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► **To cite this version:**

Flaminia Paddeu. From one movement to another? Comparing environmental justice activism and food justice alternative practices. *Justice spatiale = Spatial justice*, 2016, Food justice and agriculture, 9. halshs-01507261

HAL Id: halshs-01507261

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01507261>

Submitted on 12 Apr 2017

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From one movement to another? Comparing environmental justice activism and food justice alternative practices.

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Abstract

Food justice activism is generally considered to be an offshoot of environmental justice. We question this lineage based on empirical elements by comparing the two movements in terms of theoretical objectives, daily practices and strategies. Our material comes from the study of two grassroots movements in low-income neighborhoods in the United States – environmental justice in Hunts Point (South Bronx) and food justice in Jefferson-Mack (Detroit) – where we conducted field surveys between 2011 and 2013, interviewing more than sixty stakeholders. We demonstrate how environmental justice activism in the Bronx is the expression of a protest model, involving rallying against polluting infrastructures, whereas food justice alternative practices in Detroit are characterized by the organization of community food security networks. Despite similarities between the two movements, we strongly challenge their “lineage”. Not only do the types of collective action and the catalysts differ markedly, but each of the two movements has evolved relatively independently in the context of an assertion of the food justice movement.

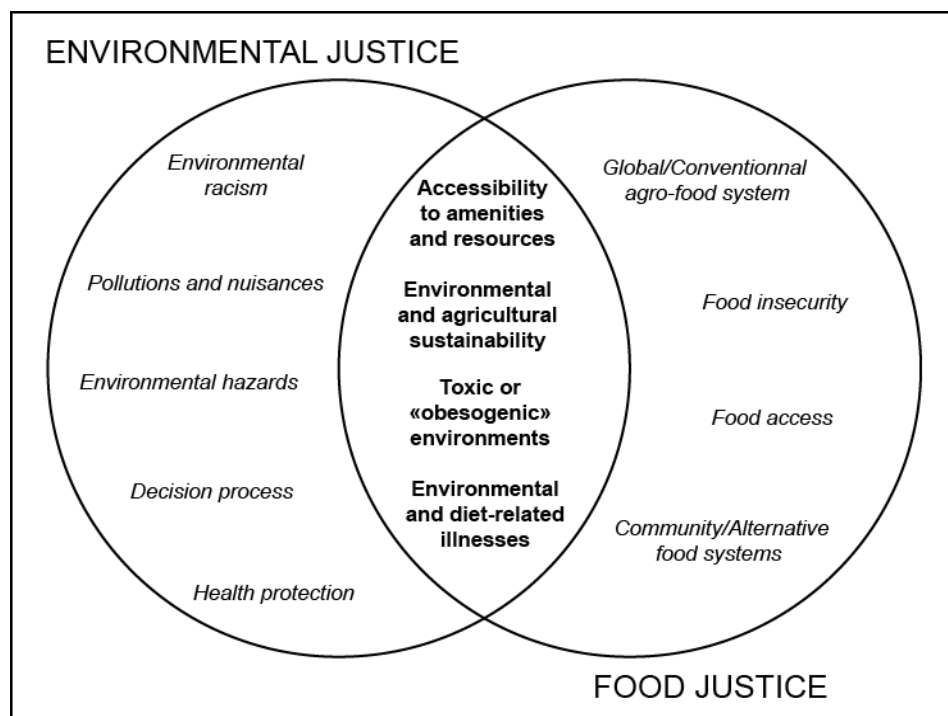
Key words

South Bronx; Detroit; food justice; environmental justice; alternative practices.

The food justice movement is generally considered to be an offshoot of the environmental justice movement, and the lineages between the two movements were first emphasized in the 1990s (Gottlieb & Fisher, 1996). The term *food justice* was first used in scientific journals specialized in environmental justice such as *Race, Poverty and the Environment* (Gottlieb & Fisher, 2000). Robert Gottlieb (2009) claimed that the definition of the environment as “where you live, work, and play” had to be revised and changed for “where you live, work, play, and *eat*”. Broadening the environmental justice agenda to include food justice issues (Alkon & Agyeman, 2011: 7-10) indicated that the latter had been included in the theoretical currents and activist movements advocating justices, whether social, spatial or environmental. Several common interests and concerns are put forward to justify this “lineage”, such as criticizing systemic injustices as a cause of unequal urban environments and unequal access to amenities and resources; building environmental or agricultural sustainability; being concerned by unequal access to healthcare for environmental or diet-related illnesses; connecting local movements to global ecological and food issues; focusing on quality of life and living conditions (Gottlieb, 2009; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Alkon & Agyeman, 2011) (chart 1). The parallel is all the more compelling as activists in both movements are often working in the same types of neighborhoods: low-income inner city neighborhoods concentrating the urban poor and ethnic minorities which are considered to be food deserts¹ (Cummins & Macintyre, 2002; Paez *et al.*, 2010) and/or neighborhoods with serious environmental stigmas (nuisances, pollutions).

¹ A food desert is defined as “populated urban areas where residents do not have access to an affordable and healthy diet” (Cummins & Macintyre, 2002).

Chart 1: Common interests and concerns in environmental justice movements and food justice movements



Source: F. Paddeu, 2015.

The term environmental justice has been used in the United States since the 1980s to designate low-income ethnic minority grassroots movements against any decisions or practices, whether industrial or governmental, causing pollution or environmental and sanitary nuisances, sometimes with dramatic consequences (Bullard, 1990; Bullard *et al.*, 1997; Taylor, 2000; Figueroa & Mills, 2001; Hache, 2012). In the 1990s, food justice movements (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Alkon & Agyeman, 2011; Paddeu, 2012; Morgan, 2015) started to tackle food security issues in terms of access, availability and quality. They stemmed from grassroots movements rising against the global food system, monopolized by a few companies and characterized by its unequal power relations and its harmful environmental and sanitary impact (Schlosser, 2001; Nestle, 2002; Pothukuchi, 2004; Pollan, 2007). Food justice activists advocated for alternative food systems (Deverre & Lamine, 2010) in the United States

as well as in some other countries, including the development of urban agriculture in *inner cities*. They work with economically challenged people and ethnic minorities, considered to be the most vulnerable victims of an unjust global food system.

