

“Just” ecopreneurs: re-conceptualizing green transitions and entrepreneurship

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Abstract

Economic, environmental, and social limits of the current capitalist mode of production have led to a rethinking and reconceptualisation of economic processes and models including the role of businesses in sustainable development. While green economies and more specifically green entrepreneurs have been identified as agents of change that can challenge the mainstream and seek to induce environmental, social, and ethical transformation of society, much research has stayed within existing models of thinking predominantly rooted in technocratic approaches (e.g., ecological modernisation and more recently transition studies). This paper seeks to offer an alternative understanding of green entrepreneurship that breaks open these discussions using an environmental justice frame that focuses on the role of extra-economic discourses in shaping the social relations of economic systems. By drawing on an exemplary case study of ‘just’ entrepreneurship from Boston, Massachusetts, USA, the paper seeks to start a conversation around the ideas of green entrepreneurship and environmental justice as vehicles to deliver potentially broader system changes and explores both conceptual and practical aspects of green development. As such, it offers (1) evidence of a just green economy that can be realised within existing capitalist structures as well as (2) a different conceptual entry point to understanding green entrepreneurship.

Keywords: Just entrepreneurship, ecopreneur, environmental justice, innovation, urban sustainability

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1. Introduction

The notions of a 'green economy', 'green growth', and the role of (small) businesses as green entrepreneurs (or ecopreneurs) are widely adopted and promoted as a pathway to overcome economic, environmental and social limits of the current capitalist mode of production in both research and policy documents (UNEP 2011, OECD 2013, Bina 2013). While a green economy has been defined as 'low carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive' (UNEP 2011, p. 16), ideological debates rage on how to address issues related to economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity including significant differences in emphasis and focus. Considerable attention has been directed towards technological innovations emphasising environmental and economic sustainability objectives, for example, through ecological modernisation in the transportation, energy, and building sectors. Research on climate policies and the commodification of nature (e.g., carbon markets), however, reveals considerable limitations of the reformed capitalist growth regime driven by ecological modernization and transition studies thinking (Redclift 2009, Bailey *et al.* 2011, Böhm *et al.* 2012, Brown *et al.* 2014, Kenis and Lievens 2015a, 2015b). As a consequence, these technocratic approaches have triggered 'international calls for a radical transformation of current development practices and transitions towards a *just* green economy' (Davies, 2013: 1286, emphasis added) that question objectives of growth for growth's sake and postulate a deeper rethinking and reconceptualisation of economic processes and models (see also Kenis and Lievens 2015a, Schulz and Bailey 2014).

In response to these calls for a *just* green economy, we explore the proposition that businesses, and small businesses in particular, have a role to play in responding to the challenges of the economic, social, and environmental crisis (see also North 2015). We do so through an environmental justice frame that brings together work on green entrepreneurship and the green economy with the literature on environmental justice (Agyeman 2013, Agyeman *et al.* 2003, Walker 2012). Environmental justice is both a social movement and a body of academic literature that addresses environmental injustices through increased environmental risks of the disadvantaged or their reduced access to environmental benefits (e.g., clean water and air, green spaces). Since its formation in the mid-1980s, environmental justice evolved from articulating the kind of world that "we don't want" to expressing "the world that we do want" including new ways of doing business. Jones (2008) of "Green for All" exemplifies this idea arguing that disadvantaged populations that were largely locked out of the old economy and suffering from its externalities could figure importantly in the green economy. Jones (2008) envisioned a small business that could promote pollution prevention and poverty at the same time. While incorporated into policies and promoted at the US national level through, for example, Jones' (2008) 'green-collar' jobs campaign, environmental justice is still largely practiced as social activism on the fringe in response to identified local injustices. We argue that the environmental justice movement can offer both core values (ethics) and tools (skillsets, networks) to harness individuals and activists as 'just' ecopreneurs who bring about social change and help communities to benefit economically by being part of the environmental solution.

