabolic Rift,” 191–207; McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contractions,” 147–71.

<sup>20</sup> Morales, “Growing Food and Justice: Dismantling Racism Through Sustainable Food Systems,” 149–76.

For food-sovereignty-oriented urban agriculture projects, food is more than just a commodity that should be fairly distributed – food is intertwined with culture, policy, activism, identity, and place.<sup>21</sup> Thus, while food sovereignty signifies the goal of increasing local influence on food systems, it also encapsulates a plethora of connected justice concerns.

As intimated above, several key justice commitments guide food-sovereignty-focused movements. These include but are not limited to providing culturally significant foodstuffs, improving production methods to help ensure sustainability and ecological soundness, and addressing discrimination. According to Pimbert, food sovereignty demands that we reorganize “the material basis of food systems in the image of nature to regenerate diversity (genetic, species, ecological) and resilience.”<sup>22</sup> It was stated in a recent analysis that “they hold broadened conceptions of who or what is an ‘ethical patient’ to include the surrounding future generations, ecosystems, and biotic communities [...] and seek to address racial and gender injustices.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, this guiding framework focuses on increasing the self-determination of communities and conceives of these communities as sovereign collectives that should be empowered to work toward this self-determination in culturally acceptable ways.

In point of fact, coalitions made up of thousands of local projects, such as the US Food Sovereignty Alliance, are vocal in their commitment to the expanded justice framework encapsulated by food sovereignty. In urban contexts, this interconnection between these justice concerns and addressing hunger is particularly pronounced. In such contexts, even initiatives that do not use the above terminology may still be influenced by food sovereignty commitments, as motives for engaging in food activism tend to be connected to righting a perceived wrong.<sup>24</sup> Thus, one could argue that this justice orientation plays an important role in guiding food projects in city contexts. For example, The Detroit Black Community Food Security Network clearly adopts food sovereignty commitments in their mission statement:

It was and is our view that the most effective movements grow organically from the people whom they are designed to serve. Representatives of Detroit’s majority African-American population must be in the leadership of efforts to foster food justice and food security in Detroit. While our specific focus is on Detroit’s African-American community, we realize that improved policy and an improved localized food system is a benefit to all Detroit residents. Here we see, not only notions of sovereignty in terms of community solutions designed and enacted by community members, but also the wedding of achieving food security to the goal of food justice. The importance of crafting food security initiatives informed by the collective.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, urban agricultural projects guided by food sovereignty are marshaling the power of the local food movement to address not only food security issues but also a wide range of injustices faced by marginalized communities. These include but are not limited to addressing food insecurity in neighborhoods,<sup>26</sup> removing historical biases in food systems and food policy,<sup>27</sup> revitalizing culturally significant foodways,<sup>28</sup> and increasing green urban spaces used for food production, as wildlife havens, and for leisure activities.<sup>29</sup>

In this way, food sovereignty projects are in line with the food justice movement that developed in the United States. Here “food justice” can be understood as the commitment to address racial, ethnic, and gender injustices, exploitation, and oppressive practices within the food system as well as the commitment

<sup>21</sup> Werkheiser and Noll, “From Food Justice to a Tool of the Status Quo: Three Sub-Movements Within Local Food,” 201–10.

<sup>22</sup> Pimbert, “Food Sovereignty,” 181.

<sup>23</sup> Noll and Murdock, “Whose Justice is it Anyway? Mitigating the Tensions Between Food Security and Food Sovereignty,” 6.

<sup>24</sup> Clendenning et al., “Food Justice or Food Sovereignty? Understanding the Rise of Urban Food Movements in the USA,” 165–77.

<sup>25</sup> *Detroit Black Community Food Security Network*, n.d.

<sup>26</sup> Schafft et al., “Food Deserts and Overweight Schoolchildren: Evidence from Pennsylvania,” 102–33.

<sup>27</sup> Noll, “Food Sovereignty in the City: Challenging Historical Barriers to Food Justice,” 95–111.