Few have challenged the claim that food justice is the legitimate offshoot of environmental justice (Mares & Peña, 2011), generally described as two movements with similarities united under the same banner of “justice”, thereby disregarding any discrepancies in approaches, variations in activists’ everyday strategies and practices. Furthermore, the actual nature of the lineage is rarely defined accurately. Is the relation between these two movements actually a “lineage”, meaning that the food justice movement stems directly from the environmental justice movement, the former originating in the latter, in a dependent or subordinate relation? Or are they just “brother” movements, arising from common concerns in social justice before specializing in different branches, each advocating different sorts of actions for justice? Or could the two movements be “hybridized”, making it harder and harder to differentiate them since they share common causes and strategies, fighting hand in hand, striving together to further sustainability and put an end to toxic environments? By using our empirical data to draw parallels and compare the two movements in terms of theoretical objectives, practices and collective action strategies, we wish to examine this complex relationship.

These questions are raised within the framework of reflections on social and spatial justice. Firstly, do the intentions of environmental justice and food justice activists correspond to an identical conception of justice? There are at least two theoretical concepts of social justice: *distributive* social justice (Rawls, 1971), defined by Edward Soja in his work on spatial justice (2009) as “the fair and equitable distribution in space of socially valued resources and the opportunities to use them”, and *inclusive* social justice (Young, 1990), striving for changes to fight socially situated injustice due to gender, racial, cultural differences, etc. and provide minorities with a more effective framework in which they can participate fully. Given the polysemic nature of the notion of justice, how exactly do activists’ grassroots discourse in the two movements relate to so-called *environmental* or *food* justice? Secondly, how are their concepts of

environmental or food justices implemented and spatially organized by the activists? Beyond a common desire for social justice and a shared territory, are the types of collective actions and their catalysts similar? Is there a lineage, parallel or hybridization between the two movements, or on the contrary, should they be dissociated despite common heritage?

The empirical data is provided by a study on grassroots environmental justice activism in Hunts Point in New York (map 1) and grassroots food justice activism in Jefferson-Mack in Detroit (map 2). More than 40 % of the community in both of these neighborhoods lives below the poverty line, and more than 90 % belongs to an ethnic minority². Hunts Point is a heavily industrialized peninsula in the South Bronx, and Jefferson-Mack is a former working class residential neighborhood on the East Side of Detroit, severely affected by the city's urban crisis over the past decades. Hunts Point remains partially industrialized, mainly with the presence of New York's wholesale food market, waste disposal facilities, and the transportation industry. Jefferson-Mack has been almost totally deindustrialized and the community has lost most of its working class population. Both neighborhoods are characteristic of the "urban crisis" (Sugrue, 1996) which affected American inner cities during the second half of the 20th century, caused by a combination of suburbanization and deindustrialization, encouraged by federal policies and disinvestment of private capital. The grassroots actions in these neighborhoods are collective protest movements, carried out mainly by local members of these low-income communities. In a comparative perspective, we will start by presenting the similarities between the two movements, then we will examine the singularities of each movement and, lastly, we will interpret and discuss the results.

Our demonstration is based on qualitative methodological research, with fieldwork conducted between 2011 and 2013 in Hunts Point and Jefferson-Mack. In order to analyze the discourses, practices and representations of stakeholders, we conducted

² According to the US Census Bureau (2015), 43.9 % of the population in Hunts Point (South Bronx, New York) live under the poverty line (2010), and ethnic minorities represent 98.7 % of the population in the neighborhood (2012). In Jefferson-Mack (East Side, Detroit), 40.8 % of the population live under the poverty line (2010), and ethnic minorities represent 93.3 % of the population (2012).

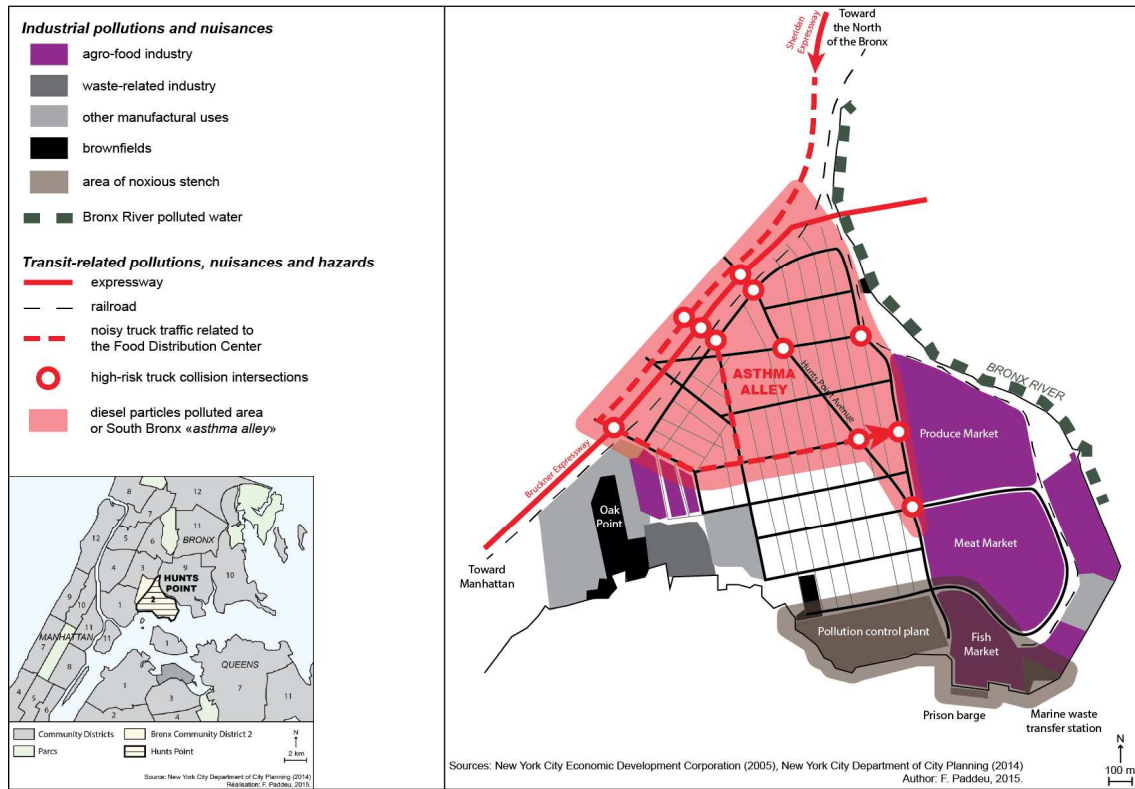
observational sessions (participative or not) and about sixty semi-directive individual interviews of grassroots activists (five organizations in Hunts Point; fourteen in Jefferson-Mack), members of the community (thirteen in Hunts Point; fifteen in Jefferson-Mack) and experts from public or private institutions (eight institutions in Hunts Point; seven institutions in Jefferson-Mack). The interviews were supplemented by informal conversations with other members of the community, volunteers, and activists.