We introduce the notion of 'just entrepreneurship' drawing on Agyeman's 'just sustainabilities' concept as a vehicle for environmentally and socially just change through

innovative business ideas (Agyeman 2013). ‘Just’ entrepreneurs, as we will illustrate, are those business innovators who have a green business orientation and take on a business model that reflects the embeddedness of environmental and social justice concerns up and down the supply chain, for example, by explicitly incorporating jobs for the disadvantaged. By drawing on an exemplary case study of just entrepreneurship from Boston (MA), the paper seeks to start a conversation around the ideas of green entrepreneurship and environmental justice as vehicles to deliver potentially broader system changes and explores both conceptual and practical aspects of green development. Our discussion is based on research involving 19 semi-structured interviews with leaders in the environmental justice movement in the larger Boston region conducted between April and June 2013. Interviews focused on origins and motivations of environmental justice activists and their work as well as the impact and consequences of activism including the mobilisation, transfer, and spread of ideas, practices, and skills. The example offers evidence of a just green economy that can be realised within existing capitalist structures. In contrast to the technocratic focus of ecological modernisation and transition studies that addresses the challenges of resource depletion and pollution proposing ecologically sustainable and economically viable business solutions (win-win), the presented environmental justice frame uses social sustainability as the starting point for green entrepreneurship to realize a triple bottom line (win-win-win). It does so by proposing a business model that is not driven by profit-maximization and rational choice but by ethical considerations, alternative norms, and values (North 2015).

The paper is structured as follows. The next section discusses proposals around the green economy examining calls by policy-makers, think tanks, and academics for incorporating justice and equity explicitly into economic policies and practices. Section 3 focuses more specifically on the role of small-businesses as agents of change in sustainability transitions by reviewing the literature both on green entrepreneurship and related work on the social economy. We believe that by bringing together the economic change literature with environmental justice, we can better explain new justice-oriented economic growth scenarios. Section 4 elaborates on the idea of just entrepreneurship introducing an illustrative example through the case study of Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE) and the work of its co-founder Charlie Lord in privatising his justice oriented work in the city.

2. The green economy

Debates around the limits of the current (advanced) capitalist mode of production consist of voices from a variety of academic and policy quarters. There is now widespread recognition that economic crisis is no one-dimensional phenomenon but much more complex and needs to be seen as part of wider social and environmental systems. For example, economists from organisations that range from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to The World Bank and the New Economics Foundation have called for “quality of life” to be incorporated into economic indicators. They argue that production and exchange through formal markets (measured in GDP) are insufficient for understanding human and environmental well-being and highlight the economic importance of opening up economic thinking to a broader set of social concerns (Kubiszewski et al. 2013, Costanza et al. 2015). Similarly, Joseph Stiglitz, former chief

economist of the World Bank, along with other well-known economists, prepared a white paper on how human well-being is measured largely criticising GDP as too narrow ignoring the multiple ways that prosperity for some has led to the exploitation of others as well as questioning the ideology of growth that has become naturalised over the past decades (Stiglitz 2010, North 2015).

One widely promoted solution emerging out of the 2008 economic crisis has been the notion of a green economy which seeks to integrate economic growth, environmental sustainability, and social equity. The idea of a green economy is not new. Agenda 21 sought to put these values on the economic agenda two decades ago, the Millennium Development goals did later. But it was in the wake of the 2008 economic crisis that the green economy has been broadly promoted as *Leitbild* and development strategy internationally and as part of national, regional, and even local development strategies. A green economy is commonly referred to as an economy 'that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities' (UNEP 2011, p. 16). The Green Economy Coalition (GEC), the world's largest green economy multi-stakeholder initiative, defines a green economy as 'a resilient economy that provides a better quality of life *for all* within the ecological limits of the planet' (GEC 2012, emphasis added).

