

# Legalising urban agriculture in Detroit: a contested way of planning for decline

Paddeu, Flaminia . The Town Planning Review ; Liverpool Vol. 88, Iss. 1, (2017): 109-129.

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, we explore legalising urban agriculture as a contested way of planning for decline, beyond the usual 'mutual benefits' narrative of urban agriculture in shrinking cities. Through the case study of Detroit (MI), we examine the content, implementation, and debates concerning zoning legislation legalising urban agriculture adopted in 2012 and assess both its advantages and drawbacks. This paper derives from fieldwork carried out in 2012-2013 and a qualitative method based on interviews with urban agriculture stakeholders, including several with the designer of the legislation as well as readings of the documents legalising urban agriculture. Our results show that legalising urban agriculture is not a beneficial practice per se, allowing a city to shrink 'better'. We thus encourage advocates of legalising urban agriculture to encompass the complexity of decline as well as acknowledge the role of public policies in shaping a 'just' urban agriculture.

## FULL TEXT

### Headnote

In this paper, we explore legalising urban agriculture as a contested way of planning for decline, beyond the usual 'mutual benefits' narrative of urban agriculture in shrinking cities. Through the case study of Detroit (MI), we examine the content, implementation, and debates concerning zoning legislation legalising urban agriculture adopted in 2012 and assess both its advantages and drawbacks. This paper derives from fieldwork carried out in 2012-2013 and a qualitative method based on interviews with urban agriculture stakeholders, including several with the designer of the legislation as well as readings of the documents legalising urban agriculture. Our results show that legalising urban agriculture is not a beneficial practice per se, allowing a city to shrink 'better'. We thus encourage advocates of legalising urban agriculture to encompass the complexity of decline as well as acknowledge the role of public policies in shaping a 'just' urban agriculture.

Keywords: decline, Detroit, land-use, legislation, shrinking cities, urban agriculture, urban planning

Shrinking cities are not just 'urban areas that have experienced population loss, economic downturn, employment decline and social problems as symptoms of a structural crisis' (Martinez-Fernandez et al., 2012, 2), as they also offer opportunities for new uses of urban space. Although the effects of shrinkage can be dramatic (Downs, 1997; Smith et al., 2001; Rappaport, 2003), it has been argued that shrinking cities are places where urban sustainability can be experimented with and where environmental innovations can be an important catalyst for change (Wachter, 2005; Schilling, 2007; Hollander, 2010; Mulligan, 2014). In the shrinking cities of the north American 'Rust Belt', urban agriculture is one of the most publicised 'green strategies' that has been acknowledged for providing economic social, and environmental benefits (Mogk et al., 2008; Schilling and Logan, 2008; Gallagher, 2010; LaCroix, 2010). Food access issues have been analysed within the framework of 'food deserts' (Zenk et al., 2005; Gallagher, 2007), whereas community food systems have been explored as a way to improve food access for residents (Pothukuchi, 2015). In several of these cities, planning for decline (Pallagst et al., 2013) and 'smart decline' policies (Popper and Popper, 2002; Hollander and Popper, 2007; Hollander and Németh, 2011) have included urban agriculture in their plan, such as in Cleveland or Youngstown, and the zoning has been modified to

legalise urban agriculture (LaCroix, 2010). Yet a smaller body of work has a more sceptical and critical approach towards urban agriculture in shrinking cities, focused on remaining unjust dynamics for people of colour, women and marginalised communities (Draus et al., 2014) or on green marketing as a part of unequal right-sizing politics (Rhodes and Russo, 2013; Safransky, 2014).