A search for justice: similarities between two activist movements

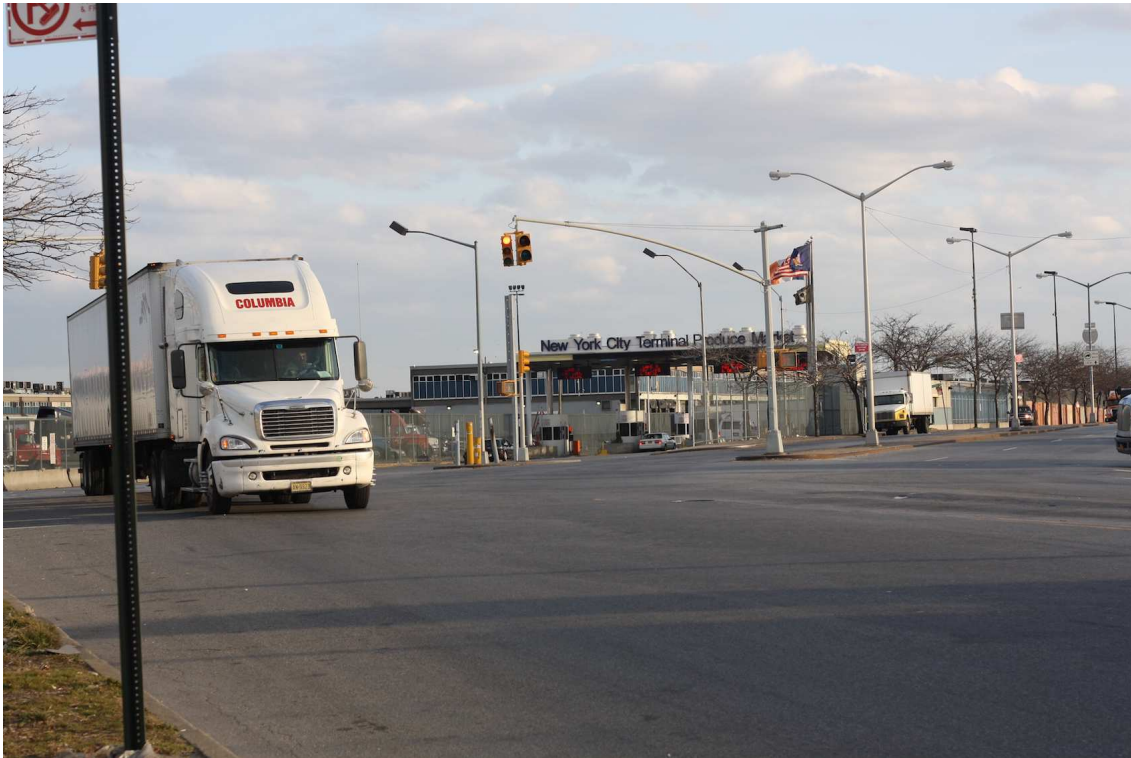
In Hunts Point, the rise of *grassroots* movements protesting against environmental nuisances and pollution

Noxious stench, polluted air, non-stop noisy truck traffic, the waterfront view blocked off by industrial plants shape everyday life for the Hunts Point community, symptomatic of an accumulation of environmental nuisances and pollution (map 1 and picture 1). There are at least 35 waste disposal infrastructures in the community (NYCDCP, 2012), approximately 13 000 trucks drive daily to and from the food market (Parrilla, 2006; NYC Mayor's Office, 2013), and asthma-related hospitalization rates are 21 times as high as in upper-class neighborhoods in the city (Maciejczyk *et al.*, 2004).

Map 1: Cumulative environmental “burdens” in Hunts Point in the South Bronx



Source: F. Paddeu, 2015.

Picture 1: Truck traffic related nuisances in Hunts Point

A truck heading toward New York's wholesale food market (New York City Food Distribution Center), located in the south-east of the peninsula in Hunts Point, near the Bronx River. Source: F. Paddeu, 2012.

In the 1990s, a part of the community became aware of these problems and began to protest: Hunts Point is well-known today for its pioneering environmental justice movements (Parrilla, 2006; Sze, 2007; Angotti, 2008; Carter, 2009). In 1992, the installation of the fertilizer plant NYOFCo led to a large grassroots movement in the community, soon to be followed by the support of a solid network of local organizations, such as Mothers on the Move and Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice. Several organizations, including the South Bronx Clean Air Coalition founded in 1994, the Community Development Corporation The Point founded in 1994, the Hunts Point Awareness Committee founded in 1996, and the Sustainable South Bronx organization founded in 2001 by Majora Carter, an African-American activist born in

Hunts Point, worked together – not without some internal strife – and succeeded in getting the plant shut down in 2010.