Greater interest in 'green new deals', in particular, and the 'green economy', in general, arose out of the financial crisis in 2009 which appeared to threaten the whole foundation of the capitalist system. Green new deals were proposed as a way to: transform and re-regulate the international financial sector; provide an opportunity for state intervention to redirect, or at least encourage, restructuring towards new economic forms - i.e. a 'green' or 'low carbon' economy; and finally, to address issues of 'peak oil' or the 'energy crunch' associated with dependence on oil. As Bowen et al (2009: 4) comment:

If the appropriate mix of policies is adopted, action to tackle climate change could form a central part of a fiscal package designed to moderate the economic slowdown. The development of a low-carbon economy can provide new jobs and new opportunities for innovative businesses. A 'green' fiscal stimulus can be a more effective fiscal stimulus, building the foundations for sustainable, strong growth in the future, rather than unsustainable bubbles.

After the credit crunch, a number of agencies and institutions responded by identifying sectors to be targeted for investment by national government stimulation packages as a way out of financial as well as environmental crisis (SDC, 2009). Thus for the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) the solution to both climate change and financial crisis is a green industrial revolution with investment in clean technologies, renewable energy, waste management, sustainable agriculture, green cities, and ecosystems management (UNEP, 2008). A report from HSBC Bank identified four main areas for investment opportunities: low-carbon energy production; energy efficiency and energy management; water, waste, and pollution control; and carbon finance (HSBC, 2009). In 2008 the US introduced the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act (ESSA) with a \$700 billion rescue package for the financial sector, with tax cuts and credits for renewable

energy sectors. Subsequently the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) introduced a \$787 billion package, including \$492 billion of new spending.

ARRA provided a \$22.5 billion stimulus to the renewable energy sector through a mix of tax credits, capital subsidies, loan guarantees and grants, as well as incentives for carbon capture and storage projects (HSBC, 2009). In addition, ARRA allocates \$52 billion to energy efficiency measures for buildings, low carbon vehicles, the electricity grid, and a modal shift to rail and mass transit. Finally, the plan invests \$16bn in flood protection, environmental restoration, navigation infrastructure, and drinking water in rural areas. Globally, the US ARRA represents the largest overall global financial commitment to a green new deal¹ with \$26 billion for low carbon power, \$27.5 billion for energy efficiency in buildings, \$4bn for low carbon vehicles, \$10 billion for rail, and \$11 billion to upgrade the electricity grid (SDC, 2009). Green and social activists have argued that ARRA represents an opportunity for the restructuring of the US economy:

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act offers more than economic relief to a struggling nation. It is a chance for state and local leaders to pursue innovative strategies that can benefit people and the planet, demonstrate the equity and employment promise of a green economy, and lift up new models that federal policymakers can learn from to inform future legislation...Smart implementation of the Recovery Act can build the foundation of an inclusive green economy and lay the groundwork for the long-term policy changes necessary to create a more equitable, sustainable and greener America. (Fox et al., 2009: 16)

As the examples from the US illustrates, the green economy concept has quickly become incorporated into national (as well as supra- and sub-national) development strategies but similarly to the notion of sustainability, it has suffered from its elasticity in terms of how it has been interpreted. As Bailey and Caprotti (2014, p. 1798) argue, 'one striking feature [...] is the range of meanings being attached to the green economy'. While the core idea of a green economy explicitly incorporates justice and equity in economic strategies and policies and underlines the economic importance of opening up economic thinking to a broader set of social relations, approaches and strategies of a green economy vary widely. While broader notions of social needs, well-being, and quality of life are at least rhetorically part of a green economy, criticism of the green economy has grown louder in particular related to the use and hollowing out of the concept to align it with sustained growth (Bailey et al. 2011, Kenis and Lievens 2015, Schulz and Bailey 2014). In their introduction to a special issue, Caprotti and Bailey (2014, p. 197) argue that the green economy is now largely used as 'discursive strategy which strongly conjoins what is green with strategies amenable to business, products and services' in particular ignoring social dimensions.

In her analysis of green economy documents and proposals, Bina (2013) distinguishes between 'almost business as usual', 'greening' and 'all change' proposals with most documents falling into the first two categories illustrating the predominance of weak sustainability interpretations. She argues that 'objectives, priorities, and solutions to the

¹ Although South Korea (80.5%) and China (37.8%) have larger proportions of their overall stimulus devoted to green spending.

crises in the greening category are understood through the lens of mainstream economics and elements of environmental economics' (Bina 2013, p. 1034).