Focusing on making urban agriculture a legal land-use in Detroit is therefore an opportunity for us to assess both the advantages and drawbacks of legalising urban agriculture in a shrinking city. We argue that urban agriculture in shrinking cities has been embedded in a 'mutual benefits' narrative, since shrinkage is presented as an opportunity for urban agriculture - usually threatened by urban growth and development - and since urban agriculture is portrayed as a multifaceted tool to reduce the negative impacts of shrinkage. In this context, legalising urban agriculture would be an opportunity to plan for decline while increasing the assumed ongoing benefits. Land access and security are indeed key planning features to stabilise and expand urban agriculture. Yet, it does not necessarily solve all of the issues faced by urban growers, especially as land management is troubled in shrinking cities. We contend that legalising urban agriculture is not a beneficial or just practice per se, allowing a city to shrink 'better'. Through a case study of Detroit, we therefore explore how the content, implementation, and debates concerning new zoning legislation legalising urban agriculture can help us go beyond the 'mutual benefits' narrative. It will allow us to reflect on remaining issues and better assess and plan for decline while including urban agriculture in shrinking cities.

Detroit, the former capital of the automobile industry has now been a shrinking city for decades and is considered to be at the forefront of the urban agriculture movement in the United States (Morgan, 2015). It suffered from a severe deindustrialisation process lasting more than half a century that hit the Rust Belt particularly hard. Since 1950, Detroit has lost more than a million people and hundreds of thousands of jobs. The city's population dropped from 1.8 million inhabitants in 1960 to 951,000 in 2000 and only 681,000 inhabitants in 2014. The city has endured a generalised urban crisis (Sugrue, 1996), resulting in a highly segregated and deprived city, as its population is 83 per cent African American in a predominantly White metropolitan area and 38 per cent of its population is under the poverty line (US Census Bureau, 2012). An immense amount of vacant land covers one third of the vast city territory, representing 105,000 vacant lots (Detroit Works, 2012). Severely hit by the financial crises of 2007-2009, Detroit is also the largest city in the United States to have undergone bankruptcy, for an \$18 billion debt (McDonald, 2014). In this context, after several years of preparation, an amendment to the zoning code proposed by the Detroit City Planning Commission (CPC) called the Urban Agriculture Ordinance (UAO) was adopted by the City Council in December 2012 and has been enforced since March 2013 (CPC, 2013; City of Detroit, 2013). Within certain limits, it makes urban agriculture operations legal in Detroit.

This paper derives from fieldwork carried out in Spring 2012 and 2013. The qualitative study is based on thirty semi-directed interviews with protagonists of Detroit's urban agriculture such as non-profit advocates, urban farmers, local experts and residents, but this article focuses on several interviews specifically conducted with the leading designer of the UAO (interviewees have been anonymised by changing their names, while respecting gender and ethnicity). These interviews have been supplemented by sequences of observation and studies of grey literature such as the documents legalising urban agriculture, the UAO (CPC, 2013) and its abridged version (City of Detroit, 2013).<sup>1</sup> After a review of literature on urban agriculture in shrinking cities as a narrative of mutual benefits (1), we will contextualise and analyse the UAO making urban agriculture legal in Detroit (2), in order to propose a reflection on legalising urban agriculture as a contested way of planning for decline (3).

Urban farming in shrinking cities, a narrative of mutual benefits

Shrinkage as an opportunity for 'green uses'

The literature on urban decline has been exploring the causes (Sugrue, 1996; Downs, 1997; Smith et al., 2001; Rappaport, 2003) and consequences of decline for decades, such as the rise of unemployment and social problems, racial transition, urban decay, tax delinquency, budget cuts, inadequate urban services and the loss of community capacities, especially affecting the most vulnerable population groups. Land vacancy, produced by the combination of population loss and the collapse of land market values (Accordino and Johnson, 2000; Dewar,

2006; Hackworth, 2014), is one of the detrimental distinctive features of shrinking cities, associated with urban blight, marginal and illegal activities and crime (Branas et al., 2011; Raleigh and Galster, 2014).

Yet it has increasingly been argued that urban decline, especially through the release of vacant land, can be an opportunity to experiment in innovative land-uses and especially 'green' uses (Wachter, 2005; Schilling and Logan, 2008; LaCroix, 2010) such as reforestation, greenways and urban agriculture. A decade ago, the discourse and practices of 'smart decline' - defined as 'planning for less - fewer people, fewer buildings, fewer land uses' (Popper and Popper, 2002, 23) - started to attract the attention of planners and politicians in shrinking cities (Hollander and Popper, 2007), with some deciding to plan for decline rather than for growth (e.g. Youngstown) and to focus on improving quality of life for residents. 'Smart decline' would lower the number of abandoned buildings and vacant land and put them to good use through the installation of parks and community gardens while reducing municipal expenditures and improving the delivery of urban services (Schwarz and Rugare, 2008).