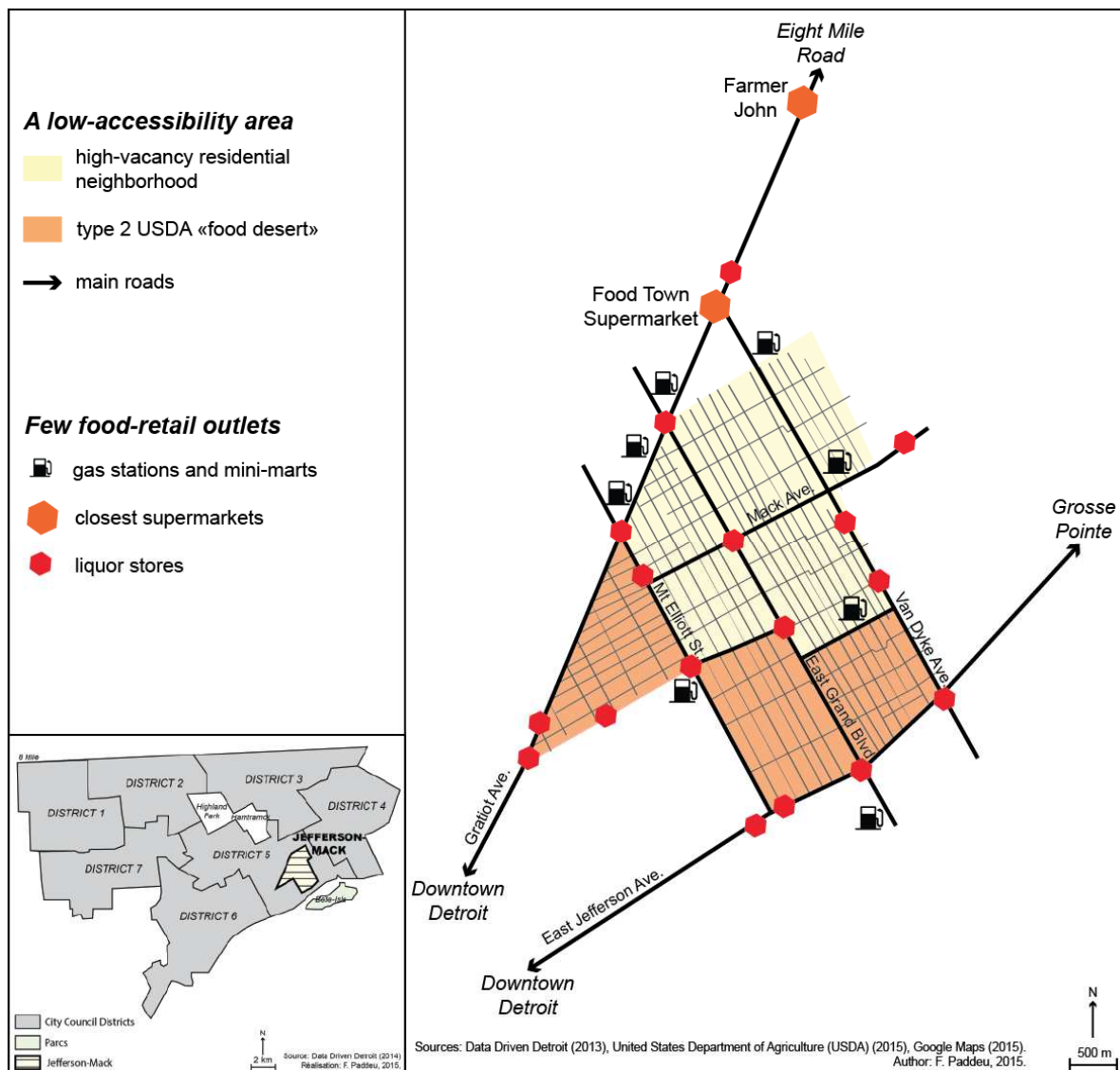
Environmental organizations of different types joined the movement started by grassroots organizations: municipal organizations (such as the Bronx River Alliance); metropolitan environmental justice organizations (such as the Organization of Waterfront Neighborhoods (OWN) or the New York City Environmental Justice Alliance), or non-governmental environmental organizations (such as the Natural Resources Defense Council). For each specific cause, a different coalition was set up *ad hoc*, composed of outside organizational stakeholders – experienced activists or legal experts – who worked with a central core of members of the local community, fighting together for environmental justice.

Jefferson-Mack, a food desert and home of a community urban agriculture movement

According to the United States Department of Agriculture³, the Jefferson-Mack neighborhood is a type 2 food desert. With 40.8 % of the population living under the poverty line, no supermarkets, 35.4 % of households that do not own a car, and no public transportation, access to food is particularly difficult in this neighborhood (map 2). Jefferson-Mack is representative of the general situation at the city scale, since about half of the people in Detroit are considered to be living in a food desert (Gallagher, 2007). The ensuing detrimental impact on public health is that Detroit has the fifth highest obesity rate in the United States (69.1 %) (Pothukuchi, 2011), and cardio-vascular mortality rates are 50 % higher than the national average (Detroit Works, 2012: 210).

³ USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) defined a food desert as a census tract with a substantial share of residents who live in low-income areas that have low levels of access to a grocery store or healthy, affordable food retail outlet. They qualify as “low-income communities”, based on having a poverty rate of 20 % or greater, or a median family income at or below 80 % of the area median family income. They qualify as “low-access communities”, based on the determination that at least 500 persons and/or at least 33 % of the census tract’s population live more than 1 mile from a supermarket or large grocery store (10 miles, in the case of non-metropolitan census tracts) (see <https://apps.ams.usda.gov/fooddeserts/fooddeserts.aspx>, last consulted on January 10, 2016).

Map 2: Jefferson-Mack in Detroit, a food desert



Source: F. Paddeu, 2015.

Yet today this neighborhood is the home of Earthworks, one of the most emblematic organizations in the Detroit urban agriculture movement, founded in 1997 (picture 2). With its urban gardens and educational programs, it is one of the largest urban farms in the city. Attracting thousands of volunteers every year, it has become one of the key organizations in the local grassroots food justice movement. It works in close

collaboration with the Capuchin Soup Kitchen, founded in 1929 and located on a next-door lot. The head office and logistics platform of Gleaners Community Food Bank, specialized in food distribution to the most disadvantaged, is located a block away. Several other urban farms and community gardens can be found in the neighborhood, including The Yes Farm, Georgia Street Community Garden, and the Rising Pheasant Farms, one of the few small-scale family urban agriculture enterprises. In all, they amount to a significant concentration of local agro-food organizations. These grassroots initiatives are supported by and part of a network of urban agriculture organizations committed to food justice in Detroit, such as the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network, Greening of Detroit or Keep Growing Detroit.

Picture 2: An Earthworks urban farming lot



The "Garden of Unity", an open community farming lot.

Source: F. Paddeu, 2013.

Comparing environmental justice movements with food justice movements?

In our research on these two movements (Paddeu, 2015), we confirm that environmental justice and food justice have several characteristics in common (Gottlieb, 2009; Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010; Alkon & Agyeman, 2011) including the goal of environmental and/or agricultural sustainability, and health concerns – such as asthma, obesity, or diabetes – related to systemic inequalities. We will leave these aspects aside to concentrate on “justice” issues: on one hand multiracial organizations striving for inclusive social justice, and on the other hand the

importance given to redistributive spatial justice. The following table (table 1) lists the elements we will use to compare the two movements in this article.

Table 1: Elements for comparison between environmental justice movements and food justice movements

	HUNTS POINT (South Bronx) <i>Environmental justice</i>	JEFFERSON-MACK (Detroit) <i>Food justice</i>
SIMILARITIES		
Themes and interests	Environmental or agricultural “sustainability” Health issues (asthma, obesity, diabetes etc.) related to systemic inequalities	
Activists characteristics	Multiracial grassroots coalitions	
	Overrepresentation of white activists	
“Justice” issues	Redistributive spatial justice <i>Unjust urban environments and unequal access to amenities and resources</i>	
	Inclusive social justice <i>Focus on ethnic minorities and economically challenged population through charity and empowerment actions</i>	
DIFFERENCES		
Mobilization strategies	Oppositional fights	Alternatives initiatives
	Demonstrations, sit-ins, collective rallies, petitions, leafleting, informal information meetings or public meetings.	Urban agriculture, food distributions, food markets.
Action catalysts	Fighting against a noxious infrastructure.	Building community food systems.
Territorial strategies	Establishing parks on brownfields.	Squatting vacant lots to set up urban farms.
Positioning in relation to city authorities	Negotiation with and recognition by City departments.	Municipal political vacancy as an opportunity.