Bina's (2013) analysis reflects the promotion of green technology in the vein of ecological modernisation and the more recent work on sustainability transitions. Focused on understanding changes in socio-technical systems towards more environmentally friendly modes of production and consumption, research on sustainability transitions has recently attracted significant research interest featuring predominantly sectoral or national analysis, for example, in the transportation, energy, and building sectors (Markard et al. 2012, Emelianoff 2014, McCauley and Stephens 2012, O'Neill and Gibbs 2014). Both ecological modernisation and transition studies are based on the assumption that climate change mitigation (or environmental sustainability more broadly) requires some form of technological innovation. It is the strong technocratic focus of the perspectives that has been criticised as it tends to neglect socio-political dimensions of change including power relationships but also spatial dimensions (Lawhon and Murphy 2011, Meadowcroft 2011). There is a tendency of sector-specific or localised green economy research to detach the greening process from broader goals of sustainability. For example, the large majority of work on green technologies – represented by the contributions to a series of sessions on eco-innovation and sustainability at the Geography of Innovation Conference (Coenen and Hekkert 2014) – focuses on the diffusion and adoption of new technologies conflating green with sustainable. Empirically rich, these contributions are quite effective in analysing changes to profitability and mainstreaming of green innovations but rarely consider broader environmental costs (e.g., resource intensive manufacturing processes of green or alternative technologies) and social implications (unequal access) of greening strategies.

Cook and Smith (2012) as well as Davies and Mullin (2011) rightly criticise the lack of attention given to issues of inclusivity and social and distributive justice in the green economy literature. Green economic restructuring cannot just ignore social sustainability objectives but also deepen social inequalities (Kenis and Lievens 2015). For example, green products and policies can cater towards high-end green consumerism (or eco-elitism). Grover (2014) in his study on the funding schemes of small-scale PV systems in the UK revealed uneven access to subsidies and uneven distribution of the cost burden through feed-in tariffs that largely disadvantage lower income groups and poorer neighbourhoods and regions. At a different scale, Bailey et al. (2011, p. 697) raise similar issues in their analysis of carbon emission trading in the EU and the global market questioning "the ideological foundations and social, environmental and spatial consequences of the new carbon economy".

Another strong characteristic of the green economy is the focus on the role of (small) businesses to deliver solutions. Green or sustainable entrepreneurs are seen as agents of change (Jones 2008; Schaper 2012). While proponents emphasise how sustainability can pay out economically rejecting previous incompatibilities between the economy and environment, critics argue that environmental concerns become subordinated to profitability for example through new commodification of the environment (e.g. ecosystem services) (Kenis and Lievens 2015b). With increased consumption, even with greater resource efficiencies, the environmental and social contradictions of growth and inequality remain, especially around climate change and fossil fuels (see Schulz 2012 and Schulz and Bailey 2014 on post-growth economies) even

though positions on green growth vary (Jänicke 2012).² These points link to earlier calls for a departure from business as usual and the corporate sector as the change agent that focuses on the moral and ethical responsibilities of businesses. Eden (1996), for example, provides an analysis of the motivations of businesses to be green revealing different drivers behind greening. In their analysis of corporate social responsibility (CSR), Porter and Kramer (2006) critique CSR on a variety of fronts, from measurement to benefit. They characterise CSR activities as ‘aggregated anecdotes about uncoordinated initiatives to demonstrate a company’s social sensitivity’ (2006, p. 81). It is the bolted on feel of CSR that is striking to Porter and Kramer, however. They suggest that these initiatives, instead of focusing on the interdependence between business and society and by extension, their host community, they focus on the tensions. For them, ‘[t]he power of corporations to create social benefit is dissipated, and so is the potential of companies to take actions that would support both their communities and their business goals’ (Porter and Kramer 2006, p. 83). These criticisms of the green economy and corporate greening emphasise the need to redirect the economy away from growth for growth’s sake to one that includes, qualitatively, people and their environment, highlighting the need for social sustainability (Agyeman 2013, Davies and Mullin 2011). In the next sections, we seek to contribute to this debate by bringing together literature on the green economy and more specifically on green entrepreneurship with environmental justice to highlight the role of just and green enterprises.