Regarding urban agriculture, many cities in North America in the past few years have adopted supportive policies and programmes (Neuner et al., 2011; Cohen and Reynolds, 2014). Shrinking cities have included food production in sustainability strategies (e.g. Baltimore) and provided city property for urban farms (e.g. Cleveland). Various cities have amended zoning ordinances and building codes to legalise urban agriculture (Hodgson et al., 2011). In a context of rampant urbanisation in the Global South and intense land pressure in the Global North, where urban agriculture faces issues of land scarcity, vulnerability to urban development, and insecurity of land tenure, urban agriculture appeared to have finally found a haven in shrinking cities.

Urban agriculture as a beneficial practice to 'shrink better'

Not only is shrinkage considered an opportunity for green uses and food systems, but urban agriculture is specifically regarded as a multifaceted tool helping reduce a large range of negative impacts related to shrinkage (Figure 1). For instance, Schilling and Logan (2008) argue that greening strategies of declining areas provide environmental and health benefits for residents. This narrative draws from a shared assumption that urban agriculture is irreducible to its nutritional function (Morgan, 2009; 2015). For Duchemin et al. (2010), urban agriculture is a tool for education, economic development, food security, leisure activities, social interactions, health, and urban development, as well as for environmental enhancement. Applied to shrinking cities, the merging between smart decline and food planning literatures creates a common narrative of mutual benefits: shrinkage as an opportunity for urban agriculture and urban agriculture as a beneficial tool for shrinking cities.

Indeed, in shrinking cities, urban agriculture has first been pictured as a response to the development of 'food deserts' - poor urban areas where people cannot access affordable healthy food (Cummins and Macintyre, 2002) - and food insecurity for low-income populations. Some defend community food planning as a way to create a more responsive food system (Pothukuchi, 2015), while others present urban farming as a strategy of resistance to food insecurity for the African American community (White, 2011a) as well as for Black women (White, 2011b). Urban agriculture is thus regarded as providing economic, social, and environmental benefits. It could produce employment opportunities through agricultural, food distribution and market selling jobs (Pothukuchi, 2011).

Regarding land vacancy, it could increase real estate and land market prices in cities where extremely low land and real estate values entail issues of residential captivity for low-income owners. In Philadelphia, Wachter (2005) showed that cleaning and greening vacant spaces could increase the value of the adjacent property by up to 30 per cent. Social benefits are put forward too, as occupying land with urban agriculture could slow down population loss in highvacancy areas, where cycles of departure are triggered by 'noxious' uses of vacant lots (Paddeu, 2015). Community urban agriculture has been touted as a way to tackle the loss of community capacities during the decades of shrinkage through community building and mutual assistance (Colasanti et al., 2012). The greening of vacant space can also influence the sense of safety, as Branäs and colleagues (2011) showed that in Philadelphia armed attacks and vandalism have dropped in neighbourhoods where lots had been greened, while residents reported doing more physical exercise. Regarding environmental benefits, urban agriculture has been portrayed as a way to improve deindustrialised urban ecosystems (Irvine et al., 1999) and to 'beautify' neighbourhoods plagued by ruins and undergoing rewilding.

In Detroit, it is thus based on these assumptions of benefits that the CPC drafted an ordinance legalising urban agriculture.