<sup>28</sup> Alkon, *Black, White, and Green: Farmers Markets, Race, and the Green Economy*.

<sup>29</sup> Angotti, “Urban Agriculture: Long-term Strategy or Impossible Dream?: Lessons from Prospect Farm in Brooklyn, New York,” 336–41.

to address the root causes of inequalities beyond this context.<sup>30</sup> As the urban agriculture projects are socially, politically, and culturally situated,<sup>31</sup> food justice encompasses a plethora of issues, such as addressing food-related health disparities, increasing access to land, improving working conditions and wages in the food sector, and increasing community access to fresh fruits and vegetables.<sup>32</sup> Despite this diversity of goals, what unifies these urban agriculture projects is the desire to address the existing injustices, including but not limited to social injustices and environmental inequities.<sup>33</sup> Agyeman labels this unifying focus “just sustainability,” which is meant to signify the coupling of ecological and social justice concerns.<sup>34</sup>

This is a particularly pressing concern, especially in the United States, as food systems are marked by inequalities throughout. For example, white male farmers historically enjoyed preferential treatment by government organizations, such as the USDA. In contrast, support was often denied to historically marginalized groups, including black farmers, Latino/a, Native American, and women farmers.<sup>35</sup> Today, historical inequities continue to impact the agricultural sector, as generational wealth, biased inheritance practices, and social networks provide white male farmers with advantages. Food justice scholarship and activism grew out of community members, local groups, and policy makers’ responses to these inequalities, as they work together to provide food-related opportunities and alternative social networks aimed at fostering lasting food system change.

While the origins and focuses of the above justice-oriented frameworks are distinct, both food justice and food-sovereignty-guided projects are united in their commitment to address inequities within the food system as well as their root causes. Additionally, both groups demand that rights-based changes be made,<sup>36</sup> as they pragmatically focus on “entitlements, structural reforms to markets and property regimes, and class-based, redistributive demands for land, water and resources, as captured in the notion of food sovereignty.”<sup>37</sup> According to McClintock, these changes are both radical, as they are grounded in a demand that food systems support meaningful and fair social relations, and neoliberal, as they have a strong preference for market-based solutions.<sup>38</sup> This is not a contradiction but highlights the transformative potential and limitations of urban agriculture. In McClintock’s view, the market and the state should not be viewed as in opposition, but rather we need to recognize that there are “countervailing regulatory and neoliberal tendencies within social groups and governmental institutions.”<sup>39</sup> If we understand urban agricultural initiatives as, at least partially, countermovements aimed at protecting communities from negative impacts of a market-focused economy, then it should come as no surprise that justice-oriented projects may utilize market-based solutions or attempt to enact structural changes within markets.<sup>40</sup>

When viewed in this manner, urban agriculture’s lack of commitment to wholeheartedly resisting the market forces that enable the neoliberal global food system does not undermine their transformative or

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<sup>30</sup> Glennie and Alkon, “Food Justice: Cultivating the Field,” 1–14.

<sup>31</sup> McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contractions,” 147–71.

<sup>32</sup> Glennie and Alkon, “Food Justice: Cultivating the Field,” 1–14.

<sup>33</sup> McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contractions,” 147–71.

<sup>34</sup> Agyeman, *Introducing Just Sustainabilities: Policy, Planning, and Practice*.

<sup>35</sup> Glennie and Alkon, “Food Justice: Cultivating the Field,” 1–14; Glazebrook et al., “Gender Matters: Climate Change, Gender Bias, and Women’s Farming in the Global South and North,” 1–25; Gilbert et al., “The Loss and Persistence of Black Owned Farms and Farmland,” 1–30.

<sup>36</sup> McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contractions,” 147–71.

<sup>37</sup> Holt-Gimenez and Shattuck, “Food Crises, Food Regimes and Food Movements: Rumbblings of Reform or Tides of Transformation?,” 114.