3. Sustainable entrepreneurship

While governments have a crucial role to play in setting a stage for an ecologically viable and socially just society, we focus here on the role of the private sector and small businesses in particular and their role in transitions towards a green economy. ‘Ecopreneurship matters because it also has the potential to be a major force in the overall transition to a more sustainable business paradigm’ (Schaper 2010, p. 11). In the US (and increasingly elsewhere) attention has focused on small businesses as important drivers of economic recovery. In the US, small businesses, created by entrepreneurs, have provided 66% of new jobs since the 1970s. Moreover, the 23 million small businesses in the US employ 54% of the working population. Even more provocative is that since 1990 big business has eliminated 4 million jobs in the US, while small businesses have created 8 million (US Small Business Administration 2014). At the same time small businesses are creating new jobs, the incidence of green jobs and ecopreneurship has grown. With the sector employing over 2.9 million people in the US, the green sector of the economy has become an area of aspiration for many economic development strategies, but, at the same time, it has proven difficult to measure just what green is (Brookings 2011).

In the US, a green job is one ‘that produces goods or provides services that benefit the environment or conserve natural resources, or, where workers’ duties involve making their establishment’s production processes more environmentally friendly or use fewer natural resources’ (BLS 2010). Similarly, in Europe, policy makers define a green job as those set of producers of technologies, goods and services that: (1) measure, control,

² Proponents of decroissance or de-growth like Georgescu-Roegen and Latouche have centred their analysis of resource extraction and growth around environmental justice and social equity concerns.

restore, prevent, treat, minimise, research and sensitise environmental damages to air, water, and soil as well as problems related to waste, noise, biodiversity and landscapes. This includes 'cleaner' technologies, goods, and services that prevent or minimise pollution; or (2) measure, control, restore, prevent, minimise, research, and sensitise resource depletion. This results mainly in resource-efficient technologies, goods, and services that minimise the use of natural resources.

With respect to uneven processes of development, the literature offers two entry points to trace and explain shifts in the role of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking as part of emerging sustainability transitions. The first strand is concerned with environment-economy relations and their translation into a green economy with emphasis on technological innovations, institutional changes, and shifts in governance that follow the rules of the markets and predominant logics of capital accumulation and growth. Green entrepreneurs are usually defined as profit seeking and hence excluding the non-profits sector that has been at the centre of the second strand of literature that primarily responds to social inequalities and the role of non-profits and social enterprises.

The relatively recent literature on green entrepreneurship emphasises the potential role of ecopreneurs as agents of change towards a greener society (Walton and Kirkwood 2013). Within the literature, considerable emphasis has been placed on definitions, classifications, and typologies of green entrepreneurs as agents of change that dissent from the mainstream and induce environmental, social, and ethical transformation of society. These have focused primarily on objectives and environmental commitment and implicitly, their transformative power (e.g., Pastakia 1998, Isaac 2002, Walley et al. 2010, Schaltegger 2010). While Isaac (2002), for example, distinguishes different levels of environmental concern or greenness, North and Nurse (2014) argue that businesspeople driven by 'morality, curiosity, enthusiasm and commitment' to more than the bottom line can act as an important catalyst and exert influence within the business community. Beveridge and Guy (2005) have questioned the strong focus on the individual as an agent of change, highlighting the importance of the wider institutional context that promotes as well as restricts entrepreneurial activity and innovation. In their study on entrepreneurs in the UK green building sector, O'Neill and Gibbs (2014; 2016; Gibbs and O'Neill 2012) similarly challenge the dominant perception of individuals as 'lone heroes' emphasising the importance of supporting infrastructures at different spatial scales. While green entrepreneurs frequently offer innovative alternatives to established markets, they heavily rely on niches that are defined by protection from market competition (e.g. tax breaks or subsidies) or narrow consumer demands that make it very difficult for businesses to break out of these niches and limit their transformative powers.