Legalising urban agriculture in Detroit: supporting a community-based practice and allowing for entrepreneurial projects

Urban agriculture in the context of Detroit's decline

A community-based 'greening renaissance'

Mostly embedded in grassroots initiatives, community organisations and local non-profit groups, urban agriculture in Detroit has attracted interest from the scientific community in recent years (Mogk et al., 2008; Pothukuchi, 2011, 2015; White, 2011a; 2011b; Colasanti et al., 2012; Draus et al., 2014) while acquiring international media visibility. For some, where the auto industry once reigned, gardening in Motown has become a mainstream feature of the city (Giorda, 2012). Detroit is estimated to host between 350 (Duda, 2012) and 1,600 community, school and institutional gardens or farms, producing 165 tons of harvests per year on 0.4 per cent of city-owned vacant land (Gallagher, 2010, 61). The size of the operations ranges from backyard plots to two acres, while the largest of the six small farms operates on seven acres (CPC, 2013). Mainly cultivating vegetables, fruits and herbs, the farms produce food for sale through a dozen farmers' markets, direct sales to restaurants, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) networks, and soup kitchens.

If the rise of urban agriculture has often been presented as a greening renaissance of a formerly heavily industrialised city, it has played a constitutive role since the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it was correlated with episodes of economic crisis or wars, such as Mayor Pingree's 'Potato Patch Plan' in 1893, the Great Depression 'Thrift Gardens', or the World War Two 'Victory Gardens' (Holli, 1969; Hynes, 1996; Lawson, 2005). Urban agriculture is also widely embedded in the racial history of the city (Colasanti et al., 2012). Following the Great Migration in the 1920s, the Black Bottom neighbourhood was home to African American gardens. In 1975, when the city was already in the throes of urban crisis and 43.7 per cent African American (McDonald, 2014), Mayor Young launched the Farm-A-Lot Program, offering gardeners assistance to grow crops on vacant lots (Mogk et al., 2008). As for grassroots initiatives, the Gardening Angels, a group of seniors, were among the first in the 1980s to install community gardens (Boggs and Kurashige, 2012). Today, urban agriculture continues to support racial emancipation, particularly through the Detroit Summer programme or the urban farm of the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network (DBCFSN) called D-Town (Figure 2).

Detroit urban agriculture takes advantage of the city's massive amount of vacant land, conveying a form of 'perforated city' (Lutke-Daldrup, 2003; Florentin et al., 2009), sprawled and shrunk at the same time, alternating empty neighbourhoods and a few lively pockets. Vast parts of the city stand abandoned: factories, shops, apartment buildings and houses have broken windows, are boarded up or burned out (Figure 3), as empty lots turn into 'urban prairies' (Gallagher, 2010). Vacant lots comprise over 20 square miles and 105,000 lots (Detroit Works, 2012), roughly twice as vast as Manhattan's surface. Disregarded by supermarkets, Detroit is considered a 'food desert' (Zenk et al., 2005), as over 500,000 of its inhabitants have to go twice as far to shop in a food store rather than at a 'fringe retailer' (liquor stores, gas stations, dollar stores) (Gallagher, 2007).

Farming in the political context of crisis and 'smart decline'

Urban agriculture in Detroit takes place in the political context of a disempowered city government largely indebted and intermittently submitted to Michigan State takeovers (McDonald, 2014), decade-long utilities failures, urban projects based on entrepreneurial private-public partnerships and dedicated to urban pioneer gentrifiers and the creative class (Schindler, 2014), and a managerial regime of land management (Hackworth, 2014). In parallel, a group of stakeholders attached to the city, dominated by large philanthropic foundations such as Kresge, proposed a 'smart decline' framework plan in 2012 called Detroit Future City (Detroit Works, 2012). As it recognises the need to plan for decline, partly through environmental planning, some argue that it is an interesting case of degrowth machine politics (Schindler, 2014). Yet, others argue that it concentrates investments on the city core to the detriment of peripheral areas, overlooking the issue of relocation and proposing an unclear strategy conciliating divergent interests (Bockmeyer, 2013).