<sup>38</sup> McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contractions,” 147–71.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>40</sup> Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time*.

radical potential.<sup>41</sup> Rather, it highlights how justice-oriented projects can be involved in neoliberal or reformist urban restructuring *and* bring about key equity-focused changes in the food system. Neoliberalism is an ideology that espouses the removal of the social safety net, shifting responsibilities from states to individuals, and opening spaces for further capitalist accumulation.<sup>42</sup> Movements aimed at protecting communities from market forces typically include strategies that work within the system, resulting in reform via regulation rather than a complete restructuring. While some scholars dismiss these changes because of their focus on clearing regulatory obstacles,<sup>43</sup> I agree with McClintock that they actually represent a progressive and potentially radical “return of the means of production to urban residents, upending decades-old zoning laws that stigmatised and ultimately restricted urban food production.”<sup>44</sup> These changes should not be discounted, as the creation and revision of policies and zoning ordinances that foster urban food production can be a radical act. Thus, neoliberal tendencies, including the push for deregulation, could be beneficial for urban agricultural projects.

Urban agriculture projects are embedded in specific social, political, and cultural contexts, and these contexts are not value free but marked by historical barriers that reinforce inequities. Thus, new policies that foster urban agricultural production can be transformative. However, due to the contested nature of the urban agriculture landscape, there are also limitations, as these projects could inadvertently reinforce systems of oppression. Section 3 of this study places urban agriculture in social and political context to highlight (a) how policies and zoning ordinances historically reinforced inequities within urban contexts and (b) how working within the system can be both transformative and radical. Here “radical” should be understood as the subversive rejection of the *status quo* (including the industrial agri-food system) and a push to restructure society in such a way to help ensure a more equitable distribution of benefits and harms.<sup>45</sup> It will then go on to discuss how urban agricultural projects could inadvertently support changes that perpetuate inequities.

### 3 Barriers to food justice in the city

Urban food initiatives often face similar challenges that are unique to city contexts. One of the greatest barriers to urban agriculture is policy and zoning regulations.<sup>46</sup> Though many hurdles are context-specific, zoning ordinances can make it difficult to acquire legal sites for urban agricultural activities, such as for community gardens and farmer markets, thus hindering the inclusion of these types of projects into cityscapes. According to Meenar et al.,<sup>47</sup> agricultural initiatives have emerged in the city unregulated, and this policy vacuum cultivates conflicts, including challenges to land tenure;<sup>48</sup> concerns over land use designations;<sup>49</sup> sociolegal conflicts;<sup>50</sup> and debates concerning the suitability or viability of urban

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<sup>41</sup> McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contractions,” 147–71.

<sup>42</sup> Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*.

<sup>43</sup> Holt-Gimenez and Wang, “Reform or Transformation?: The Pivotal Role of Food Justice in the U.S. Food Movement,” 83–102.; Alkon and Mares, “Food Sovereignty in US Food Movements: Radical Visions and Neo-Liberal Constraints,” 347–59.

<sup>44</sup> McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contractions,” 159.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Huang and Drescher, “Urban crops and livestock: The experiences, challenges, and opportunities of planning for urban agriculture in two Canadian provinces,” 1–14; Witt, “Urban Agriculture and Local Government Law: Promises, Realities, and Solutions,” 221–35.

<sup>47</sup> Meenar et al., “Regulatory Practices of Urban Agriculture: A Connection to Planning and Policy,” 389–403.

<sup>48</sup> Brown and Jameton, “Public Health Implications of Urban Agriculture,” 20–39.

<sup>49</sup> Meenar, “Nonprofit-driven Community Capacity-Building Efforts in Community Food Systems,” 77–94; Thibert, “Making Local Planning Work for Urban Agriculture in the North American Context: A View from the Ground,” 349–57.