Source: F. Paddeu, 2015.

Multiracial activism fighting for more inclusive social justice

The activists we met mainly focused on two types of differences: racial and class-related⁴. On one hand, the environmental justice and food justice organizations studied in the two neighborhoods are multiracial, reflecting the racial diversity of the

⁴ Although gender differences do exist in the food justice movement in Detroit (White, 2011), they were not a prevailing stake in the neighborhoods we studied.

activists. Founding presidents and executives are often members of the community's ethnic minorities (African-American or Latinos), for instance Mark Covington at Georgia Street Community Garden in Jefferson-Mack or Kellie Terry-Sepulveda at The Point in Hunts Point. Julie Sze (2007) showed that the environmental justice movement in Hunts Point was led by predominantly Black *and* Latino multiracial coalitions with temporarily converging interests. Local environmental issues tend to federate racial communities, committed to a common fight for a better urban environment for all. In Jefferson-Mack, about half of the working members of the organizations involved in food justice are African-Americans. Moreover, these organizations are sensitive to racial and minority issues, and aware that they are often under-represented. At Gleaners Food Bank, culturally appropriate crops corresponding to minority food habits are grown and distributed (Paddeu, 2015). Lauren Baker (2004) demonstrated with the example of community gardens in Chinese, Sri Lankan, Caribbean and Black neighborhoods in Toronto that the choice of crops could become a cultural affirmative tool for marginalized communities.

On the other hand, this minority sensitive attitude is completed with awareness of the economically vulnerable. The organizations in Jefferson-Mack focus on food insecurity. The initiatives undertaken by Earthworks or Greening of Detroit strive to provide free access to fruit and vegetables, plant seeds, cooked meals, as well as educational and professional training food programs. Whenever goods need to be sold, prices remain reasonable. These initiatives follow the tradition of religious organizations for social charity actions. In Jefferson-Mack, the Gleaners organization was founded by a Jesuit Father, Earthworks and the Capuchin Soup Kitchen by Franciscan monks, and several local churches are active in Detroit's urban agriculture initiatives and food movement. When questioned about the reasons for their commitment, quite a few activists mentioned their religious beliefs in the importance of maintaining a relationship with the land and its bearings. Some religious organizations are particularly involved in environmental justice, such as Youth Ministries for Peace and Justice in Hunts Point. As identified by Robert Bullard (1990), participation of members of Black and Latino community churches in pioneer

environmental justice movements was strong in the 1980s. Their acute awareness of social injustices and racial discriminations still has an influence on the movements in Hunts Point.

Yet it would be simplistic to limit the quest for social justice to charity actions: activists in both movements insist on empowerment⁵ through debates on social justice as part of the activities they organize and training in the use of political rhetoric to fight both social and spatial injustices. For example, the “Action” program organized by The Point in Hunts Point teaches teenagers how to use rhetorical tools to promote environmental justice (T.E., interview, March 23, 2012)⁶. This organization therefore holds astonishing end of the year parties during which parents can watch their children demonstrate how unequal the distribution of waste transfer stations is in New York, with figures and maps, to the disadvantage of colored communities. “Youth Farm Stand”, a course organized by Earthworks in Jefferson-Mack, is an entrepreneurship program on farming and produce marketing, but it also includes an introduction to the stakes of social justice as part of its core curriculum:

“And then we have another program for older youth to graduate into, it’s called “Youth Farm Stand”, and these youth are older, they’re twelve to seventeen and they’re growing their own food and they’re selling it at the Market; so it’s a youth entrepreneur program. But they’re also using the process of growing food to address social justice issues in the community.” (T.C., interview, April 26, 2012)

These empowerment strategies are employed by organizations to train future activists and increase the number of active members, by providing them with the political discourse and rhetorical tools used in the fight for social justice.

⁵ The notion of empowerment designates the process enabling an individual or a group to acquire the means to strengthen their ability to take actions leading to their emancipation. It refers both to the notion of power, as in the root of the word, as well as the learning process required to reach this goal. However, it is actually used to express a wide range of concepts and linked to very different practices: individual and collective liberation in feminist movements; a strategy to build “black power” and train leaders in African-American movements; self-development and self-help in the managerial, educational, social or therapeutic fields (Bacqué, 2006).

⁶ In order to respect privacy of interviewees, we chose to establish an anonymous referencing system. The initials do not reflect the actual first and last names of the interviewees.

From local concerns to spatial distribution justice issues

The fight for social justice is connected with spatial distribution justice issues. Activists living in the community always relate their feelings of stigmatization and exclusion to a need to address the issue of unequal distribution of resources and burdens.

In Hunts Point, activists often mentioned spatial distribution injustice compared with other boroughs such as Manhattan⁷, or wealthy residential neighborhoods in the Bronx: “Why shouldn’t our streets look like Park Avenue?” (N.E., interview, March 21, 2012); “Why doesn’t our community have the same resources as other communities, even other poor communities?” (U.K., interview, March 19, 2012); “We saw that as an injustice: Manhattan gets a beautiful coastline, beautiful greenways, beautiful parks. Why? Because they took their garbage facilities off their coastline and moved them to the Bronx.” (Q.M., interview, March 29, 2012). In the interviews, the general feeling is that Hunts Point is a dump for garbage from wealthy white communities. Yet our research shows that the mobilizations for environmental burden issues also address their unequal distribution at the city scale (Paddeu, 2015). Organizations in Hunts Point have assimilated the concept of “borough equity” developed by the organization OWN, *i.e.* the idea that each borough should process its own waste. The goal is to attain more equitable spatial burden distribution so that waste processing is shared fairly, instead of passing the problem on to other communities.

Although the academic term “food desert” is rarely used by activists in Jefferson-Mack, the related symptoms of spatial injustice are often mentioned. They commonly complain about mobility issues due to the near total absence of public transportation, urban sprawl, and the low rate of motorized households. The poor dietary quality of the produce sold at local shops where fringe retailers (Gallagher, 2007) are the only businesses selling food in food deserts (one-dollar stores, mini-marts, liquor stores, gas stations, etc.) is also strongly criticized (picture 3). In Jefferson-Mack, urban agricultural initiatives to multiply local sales points are thus a

⁷ Manhattan, the richest *borough* of New York City, produces 40 % of the city commercial waste, entirely processed in outer boroughs such as Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens (Sze, 2007: 116).

response to spatial distribution justice issues in terms of food accessibility (roadside stands, markets) in the community.