The literature on ecopreneurs illustrates the limitations of the discourse: the green economy too frequently neglects aspects of social and spatial equality and inclusion (Lawhon and Murphy 2011, Davies 2013, North, 2015). While the green entrepreneurship literature clearly responds to the environmental crisis, it is much less explicit about social sustainability (even though some of the most frequently cited examples such as the Body Shop and Ben & Jerry's incorporate these). Porter and Kramer (2011, p. 64) criticise the private sector more generally for being "trapped in an outdated approach to value creation". With their critique, they open up conceptual concerns that call into question the core objectives and logics of entrepreneurial activities: profit/utility maximisation and

economic growth. Instead, they argue, it is in the interest of business to engage in a process of “shared value” that includes, qualitatively, people and their environment.

At the centre of the social economy literature lie the ‘social crises’. The social economy (or social innovation) is generally understood to represent a wide range of initiatives and organisational forms consisting of “a hybridization of market, non-market (redistribution) and non-monetary (reciprocity) economies” located between the market and the state (Moulaert and Ailenei 2005, p. 2044). Based on needs, the main objective of social enterprises is the provision of goods and services to marginalized parts of the population that are not covered through government or market institutions. The social economy offers alternative models to mainstream market economics that are not for profit and hence follow a very different non-economic logic usually focused on resources within local communities and self-reliance (Leyshon et al. 2003). The local scale of social enterprises increases community and democratic participation and redirects social responsibility away from the state to the community level and community organisations while running the risk to acquit, as Amin et al. (2003) argue, the state from increasing social welfare.

Mainly focused on social equity, research on the social economy to date has placed relatively little attention on environmental dimensions of the sector (Davies and Mullin 2011). Despite a number of limitations of the sector including its dependence on the state for funding and other support, the social economy has been advocated by a number of scholars as a potential agent in transitioning towards a green economy (Smith 2005, Seyfang and Smith 2007, Davies and Mullin 2011, Shear 2014). Criticising the dominant literature on the greening of the economy for neglecting social sustainability concerns, they emphasise the potential of ‘grassroots innovation’ driven by social need and ideology that generate alternative (non-monetary) values and run against existing market regimes providing green and just solutions. Innovation here is mainly focused on social learning processes. However, and based on their study of environmentally focused social economy enterprises in Ireland, Davies and Mullin (2011, p. 807) also illustrate how the sector “is clearly envisaged by government to remain at the margins of the mainstream economy simply providing a safety net for sectors of society marginalized by economic patterns of exchange and social capacity”. Through its generally strong dependence on the state for funding and other support, the social economy has been criticised for being too dependent to offer radical economic alternatives.

Both strands of literature briefly introduced above struggle to fully integrate environmental, social and economic dimensions. An environmental justice frame can help overcome these limitations. Earlier work on environmental justice sparked a discussion about the factors that lead to environmental injustices. From these discussions also grew more normative theories about sustainable societies (Agyeman 2013).

Sustainability cannot be simply a ‘green’, or ‘environmental concern, important, though ‘environmental’ aspects of sustainability are. A truly sustainable society is one where wider questions of social needs and welfare, and economic opportunity are integrally related to environmental limits imposed by supporting ecosystems. (Agyeman et al. 2003, p. 78)

Where the environmental justice literature has been critiqued is its lack of conceptual connection to a broader political economic context (Faber and McCarthy 2003). Rather than seeking connections between environmental justice and its political economic context, our purpose here is to examine environmental justice and green jobs in respect to potential contributions to theories of economic development and social change. Our purpose for doing this is to make a conceptual contribution to the field about where economic ideas come from and the role of “the social” in this process. Moreover, we point out some concrete ways that these incipient approaches in a “post” environmental justice context can shape broader economic change. As illustrated by our case study below, we suggest that the environmental justice movement could be crucial in circulating just and green ideologies and in providing training and exchange of knowledge and skills to promote environmental and social innovations. Environmental justice has the capacity to inspire different forms of sustainability transitions as well as contribute to theories of economic development. A view from the environmental justice literature can bring new perspectives on economic change through the idea of just ecopreneurship as it arises out of a reading of the environmental justice movement.