<sup>50</sup> Covert and Morales, “Formalizing City Farms: Conflict and Conciliation,” 193–209.

agriculture in city contexts.<sup>51</sup> To put it more succinctly, small farming operations are often unlawfully operated in the United States, as several state and municipal regulations do not allow for agricultural activities.<sup>52</sup> Local governments typically have broad powers to create laws that regulate land use and city planner's question whether the use of pesticides should be permitted in neighborhoods and if scarce resources should be allocated for agricultural projects.<sup>53</sup> This is particularly the case concerning programs that include domesticated animals, as municipalities often prohibit raising livestock (such as pigs, goats, and chickens) in cities due to public health concerns, including the worry over spreading diseases, causing a nuisance, or attracting pests.<sup>54</sup>

Zoning laws were introduced to help address land use conflicts, and reduce nuisance complaints, in advance.<sup>55</sup> These divide land into categories, each with their own list of rules concerning appropriate structures and uses (such as whether a plot can be used for agriculture), and can even dictate aesthetic design, yard sizes, and the size and placement of structures. Thus, they clearly influence what activities city residents do on parcels as well as the design of the urban environment itself. Historically, such ordinances were used to systematically remove agricultural activities from the cityscape.<sup>56</sup> Interestingly, the rise of zoning regulations during the 1900s coincides with the early development of the "Modern" city and thus the active removal of farming practices from the city sphere.<sup>57</sup>

While the above zoning laws appear to be value neutral, it is important to note that they were not created in a vacuum but are grounded in specific historical and cultural contexts – contexts that are not value free but that were shaped by the values and biases of previous generations.<sup>58</sup> For example, the United States has a long history of denying African-American communities' ownership of land, determining where the property is located, if purchased, and hindering the free use of land, when ownership is obtained.<sup>59</sup> According to Gazillo, "denial of ownership and dispossession prevents many black and brown communities from growing food in urban areas [...] the root cause of food insecurity stems from the systemic disparities faced by low-income nonwhite communities. These reasons include racism, access to affordable housing, living wages, health care and land."<sup>60</sup> In many urban areas, there is a legacy of using policies and zoning ordinances to create and maintain an unequal racial hierarchy of access to resources, such as land. In fact, since the introduction of zoning in the early 1900s, these tools were clearly seen as effective means of land control and "social reform."<sup>61</sup> According to Rabin, "what began as a means of improving the blighted physical environment in which people lived and worked [...] [became] a mechanism for protecting property values and excluding the undesirables."<sup>62</sup> Southern cities, in particular, used zoning ordinances to enforce systems of racial segregation, though this practice became widespread in the early twentieth century.

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51 LaCroix, "Urban Agriculture and Other Green Uses: Remaking the Shrinking City," 611–6.

52 Heckler, "A Right to Farm in the City: Providing a Legal Framework for Legitimizing Urban Farming in American Cities," 217–66.

53 Witt, "Urban Agriculture and Local Government Law: Promises, Realities, and Solutions," 221–35.

54 Huang and Drescher, "Urban Crops and Livestock: The Experiences, Challenges, and Opportunities of Planning for Urban Agriculture in two Canadian provinces," 1–14.

55 Heckler, "A Right to Farm in the City: Providing a Legal Framework for Legitimizing Urban Farming in American Cities," 217–66.

56 Witt, "Urban Agriculture and Local Government Law: Promises, Realities, and Solutions," 221–35.

57 Silver, "The Racial Origins of Zoning in American Cities," 189–205.

58 Noll, "Food Sovereignty in the City: Challenging Historical Barriers to Food Justice," 95–111; Silver, "The Racial Origins of Zoning in American Cities," 189–205.

59 Gazillo, "Addressing Racism in Urban Agriculture: The Case for an Urban Agriculture Land Trust in Bridgeport, Connecticut," 1–70; Rothwell and Massey, "The Effect of Density Zoning on Racial Segregation in the U.S. Urban Areas," 779–806; Wilkes and Iceland, "Hypersegregation in the Twenty-First Century," 23–36.