In this context, a network emerged of community-based, non-profit, urban agriculture organisations, such as the Detroit Agriculture Network, the Garden Resource Program Collaborative of the Greening of Detroit, Keep Growing Detroit, the Detroit Food Justice Task Force or the Detroit Food Policy Council, dedicated to developing gardens, providing training and resources, and helping gardeners to market their products. Embedded in the Community Food Security (Pothukuchi and Kaufman, 2000) and the food justice (Holt-Giménez and Wang, 2011) frameworks, the operations sell their produce at affordable prices at local stands in high-vacancy African American neighbourhoods (e.g. Earthworks on the East Side) (Figure 4), donate it to soup kitchens (e.g. Capuchin Soup Kitchen) or sell it at the largest food market, Eastern Market (Figure 5). They accompany gardening with empowerment education about food justice and racism.

Yet, large urban farming projects, such as the highly controversial proposal by entrepreneur John Hantz, have also appeared recently (Safransky, 2014; Paddeu, 2015). It is therefore the emergence of entrepreneurial urban farming that triggered the need to amend the zoning, in order to make room for agriculture.

An urban planning zoning tool to protect and encourage urban agriculture

Supporting community farming expansion

Although urban farming was already blossoming prior to the UAO, the City Code had not set standards for community gardening or commercial agriculture. No public policies had supported urban agriculture since the Farm-A-Lot Program, which ceased in 2002 due to budget restrictions. If some growers considered that the troubled municipal land management and a lack of city government were a sufficient condition underwriting grassroots community farming (Sidney, interview, 29 May 2013), others claimed that the recently publicised acknowledgement of the success of urban agriculture created an opportunity for legalisation (Angela, interview, 10 May 2012; Scott, interview, 28 May 2013). Hence, the main goal of the amendment of the City Code was to make urban agriculture legal.

The involvement of one key stakeholder, Kathryn Underwood, leading designer of the UAO, was critical in the advocacy of a modified zoning ordinance. An African American native Detroiter, defining herself both as a 'community activist' and an urban planner at the CPC, she is a founding member of the Detroit Agricultural Network and the DBCFSN, stands on the board of the Greening of Detroit, and has been working in the urban agriculture community for many years.

In 2009, Underwood and members of the CPC created the Urban Agriculture Workgroup (UAW), a policy group created to draft the UAO including various stakeholders such as the DBCFSN, the Greening of Detroit, Earthworks, Michigan State University, Wayne State University and some city departments (Public Works, Planning and Development, Water and Sewerage). A process of public engagement and outreach completed it, as several community meetings were held in churches and community centres, while other meetings were addressed specifically to growers.

Legislation based on the benefits of urban agriculture

The UAO was conceived at first to help secure existing illegal agricultural operations and avoid potential destruction of gardens and farms (Angela, interview, 10 May 2012). By allowing 'new agricultural uses' (CPC, 2013, 4) in the zoning, the goal was also to set standards for agricultural practices in Detroit. Hence, it allows both small-scale and large-scale operations, with no size limitation, as well as non-commercial and commercial farming. If an 'urban garden' is limited to one acre, an 'urban farm' starts at over one acre. Unlike in Chicago, urban farming is accepted in all types of zonings, but can be limited to three acres (City of Detroit, 2013).

In its core values, the UAO is based on the recognition of the benefits of urban agriculture, considering that it 'will permit people to produce their own healthy food and also to sell the food they produce, which provides economic opportunity, thereby improving health and general welfare' (CPC, 2013, 8). UAO designers have put forward the positive impact on diet-related illnesses and unemployment to favour urban agriculture. One of them also insists on the benefits regarding municipal savings: 'How do you assess the value of a community garden other than in dollars and cents? In fact, you can assess it in dollars and cents: it was land that the city didn't have to plough, it was land that didn't get dumped on: you know there are a lot of benefits to that garden' (Angela, interview, 10 May

2012).