4. Just ecopreneurship: From environmental justice activism to just and green entrepreneurship

There is a growing body of work that is smashing the illusion that all private sector actors are entirely pro-growth and interested only in profit maximisation. These come from a variety of perspectives including Polanyian accounts of economy, cultural economic geography, and diverse economies (Peck 2013a; Amin and Thrift 2007; Gibson-Graham 2008, respectively). These accounts range from Polanyi’s notion that economies are embedded in formal and information cultures of valuation. These institutions are not universal, but culturally created, stabilized, and challenged in different places and at different times (Peck, 2013b, p. 1553). Similarly, Gibson-Graham (2008) argue that totalising conceptualisations of ‘capitalism’ divert analysis away from an understanding of the wide range of motivations on the part of economic actors for engaging in economic activity beneath metanarratives of utilitarian profit maximisation (cited in North 2015). Thus far our argument has developed to capture this diverse and culturally informed narrative of economic decision-making amongst actors. Above we developed two parallel narratives: one around greening the economy and another about bringing together social concerns and environmental issues. These two narratives are beginning to converge in practice. We can begin to see this in the context of the case study that we present below. The case elucidates an empirical account of how changing ideas of economy and value find their ways into practice. This case focuses on entrepreneurship.

Before introducing the case study, we need to position this environmental justice and the case study in context. The environmental justice movement came from the civil rights movement but resulted from the explicit acknowledgement that people of colour bared a disproportionate burden of negative environmental impacts. In 1971, Richard Nixon’s President’s Council of Environmental Quality noted that there was racial discrimination in America’s cities and that blacks and the urban poor were disproportionately affected. These correlations were established in a series of legal cases during the 1970s, too. Then, in 1987, the United Church of Christ Commission on Racial

Justice published its now famous report called “Toxic waste in the United States”. Other studies confirmed the Church of Christ’s report. Most notably Bob Bullard’s book *Dumping in Dixie* served as a treatise condemning racially motivated practices. By the early 1990s, some small neighbourhood groups began to pop up around the US to articulate and measure the implications of poor environmental quality on people of colour and those economically disadvantaged. They also stood against existing and potential locally unwanted land uses as companies from small-scale dry cleaners, to tire plants, to power plants, and hazardous waste landfills. In addition to saying “no” to these kinds of facilities, environmental justice groups had to develop science, law (case and statutory), and to organize people who had previously been overlooked by planners and policy-makers, in general, and the environmental movement in particular. Efforts flourished around the US to meet these needs.

ACE, which is discussed further below, was in the middle of this fight. During their early years, ACE developed an advocacy and organizing model that started from the bottom up. In all, ACE worked with more than 40 neighborhood groups and 3,500 people around eastern Massachusetts. They worked on issues that reflected the movement around the country by working to stop incinerators, waste transfer stations, diesel exhaust, and unmaintained vacant lots. Through ACE, its founders, Charlie Lord and William Shutkin, and the communities they supported developed skills that supported the incipient movement, but also skills that both men would use later in life in their other ventures. In particular, they were charged with the responsibility of coming up with new methods for measuring environmental inequality. For example, under the Clean Air Act provisions air quality was measured by vast “air sheds”. Covering hundreds or even thousands of square miles, air sheds as a unit of measure lacked the fine-grained analysis that environmental justice groups needed to advance their cause. Lord and Shutkin and their corps worked to develop these data for their own service area and those around them, too. In addition, case law had to be created that provided a causal and legal connection between these newly discovered exposures and health effects. Environmental justice groups also worked with states and the federal government to develop policies, in terms of statutes and executive rules regarding environmental injustice.

It is important to understand ACE, and Lord and Shutkin, in particular, because they are representative of a much larger, country-wide movement in the US. Equally, this history describes the kinds of skills and entrepreneurial tactics that they had to use to be successful in the movement. Not coincidentally, they use these same skills in their current jobs. Finally, it is important to understand ACE in this larger context because it shows that the case study that follows, while written in biographical style, is indeed a case study that reflects methodologically the requirements set out by Yin (1994). However, we chose this style to present it in because it is a biography of Lord’s and Shutkin’s work. Their work had a great deal of impact on the communities that they served but also may be an archetype of a new economic actor.