60 Gazillo, "Addressing Racism in Urban Agriculture: The Case for an Urban Agriculture Land Trust in Bridgeport, Connecticut," 5.

61 Silver, "The Racial Origins of Zoning in American Cities," 189–205.

62 Rabin, "Expulsive Zoning: The Inequitable Legacy of Euclid," 105.

Justice-oriented initiatives are committed to drawing attention to combating this type of inequity. When placed in historical context, zoning ordinances that act as barriers to community projects become part of systems that perpetuate inequality within society as a whole. For example, Glennie and Alkon point to these factors as conditions that gave rise to the food justice movement, when they argue that labor laws, federal and local policies, and land use patterns historically perpetuated inequalities in the food system.<sup>63</sup> These types of discriminatory systems are often termed “systems of oppression,” or those that are built around the idea that some social groups are superior to others and include sets of actions, policies, laws, etc., aimed at hindering the oppressed groups from accessing resources and exercising the full freedom of choice allowed within social contexts.<sup>64</sup> Society is made up of practices, institutions, and social arrangements that allow for sustained collective action, such as established laws, governmental offices, and criminal justice systems. Systems of oppression leverage these institutions and practices to reproduce inequities based on a citizen’s identity or membership in a targeted group. In this way, social systems can perpetuate inequities within societies, regardless of whether individuals hold oppressive intentions. Thus, oppression can exist even in contexts where individuals are not intentionally supporting inequalities. In the context of the US food system, USDA’s history of discriminatory lending practices can be understood as a type of institutional oppression and thus part of a system of oppression.<sup>65</sup>

One of the ubiquitous features of experiencing a world marked by systems of oppression, as an oppressed person, is living in social contexts where options are reduced to a very few using penalties, loss, or censure.<sup>66</sup> This confinement is not accidental but shaped by barriers and forces that are related to each other systematically in a way to purposefully restrict action. Frye uses the example of a birdcage to illustrate the experience of being caged by these barriers. She states the following:

if you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires [...] There is no physical property of any one wire [...] that will reveal how a bird could be inhibited or harmed by it except in the most accidental way. It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one [...] and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere.<sup>67</sup>

Not all zoning ordinances and municipal regulations are part of systems of oppression, and they provide citizens with much needed direction when utilizing urban spaces. However, the legacy of using these tools to achieve the goals of racial segregation illustrates how they can be used as a part of a system of barriers aimed at limiting the choices of marginalized communities. As intimated in the food justice literature, such policies led to the marginalization of black farmers, Latino/a, Native American, and women farmers in the agricultural sector.<sup>68</sup>

In an attempt to address inequalities in the food system and beyond, justice-oriented urban agriculture projects are working to bring about change at the regulatory level, which involves regional and state governments.<sup>69</sup> Today cities across North America are initiating new policies designed to foster urban food production. These provide urban citizens with the opportunity to participate in agricultural production. While, in the past, cities have used their extensive powers to create laws guiding land usage to effectively ban urban agriculture, urban food projects are working to change the policy landscape to allow neighborhoods to use land for agricultural purposes. Seattle, Washington’s recently updated zoning codes that make it easier for food projects to take root in neighborhoods is one example of how barriers to

<sup>63</sup> Glennie and Alkon, “Food Justice: Cultivating the Field,” 1–14.

<sup>64</sup> Carastathis, “Interlocking Systems of Oppression,” 161–73; Young, “Five Faces of Oppression,” 270.

<sup>65</sup> Glennie and Alkon, “Food Justice: Cultivating the Field,” 1–14.

<sup>66</sup> Carastathis, “Interlocking Systems of Oppression,” 161–73; The Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” 271–80; Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*.

<sup>67</sup> Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> Glazebrook et al., “Gender Matters: Climate Change, Gender Bias, and Women’s Farming in the Global South and North,” 1–25; Glennie and Alkon, “Food Justice: Cultivating the Field,” 1–14.