#### The rise of large-scale farming as a game changer

One of the UAO designers mentioned that, as mentalities were evolving towards better acceptance of urban agriculture, the timing was finally right to propose legislation that has long been discussed: 'Close to ten years ago, it wasn't 'hip and cool'. A lot of people didn't know about it, so a lot of people internally weren't responsive to adding that to the zoning ordinance. We got a lot of negative pushback' (Angela, interview, 10 May 2012). Yet the CPC acknowledges that 'there is also an increased interest in using vacant land in the city for large-scale commercial farming' (2013, 1), as the Hantz Farms proposal was actually the major game changer. Hantz, a business financial services conglomerate operating in Michigan and Ohio founded by a Detroit native, John Hantz, approached the city in 2009 to buy thousands of vacant lots in the East Side neighbourhood to settle what was presented as the 'biggest urban farm in the world' (Figure 6). The \$30 million land transaction caught the city's attention, as Hantz was later associated with the UAW (Macmillan, 2012). In 2012, the city sold Hantz 144 acres for 25 cents per square metre (Safransky, 2014), now constituting a tree farm scattered on 1,500 lots named 'Hantz Woodlands' (Figure 7). This very controversial proposal triggered a sudden new need to legalise urban agriculture, leading the city to support the CPC in setting standards for community gardening and commercial agriculture. Although one of the UAO designers, aware of the inherent risks of large-scale entrepreneurial urban farming, states that the goal of the legislation is 'to balance facilitating agriculture and protecting neighbourhoods' (Angela, interview, 10 May 2012), it nevertheless left high-vacancy neighbourhoods vulnerable to potentially environmentally noxious, socially and racially unjust and economically inequitable land uses.

#### Making a contested practice legal in a troubled land-use context

Critical geographer Chiara Tornaghi (2014) claims that urban agricultural practices are being portrayed as benevolent and unproblematic, while many controversial and potentially unjust dynamics lie unexplored. As urban agriculture is particularly praised in shrinking cities, we argue that these controversial and unjust dynamics are all the more exacerbated in the context of decline, where land-use management is troubled (Hackworth, 2014) and public government is jeopardised by fiscal debts, State power and entrepreneurial politics.

#### The unsolved issues of the legislation

##### The absence of size limitation for agricultural operations

Urban agriculture was presented by the CPC as a community 'response to the expanse of vacant land in the city' (2013, 1). Yet, recognising the need for guidance in this context of massive vacancy (Angela, interview, 10 May 2012), the UAO settled with no size limitation, potentially allowing very large commercial urban agriculture operations (City of Detroit, 2013). Questioned on this specific matter, one of the designers of the UAO, personally engaged as an activist against Hantz Farm, explained this decision as a way to allow for 'experimentation' on both sides, defending a possible coexistence between small-scale and large-scale farming (Angela, interview, 5 June 2013).

The justification for experimenting may seem idealistic in a shrinkage context of land grabbing and speculation. In this case, as Hantz was associated with the UAW and the city was closing a sale with Hantz, it might seem rather difficult for the designers of the UAO within the CPC to contradict the city council and limit the size of urban agriculture operations. The city has thus more recently been engaged in another very large project (Recovery Park), aiming at creating jobs in the food industry in partnership with local high-end restaurants (Gallagher, 2015). In this regard, the argument of economic benefits is often advanced, rather than equity and ecology. As the leader of a non-profit organisation dedicated to food sovereignty puts it, intensive crop farming neither creates a lot of jobs nor increases community networks and is more likely to use chemicals (Sidney, interview, 29 May 2013). Moreover, the real economic benefits and job opportunities of urban agriculture are difficult to assess and minimal to date, leaving the community of researchers sceptical as the impact remains insufficiently explored (LaCroix, 2010).

##### An eased access to land, not to property

Most community gardeners and growers in Detroit farm land they do not own, simply squatting on a piece of unclaimed vacant land. While it is easy to occupy land illegally; access to property in the context of decline has

paradoxically become complicated, due to land management deficiencies (Hackworth, 2014) and abstruse public handling of files, buying a specific lot you already farm on remains a difficult task. Indeed, as there was a waiting list of several years to buy the desired plot for urban agriculture (Kathryn and Jonah, interview, 4 June 2013), Hantz engaged directly with city officials, thus cutting in the queue of individuals and non-profit organisations. Neither facilitating the acquisition of land by those who run it nor setting aside public land were options retained in the UAO. Although the city has not yet intentionally set out to facilitate property acquisition for community farmers, it has offered to sell adjacent lots to community farmers for \$200, and for \$300 to Hantz (Scott, interview, 28 May 2013). The question of land ownership has still not been solved by the UAO and stands as an important future issue.