Picture 3: Fringe retailers in Jefferson-Mack



Off Jefferson-Mack, a liquor store at the intersection of Ellery Street and Gratiot Avenue.

Source: C. Ruggeri, 2015.

Ultimately, what emerges from our analysis of the two movements is the existence of common theoretical goals for more justice, both socially and racially more inclusive and spatially more redistributive. In this sense, there is a common lineage that clearly links the two movements together in their strive for justice, rather than a lineage from

one movement down to another. Yet, despite close political standpoints, their territorial strategies and collective actions differ dramatically: of common lineage, the two movements clearly diverge when their practices are compared.

Two independent movements with different practices: environmental justice protest actions and alternative food justice initiatives

Despite a common lineage, our field study of the two movements reveals rather dissembling features and practices.

In Hunts Point, environmental protest actions with growing awareness of food issues

The forms of action of what some interviewees in Hunts Point called “a long standing battle” (U.K., interview, March 19, 2012) are characteristic of environmental justice protest, with systematic protest and criticism of existing institutions, the establishment, and the social context. Both members of the community and professional activists described their actions explicitly with vocabulary referring to a fight, collective protest (*to campaign, to march, to rally*), and political claims (*advocacy, activism*). The range of environmental justice actions includes demonstrations, collective rallies, sit-ins (to get rid of the NYOFCo plant, for instance), petitions, leafleting, informal information meetings (to gain support for the destruction of the Sheridan Expressway or inform residents about unfair distribution of waste transfer stations), or else participation at public meetings. In his groundbreaking research, Robert Bullard emphasized the strong heritage of civil rights movements in traditional environmental justice activism (Bullard, 1990; Taylor, 2000). The tools listed here correspond to those used both in civil rights and environmental justice activism.

The way the interviewees relate the story of their successful actions is also evocative of protest movements. From their perspective, the actions in Hunts Point are remarkably consistent in their fights for well-identified causes, and in particular the long-term fights against noxious infrastructures— *i.e.* the fertilizer plant NYOFCo or

the Sheridan Expressway –, lasting one or two decades. Some activists remember hearing about the eventual destruction of the Sheridan Expressway when they were still children. Most of them agree that one of the reasons why their movements are successful is their perseverance over the years; the relentless determination of the organizations; constant pressure exerted on public authorities and private parties; as well as unceasing, coherent protest actions carried out to attain an unwavering goal. In their opinion, these strategies counterbalance their community organizations' intrinsically weaker position in terms of financial capital and control of political and legal levers (U.K., interview, March 19, 2012), enabling them to change living conditions in the community.

In Hunts Point, turning brownfields into public parks (picture 4) is the privileged form of action to favor environmental amenities, with fewer actions in favor of urban agriculture or community gardens. Although the latter are sometimes mentioned by activists, their precarious legal status⁸ makes them less attractive as amenities for durable change of local territories. Instead, organizations have invested in their relationship with the Department of Parks and Recreations, through the Bronx River Alliance in particular, whose expertise is dedicated to greening urban areas.

⁸ Despite private foundations such as Trust for Public Land which are dedicated to securing land for community gardens and entrusting maintenance to community organizations (Reynolds, 2015), the climate between community gardens and local authorities is still contentious (Cohen, Reynolds & Sanghvi, 2012). In November 2011, for example, the NYC Housing Preservation and Development decided on the destruction of the Morning Glory Garden in Mott Haven, a neighborhood in South Bronx, for a housing project.

Picture 4: Concrete Plant Park in Hunts Point

Park built along the Bronx River in 2009 on a brownfield by the Department of Parks and Recreations, in response to a local grassroots movement.

Source: F. Paddeu, 2012.

Yet more and more environmental justice organizations are including “food justice” in their programs. The Point has set up an urban garden, as part of a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) network, and one of their educational programs is explicitly focused on food justice. Oak Point, a brownfield where the fertilizer plant NYOFCo was located, is also representative of this shift. When the legal decision was taken to demolish the plant, a strong symbolic victory for the environmental justice movement, the 27-acre brownfield was to be dedicated to an environmental project.

A food market project, designed to improve food access in a neighborhood considered to be a food desert, is currently being examined. Local farming cooperatives from less than 150 miles (New York State, New Jersey and Pennsylvania) would sell their produce at the market on the waterfront in a complex also including a public recreational park and some wildlife areas (Q.M., interview, March 29, 2012). These projects could be the sign of a new development of hybrid actions mixing environmental justice and food justice. Or else food justice issues might be gaining interest to the detriment of environmental justice issues. One of the recent protest actions was to get Fresh Direct – a fresh produce distributor recently installed in the South Bronx – to distribute its produce locally⁹. The issue was explicitly presented by environmental justice organizations as a case of food injustice.

In Jefferson-Mack, alternative food justice initiatives disconnected from environmental justice movements

The food justice initiatives in Jefferson-Mack are alternative practices. The term “alternative economic practices” was conceptualized for instance by Manuel Castells and a group of researchers to study the emergence of a new post-crisis economic culture, corresponding to a spontaneous adaptation of individual lifestyles to the constraints and opportunities arising from the crisis (Castells, Caraça & Cardoso, 2012). According to them, alternative economic practices are “conscious practices oriented toward a use value economy” (*ibid.*: 213) including “a wide range of economic activities taking place – from urban gardening to cooperative childcare – that do not involve the exchange of money” (*ibid.*: 230). There are three forms of each, *i.e.* “self-sufficiency”, “altruism”, and “exchange and cooperation” (*ibid.*: 231). *Self-sufficiency* occurs when individuals do something themselves instead of buying goods or services: growing fruits and vegetables in community gardens and urban

⁹ See Winnie Hu, “FreshDirect Expands Delivery to Serve All of the Bronx”, *The New York Times*, May 23, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/24/nyregion/freshdirect-expands-delivery-to-all-parts-of-the-bronx.html>, last consulted on May 12, 2015, and “Residents Sue FreshDirect Over Move to the Bronx”, *The New York Times*, March 4, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/05/nyregion/residents-sue-freshdirect-over-move-to-the-bronx.html>, last consulted on May 12, 2015.

agriculture, distributing the produce through alternative networks, limiting dependence to conventional agro-food networks and chains. In Jefferson-Mack, some organizations, such as Earthworks, advocate and work for more food self-reliance (T.C., interview, April 26, 2012). *Altruism* consists in accomplishing tasks or providing services that have a market value without receiving any money in exchange. Examples of this form are charity distribution at food banks such as Gleaners or at soup kitchens such as Capuchin Soup Kitchen, or else volunteering at community farms. Lastly, *exchange and cooperation* consist in exchanging goods or services – bartering or other forms – without using money, for instance exchanges among neighbors (at Farnsworth community garden, people swap honey for DIY and computer services) (interview, K.T., May 10, 2012) or between activists and neighbors (at Earthworks urban farm, neighbors lend their tools in exchange for fruits and vegetables).