<sup>69</sup> McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contractions,” 147–71; Buttel, “Some Observations on Agro-Food Change and the Future of Agricultural Sustainability Movements,” 344–65.



agricultural land use are being replaced.<sup>70</sup> In this vein, Wekerle argues that the food justice movement is becoming a networked movement, where “committees, taskforces, and coalitions have formed interlocking networks that link small and large food agencies, social justice groups, community garden advocates, agencies and staff of local government, and municipal politicians” to bring about change in food systems.<sup>71</sup> Using various strategies, including strategic partnerships, food justice advocates are working hard to construct new policies and ordinances from within civil society by simultaneously working within and outside of governmental structures.

When placed in this context, food justice activists’ work developing and implementing equitable urban policy is a radical act. Urban reform via regulation, through the creation and revision of policies and zoning ordinances, helps to remove barriers to equity, thus potentially dismantling systems of oppression one bar at a time, to utilize Frye’s metaphor.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, as both justice-oriented frameworks recognize a multiplicity of inequities (including racial, ethnic, and gender injustices), these movements are acutely aware that systems of oppression can be interlocking. The concept of “interlocking systems of oppression” came out of the black feminist movement in the 1970s, as a way to signify the simultaneous experience of several types of oppressions, such as experiencing gendered, class-based, and racial inequality.<sup>73</sup> By recognizing several forms of oppression, food-justice-oriented agricultural initiatives are actualizing what Carastathis calls “an integrative theory of, and a transformative praxis against, multiple oppressions.”<sup>74</sup> According to the Combahee River Collective, this type of “transformative praxis” is imperative for addressing the multidimensionality of oppression as it manifests in peoples’ lives.<sup>75</sup>

## 4 Urban agriculture as transformation

Thus, urban justice projects have transformative power both on the ground and at the conceptual levels. Specifically, these movements are transforming neighborhoods by adding and making green spaces available to communities;<sup>76</sup> improving food security for vulnerable communities;<sup>77</sup> and, as argued in this study, leveraging local knowledge to bring about change at the policy level, with the aim of producing a more equitable food system. Removing barriers that support systems of oppression in urban contexts is a radical act, as it is the subversive rejection of the *status quo*, including the industrial agri-food system,<sup>78</sup> and a push to restructure society in such a way to help ensure a more equitable distribution of benefits and harms. Justice-oriented food movements recognize how failing to use an antidiscrimination lens hides the legacy of using policy and ordinances to support the unequal distribution of resources.<sup>79</sup> By working toward changing policies and regulations that perpetuate historical and current social injustices, these projects are helping to dismantle systems of oppression that impact people’s lives well beyond food systems. In short, they are removing barriers that support systems of oppression in urban contexts.

<sup>70</sup> Assefa, *Urban Agriculture – OPCD*|seattle.gov., n.p.

<sup>71</sup> Wekerle, “Food Justice Movements: Policy, Planning, and Networks,” 378.

<sup>72</sup> Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*.

<sup>73</sup> Carastathis, “Interlocking Systems of Oppression,” 161–73; The Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” 271–80; Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*.

<sup>74</sup> Carastathis, “Interlocking Systems of Oppression,” 162.

<sup>75</sup> The Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” 271–80; Frye, *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory*.

<sup>76</sup> Barthel et al., “Food and Green Space in Cities: A Resilience Lens on Gardens and Urban Environmental Movement,” 52.

<sup>77</sup> Glennie and Alkon, “Food Justice: Cultivating the Field,” 1–14.

<sup>78</sup> McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture’s Contractions,” 147–71.

<sup>79</sup> Gazillo, “Addressing Racism in Urban Agriculture: The Case for an Urban Agriculture Land Trust in Bridgeport, Connecticut,” 1–70.