Dismissing the keeping of animals while allowing chemicals: shaping nature acceptability in an urban setting  
Detroit urban growers favour field crops - most of the time uncertified organic - grown with low or no chemical input. Prior to the writing of the UAO, the expressed concerns at the UAW community meetings were directed towards environmental issues and food safety. Considering some operations are located on brownfields, one of the concerns regarded industrial contamination. This issue was finally included in the UAO, as soil testing is part of the mandatory 'Site Plan Review' process. Another concern regarded the use of pesticides or other chemicals, and genetically modified seeds and plants. On this matter, State Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) legislation prevails, to the point that the UAO had no leeway on banning more chemicals or Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) than the EPA recommendations. The city thus has little control on the use of chemical input and GMOs, making the usually acclaimed environmental benefits uncertain, especially in the case of large-scale intensive farming.

Animal husbandry is now fairly common, both in Detroit and other American cities (Figure 8) (Butler, 2012). Yet most concerns expressed during the community outreach process were about animals, as residents worried about smells and noise. The keeping of animals, as well as certain species and plants - oat, wheat and rye - has indeed finally been prohibited by the UAO, in order to prevent rodents. Although legalising the keeping of chickens, rabbits and bees was discussed in the process and supported internally, the pushback from the community led the conceivers to remove the items on animals to avoid jeopardising the entire legislation (Angela, interview, 5 June 2013). Some baby pygmy goats and chickens were eventually seized from their owners in October 2014 (Neavling, 2014). For most of the community, the keeping of animals is still linked to a rural southern practice, considered unsound and unfit for a city that continues to embody the Manufacturing Belt (Angela, interview, 10 May 2012). For some of those who witnessed Detroit's growth and splendour, urban agriculture is an impaired form of urbanity, and a visible symptom of decade-long urban decline residents would prefer to deny. Yet, an amendment to the UAO legalising animal husbandry is currently being discussed (Bethencourt, 2015), mirroring the ambiguous and shifting acceptability of urban agriculture.

Responding to the community pushback regarding nuisances (chemicals, noises, smells etc.), standardisation of urban agriculture practices in the UAO appeared to be a requirement to control it, hence making it more acceptable for the rest of an often sceptical community. The lots have to be 'maintained in an orderly or neat condition' (City of Detroit, 2013, 8) and high grass, weeds or debris are not accepted, as well as excessive noise, odour, smoke, vibrations or fumes. Not only does this curb the risk of nuisances, it also encourages shaping a tamed garden, thought to beautify vacancy rather than enhancing the city grit or evoking new hybrid landscapes (Millington, 2013) (Figure 9). Yet, because urban farming does involve some nuisances, it remains unclear if it will have as beneficial an impact on land and property values as 'greening' initiatives (Wachter, 2005). Regarding demographic stabilisation in high-vacancy areas, urban farms could actually deter neighbours, instead of beautifying or revivifying the neighbourhood as it is often claimed.

Lessons for planning for decline while legalising urban farming

Recognising the complexity of decline

In Detroit's UAO, as well as in multiple articles in planning literature on shrinking cities, urban agriculture has often been presented as the ultimate 'smart shrinkage' strategy. Yet, its treatment often remains only vaguely related to

the complexity and multidimensionality of the decline process and issues. According to Draus et al. (2014), residents in Detroit have actually little hope of improvement and few expectations for urban agriculture to alter daily life or social dynamics in their neighbourhood, indicating that idealistic urban agriculture efforts may have some work to do in terms of engaging residents and off-setting legacies of displacement as well as ongoing marginalisation. Issues remaining include the real extent of 'green job' opportunities in a context where schooling and training crucially lack funding; the varying levels of community acceptability of urban agriculture within remaining neighbourhoods; or, the unproven effects of urban agriculture on safety in high-vacancy neighbourhoods. As regards the latter, as Raleigh and Galster (2014) show, there is little evidence of a direct link between crime rates and vacancy rates, with the unemployment rate being a more significant factor. In shrinking cities, land vacancy is too often recognised solely as an opportunity, and too rarely as the result of a troubled land-management regime involving issues of land grabbing, in which the role of large commercial urban farming could play a part. Moreover, legalising urban agriculture policies should be accompanied by measures to help growers' access to property, ensure equal conditions of access for all stakeholders (especially for people of colour and community organisations), set aside public land, and develop associations with land banks in order to implement better land government.