These practices in Jefferson-Mack correspond less to social activism than efforts to create a safety net of local community food structures (Feenstra, 1997). They are dedicated to the development of urban agriculture and the physical construction of structures intended to provide better access to food – seed planting days, building greenhouses, cleaning up parcels of land. No demonstrations, sit-ins, or petitions, but numerous informal and formal meetings – with the Detroit Food Policy Council, for example – and some participation at public meetings. Protest is not absent but it is less predominant: although Detroit’s food justice movement actively fought Hantz Farms, a large commercial urban farming project on the East Side, and advocated for the amendment to legalize urban agriculture, these actions remain numerically limited and secondary on the list of activists’ priorities. Their concerns focus mainly on the emerging local agro-food system involving collaboration between urban farms, soup kitchens, food banks, and food stands or markets at community gardens and urban farms (picture 5), as well as the development of Eastern Market, a food market and logistic platform located near the downtown area (Mogk, Kwiatkowski & Weindorf, 2008).

Picture 5: A food market in Jefferson-Mack



A sign announcing a food market at the entrance of Earthworks urban farm.

Source: F. Paddeu, 2012.

Compared with the general consensus of lineage between environmental justice and food justice, food justice activists have surprisingly little to say about environmental justice movements, which they hardly ever mention. In Detroit, the two movements belong to separate worlds, the food justice organizations stemming from urban agriculture and community gardens projects whereas the environmental justice movement is the offspring of actions to fight industrial pollution. Even though they feel concerned by environmental issues, environmental *justice* issues are not actually on the agenda of the food justice organizations. They are of course aware that most of the input, processing, and transportation strategies used in the global food system have a major noxious environmental impact, which they strive to reduce. The environmental footprint of the agro-food system, measured in "food miles", is

supposed to be limited by reorganizing produce distribution networks. Organic farming would also help to reduce pesticide dependence.

Where did these differences in operational modalities originate and what do they mean? Are they due to the “nature” of the issues each of the movements address? Is it the way they choose to fight for social justice that differs? Do local contexts favor some modalities more than others?

Improving the local environment while striving for social justice? The uncertain bet of environmental and food justice movements

The contrasts between the two movements and the discrepancy between a common political stand and different mobilization strategies and practices can be interpreted in the light of specific urban contexts and in terms of the literature on social justice.

Recontextualizing the differences: strategic positioning in relation to city authorities

If the environmental justice movement includes mainly protest actions whereas the food justice movement includes mainly alternative practices, this does not correspond to two forms with a hierarchical relationship, in which one movement would be more or less radical or critical than the other one. Instead, in our case, they represent adaptation to a local context in terms of municipal public policies. Indeed, the oppositional nature of environmental justice actions in Hunts Point coexists with a strategy of negotiation with and recognition by city departments, such as the Parks and Recreation Department; while the alternative nature of food justice actions in Detroit can be related to the situation of political vacancy in the city, particularly affecting the provision of urban services.

In Hunts Point, the fight against environmental pollution is used as a political tool of negotiation in order to establish more green areas on the released vacant industrial lots. By addressing pollution, activists manage to urge public authorities to offset the damage suffered by the community. Yet the detrimental impact on health in the context of sanitary hazards is very difficult to assess and compensate at the

community level (Bullard, 1990: 95). The municipal government therefore opted for a public park as a long-term compensation benefiting the entire community. This symbolic gesture – replacing a factory with a park – confers public authorities with a role as the amends makers, implementing an environmentally “sustainable” solution after having turned a blind eye on these spatial injustices or even promoted them. This tool is well integrated in the strategies of the environmental justice organizations, as evidenced by the case of the fight against the NYOFCo plant. In 2010, the Hunts Point Awareness Committee obtained through legal settlement that the vacant land released by the closing down of the factory would be devoted to a green space for the local community. The same strategy is being used in the case of the mobilization against the Sheridan Expressway: some of the interviewees point out that even if the struggle is not successful, the coalition could keep working in order to obtain more land for their greening projects (I.R., interview, April 3, 2012). These negotiation strategies are most understandable in the land dynamics context of New York – the resulting pressure and search for capital, even in the South Bronx – especially on the waterfront. Hence grassroots organizations are often unable to reclaim vacant lots to create parks without the legal and financial support of the Department of Parks and Recreation. A strategy of partnership with the municipal government is increasingly opted for instead of more spontaneous precarious reclamation such as squatting, which is common in the case of urban gardens.

In Jefferson-Mack, political vacancy constitutes a favorable condition for alternative practices. Marginal yet pragmatic solutions can be implemented rapidly and autonomously, to address issues affecting the daily lives of residents. The advanced state of crisis in Detroit incites food justice organizations to take collective actions to solve urgent, vital problems, namely food insecurity and lack of accessibility. The fact that the City of Detroit is indebted and can no longer provide services or control land use, has actually made the reclamation of vacant spaces for urban agriculture possible. The withdrawal of the municipal government paves the way for civil self-organization and the implementation of alternative projects. Julie Hernandez identified a similar situation in New Orleans with what she referred to as

“substitutional reconstruction capital” (*capital de reconstruction de substitution*), i.e. the sum of strategies and resources aiming at compensating for municipal shortcomings in terms of infrastructure and services (2010: 392).

Even if residents do not actually want to get involved in alternative and often illegal activities, they remain the only way to implement projects, as the municipal apparatus is paralyzed. In Jefferson-Mack, political vacancy is even seen as an opportunity by activists. Unlike “substitutional reconstruction capital” (Hernandez, 2010), not only is it considered an offset for the municipal void in Detroit, but it is also considered an asset for the development of alternative practices. The absence of regulation thus becomes a condition for successful “guerrilla” urban agriculture. Questioned about a new municipal legislation legalizing – and securing – urban agriculture in Detroit, an activist explained that “we were pretty successful in the vacuum of regulation. So it’s scary to move from a place where guerrilla gardening was really doing a huge service to us to a legal status that presents a lot more barriers, frankly” (B.B., interview, May 29, 2013). For them, the current permissive situation is far more attractive because it gives them opportunities they would never have in a more conventional politically controlled framework. Unlike radical approaches, which confront the hegemonic political-economic system openly, urban alternative initiatives do not oppose the system (global food system, neoliberalism, entrepreneurialism...) directly. Instead, they try to use space that has slipped out of public control (Holt Gimenez & Shattuck, 2010).