However, changes mandated by urban agriculture projects are not always beneficial. It is important to note that they could also inadvertently support changes that perpetuate inequities. As urban agriculture projects are diverse and guided by a wide range of values, there are often competing visions concerning what regulatory changes should be made. While some changes could undermine systems of oppression, others could reinforce the existing barriers or further bolster inequities in communities. This is at least partially due to the contradiction inherent in urban agriculture identified by McClintock.<sup>80</sup> Urban agriculture contains both radical and neoliberal elements that shape projects' goals and everyday struggles *in situ*. Neoliberal tendencies push for a “rolling back” of the social safety net and the opening up of spaces for further capitalist accumulation, while radical elements work to open up the means of production to citizens. Specifically, McClintock (2014) argues the following:

Urban agriculture “is not radical or neoliberal, but may exemplify both a form of actually existing neoliberalism and a simultaneous radical counter-movement arising in dialectical tension. Further, I contend that urban agriculture has to be both; indeed, contradictory processes of capitalism both create opportunities for urban agriculture and impose obstacles to its expansion.”<sup>81</sup>

As urban agricultural initiatives include both neoliberal and radical tendencies, projects could push for changes that bolster dominant free market ideology, at the expense of actualizing food justice's more radical goals. For example, the process of “gentrification” has been called the “consummate expression of neoliberal urbanism,”<sup>82</sup> as this process involves the reinvestment of capital, an increase in land values, and the displacement of low-income groups.<sup>83</sup> Gentrification produces new spaces to accumulate capital, especially in inner neighborhoods impacted by chronic disinvestment.<sup>84</sup> Today, “downtown revitalization” projects are changing the landscape of cities across the United States. These utilize urban greening initiatives, such as community gardens, to increase property values but these initiatives often result in excluding low-income urban residents.<sup>85</sup> This process is connected to the exacerbation of economic and racial inequalities within urban areas. In this instance, urban agriculture projects aimed at transforming vacant lots into community-supported gardens may be contributing to this process and thus inadvertently exacerbating the existing inequalities. Thus, in this instance, neoliberal tendencies could actively work against radical changes brought about by urban agricultural projects, including opening up the means of production to citizens,<sup>86</sup> *and* the justice-oriented goal of addressing inequities within society.

The recognition of the tension between addressing and exacerbating inequalities should not be used as justification for discounting the radical potential of urban agriculture initiatives. Rather, it reinforces the need for justice-oriented projects in urban spaces, as they are sensitive to how contextual factors could reinforce social injustices. Like McClintock's insight that “contradictory processes of capitalism [...] create opportunities for urban agriculture and impose obstacles to its expansion,” urban agriculture projects work toward undermining systems of oppression, while potentially reinforcing these same systems.<sup>87</sup> Thus, it is imperative that potential changes to entitlements, regulatory structures, zoning ordinances, and other systemic changes be analyzed *in situ* using an integrative theory sensitive to inequities to help ensure that the chance of unintended social justice impacts is limited. Recognizing the radical and transformative potential of urban agriculture projects to undermine systems of oppression, as well as their potential to reinforce these systems, will help to bolster future social impacts of justice-oriented projects

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<sup>80</sup> McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture's Contractions,” 147–71.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*; Smith, “New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy,” 446.

<sup>83</sup> Davidson and Lee, “New-build ‘Gentrification’ and London's Riverside Renaissance,” 1165–90.

<sup>84</sup> Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism*.

<sup>85</sup> Thurber et al., “Resisting Gentrification: The Theoretical and Practice Contributions of Social Work,” 1–20.

<sup>86</sup> McClintock, “Radical, Reformist, and Garden-Variety Neoliberal: Coming to Terms with Urban Agriculture's Contractions,” 147–71.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

going forward. It is the author's hope that urban agriculture activists, food justice scholars, policy makers, and practitioners will find these insights useful going forward. Urban agriculture projects are growing more than just food – they are growing resistance to systems of oppression, as they level the playing field, provide avenues for collective action, and develop a forum for community organization.

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