Acknowledging the role of public policies in shaping a 'just' urban agriculture

Planners in shrinking cities have to acknowledge that urban agriculture is not a 'beneficial' and 'just' practice in itself and that public policies have a role in shaping a just urban agriculture. Considering the redistributive dimension of justice (Rawls, 1971), it remains difficult to assess how many people and who would actually benefit from legalising urban agriculture, in terms of food access and security. Other issues such as how the produce is priced or if the targeted population - i.e. the most vulnerable population - is the actual population benefiting from urban agriculture, rather than the newly arrived creative class, should be addressed. Without focusing on economically vulnerable population groups (through connections with non-profit operating soup kitchens, food banks and other, more empowering food security structures) and on access (spatial distribution of produce through neighbourhood markets and stands but also individual purchasing power), urban agriculture will have little impact on service redistribution, food access and food security. In the inclusive dimension of justice (Young, 1990), urban agriculture ordinances and plans should acknowledge that urban decline in the Rust Belt has resulted in a racial transition, leaving impoverished African Americans to bear the burden. Numerous questions have thus been raised concerning race- and class-based disparities among urban agriculture practitioners (Reynolds, 2015) and the production and reproduction of whiteness in the alternative food movement (Slocum, 2007; Guthman, 2008), especially in highly segregated shrinking cities. Moreover, it has been argued that urban agriculture has been used by city policies to evict African Americans from neighbourhoods in the context of 'planned shrinkage' (Rhodes and Russo, 2013). Finally, in the participative dimension of justice (Young, 1990), as the UAO has featured the potential absence of a popular demand for urban agriculture in shrinking cities, this dismissal has to be faced, in order to improve participation processes and community engagements in discussions with the growers and multiple stakeholders in the urban agriculture community.

#### Footnote

1 This research has been carried out in the course of a PhD thesis, 'From urban crisis to reclaiming urban space. grassroots environmental and food justice activism in low-income neighborhoods in Detroit and the Bronx in New York', defended on 7 December 2015 at the University of Paris Sorbonne (Paris 4), <https://tel.archivesouvertes.fr/tel-01283583/document>.

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## DETAILS

<b>Publication title:</b>	The Town Planning Review; Liverpool
<b>Volume:</b>	88
<b>Issue:</b>	1
<b>Pages:</b>	109-129
<b>Number of pages:</b>	21
<b>Publication year:</b>	2017
<b>Publication date:</b>	2017
<b>Publisher:</b>	Liverpool University Press
<b>Place of publication:</b>	Liverpool
<b>Country of publication:</b>	United Kingdom, Liverpool
<b>Publication subject:</b>	Housing And Urban Planning
<b>ISSN:</b>	00410020
<b>Source type:</b>	Scholarly Journals
<b>Language of publication:</b>	English
<b>Document type:</b>	Feature
<b>Document feature:</b>	Illustrations Photographs References
<b>DOI:</b>	<a href="http://dx.doi.org/10.3828/tpr.2017.9">http://dx.doi.org/10.3828/tpr.2017.9</a>
<b>ProQuest document ID:</b>	1872570322
<b>Document URL:</b>	<a href="https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1872570322?accountid=14503">https://colorado.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1872570322?accountid=14503</a>
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<b>Last updated:</b>	2017-02-28
<b>Database:</b>	Art, Design &Architecture Collection,SciTech Premium Collection,Social Science Premium Collection,Arts Premium Collection,ProQuest Central

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