Reconciling betterment of the local environment with the fight for redistributive and inclusive social justice?

Ultimately, for environmental justice movements as for food justice movements, each in their own way, what seems to prevail over the advent of social justice both redistributive and inclusive, is the ability to bring about change at the local level and improve the living environment.

We have noted the importance of the distributive paradigm in legitimizing actions taken to reduce spatial injustices such as building more green spaces, or increasing

the number of food retail outlets. This perspective does not focus on eliminating but on reducing inequalities, favoring remedial policies without challenging the control of resources by a minority and the structures of domination. As suggested by the following comment of one of our interviewees in Hunts Point, urging the authorities to build a park is a “politically correct” request, disregarding all issues of racial, social and economic oppression:

“When you talk about environmental issues you really are dealing with something that no one can deny in that sense. It may be more difficult to talk about race, to talk about economics, poverty. (...) All of those issues are more difficult to tackle. The environmental issues feel easier, because they are less contentious. All the other issues are more dramatic. (...) First we can build this pretty greenway and then we can talk about power.” (U.K., interview, March 19, 2012)

Although pragmatically efficient, the risk with this strategy is that once the “pretty greenway” is built, the question of the distribution of power will never be raised. In the case of food justice movements, building local food security nets may limit their actions to remedial work, failing to challenge the roots of the inequalities.

Multiculturalists and feminist critiques of Rawls criticize the distributive perspective for not sufficiently integrating the issue of the recognition of difference (Young, 2000). According to them, the question of the right to difference is essential in bringing about an inclusive spatial justice because the physical realization of diversity implies mixed uses and incomes, accessibility of public spaces for all classes, races, ethnicities and genders (Fainstein, 2005). Although inclusion is explicitly expressed as a goal by interviewees in both movements, a less radical strain of environmental and food justice activism remains highly monopolized by more affluent non-community activists who are usually white and better educated. In Jefferson-Mack, although the presence of African Americans in the food justice landscape is well established and it would be exaggerated to tag it as a “white movement”, the former still remain underrepresented compared to the racial composition of the community, where they account for 91 % of the population (US Census Bureau, 2012). As Caucasians account for 6.7 % of the population in Jefferson-Mack and 1.3 % of the population in Hunts

Point (*ibid.*), they are overrepresented in the local organizational networks. Moreover, the activists – whether Black, Latino or Caucasian – claiming to be community spokesmen are not representative, often belonging to the most educated fringe of the community, or cumulating more capitals (social, economic, cultural and/or academic) than the average resident. Concerning the food justice movement, we believe the nearly systematic, widespread use of volunteers constitutes a decisive factor in making it a less inclusive movement: the volunteer population, often drawn from charity or educational networks, tends to be mostly white and upper middle-class. At the urban farm Earthworks, the gap between the social and racial markers the volunteers illustrate and the grassroots members is patent, as the volunteers are suburban, school children, students, retirees, or foreign visitors (France, Germany, Australia, Japan, etc.) (T.C., interview, April 26, 2012). In Detroit, the recent involvement of young, educated people, often living in the city center and interested in urban agriculture, also prompts a “whitening” of the food justice movement. With better financial resources to purchase land and the economic support of foundations, their arrival arouses some suspicion from Detroit native long-term activists who are struggling to overcome their difficulties. For one of the activists interviewed, legalizing urban agriculture and encouraging new farm operations is likely to exacerbate social inequities between urban farmers:

“I think that there is a lot of interest by young people who don’ t live in the city currently, that want to do farming in the city. Now that it’s legal, I expect that people with the means are going to buy the land. The problem is there is a lot of people here that don’t necessarily have the means that are going to feel they are pushed out... So the social justice issues within urban agriculture may be exacerbated.” (L.V., interview, June 5, 2013)

Interestingly enough, according to Tornaghi (2014), the scientific literature too often sidesteps the dynamics of inequalities and injustices in the urban agriculture community, which are becoming all the more perceptible with the rise of the food justice movement.

Conclusion

Our purpose was to question the lineage and explore the parallel between environmental justice and food justice, studying activists' movements in two low-income American neighborhoods. In a South Bronx neighborhood suffering environmental pollutions and nuisances and a lack of environmental amenities, and in a neighborhood on the East Side of Detroit constituting a food desert, the organizations strive for redistributive spatial justice and a fairer distribution of burdens and resources. They also aim at a more inclusive social justice, focusing their attention on ethnic minorities and economically vulnerable populations. Although the organizations are multiracial often with colored leaders, white activists are still over-represented, and local activists belong to the fringe of the community concentrating the most capital (cultural, social, economic, etc.).

Despite some similarities and contrary to the general acknowledgment in the literature (Gottlieb & Fisher, 1996; Mares & Peña, 2011), we highlight that the two movements share a common goal for justice rather than a lineage from one movement to another. Not only do they not use the same organizational tools but they now seem largely independent, developing in their own direction within their own networks. Even if there may have been a common origin, no vital relationship or practices in common seem to prevail in the current dynamics of collective action in the two movements. On the contrary, environmental justice movements are oppositional while food justice movements focus on the development of alternative practices. We also show that each movement has a different relationship to the other one. The environmental justice movement in the South Bronx has gradually incorporated food justice issues whereas the food justice movements in Detroit appear largely disconnected from environmental justice movements. Today, some activists even refer to them as "rivals" because they believe food justice movements are stealing the limelight from environmental justice movements.

Finally, the observed environmental and food justice mobilizations opt for actions that better the local environment and improve the everyday life of the community. Social justice cannot be improved only by modifying the urban landscape and

environment. Although systemic racial and social inequalities are frequently mentioned by activists, their practices remain limited to restorative actions of distributive justice – *i.e.* offsetting the closing down of a factory by creating a park, compensating the lack of food retail shops by a market or a soup kitchen. As for gaining a more inclusive social justice, the prevailing charity model remains somewhat problematic, even if it is supplemented by an empowerment process designed to share knowledge and skills with the community. The ability of the activists to represent the whole local community, especially the most marginalized part, is nevertheless jeopardized. Lastly, these mobilizations involve actions and narratives that should be interpreted in the light of specific territorial and community contexts: it remains challenging for them to reconcile local issues with their fights for justice.

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To quote this article: "From one movement to another? Comparing environmental justice activism and food justice alternative practices" *justice spatiale | spatial justice*, n°9 January 2016, <http://www.jssj.org>

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