In the following sections, we will develop their activities during their time at ACE, documenting some of their formative experiences. Then, we will develop the case further through the work of Charlie Lord who has over the past few years developed a social justice driven business as an entrepreneur working with his Wall Street connections. Lord’s current venture capital work is grounded in the environmental justice movement, and mediated by its same struggles and informed by its tactics to create a new form of

movement that works within capitalist structures to create economic and environmental security for those who have been overburdened by environmental risk for generations.

Getting “religion”

In 1989, Charlie Lord and William Shutkin were law students, interested in environmental law, at the University of Virginia. Both Shutkin and Lord are white, Ivy-League educated, males, who had an ‘aha!’ moment at a formative time in their careers. In the spring of 1989, Shutkin and Lord found themselves waiting for the keynote at the National Association of Law Environmental Societies Annual Meeting at Tulane University of Louisiana. This was a time when Greenpeace was saving whales. The Sierra Club had adopted the landscape photography of Ansel Adams for their brand and the World Wildlife Fund adopted the iconic panda bear, and unwittingly gave rise to a new species of ‘*charismatic mega-fauna*’, for its logo. These large environmental organisations also had high profile board members from corporate America. Indeed, Jay Hair, the CEO of the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) was to deliver the keynote at the society’s meeting. This was a critical moment for Lord and Shutkin: as one of our respondents put it, they “got religion”. Their experience did not come from a moving speech by a corporatist CEO, however. Rather, it was the group of activists that they found themselves sitting next to at the keynote. A group of mostly African American activists had come to “shout down” the speaker. The group did not like NWF’s close ties with Waste Management, Inc. Waste Management had been working to site a large facility near a black community in Alabama and people were angry. The CEO of Waste Management was on NWF’s board of directors. While the environmental movement was working to preserve “nature” in the American West and “charismatic mega-fauna” in remote parts of the world, companies were poisoning people in their own backyards. Upon reflection, Lord and Shutkin had the same realisation that many others had: that the American environmental movement was losing its way (cf. Dowie 1995). Furthermore, the experience the cohort of activists came to protest was not unique. Only two years before, the United Church of Christ had published its now famous report on toxic waste and race (UCC 1987). The following year, Robert Bullard’s book *Dumping in Dixie* came out, which was a game changer for the environmental movement in US cities. The environmental justice movement was born and Charlie Lord and William Shutkin were on the ground floor, equipped with law degrees, energy, and an entrepreneurial spirit bent on helping those in need.

In 1993, after graduating law school and moving to Boston, Lord and Shutkin started “ACE”. Shutkin and Lord’s vision was to build an institution designed intentionally to bridge the gap between environmental rhetoric and environmental reality, especially when it came to the most vulnerable communities in the country. In particular, they chose the neighbourhood of Roxbury, in Boston, Massachusetts. Roxbury is a neighbourhood in Boston that has suffered from industrial decline in the 1970s. It is a largely ethnic neighbourhood with approximately half of the population made up of African-Americans. When they started their work, Shutkin and Lord had to establish constituencies that heretofore had not existed. They learned from colleagues that the only way to be helpful was to listen first and then offer appropriate help. “These communities had their own leadership structure and constituencies” (Lord 2015, personal communication). ACE’s agenda thus emerged around community need and empowerment. Nobody in the US

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in the early 1990s had a job related to environmental justice. Philanthropists were not tuned in. There were no programmes they could appeal to. They were social entrepreneurs in the not-for-profit business. They built their organisation on a simple principle: a higher return on investment. They pitched their organisation in funding applications as one that brings the same technical and legal resources to communities in need as their middle class counterparts, with an added bonus of community organisation and education. They questioned the value proposition of funding activities that protect landscapes far away that few people in, say, Boston, would ever see or let alone live in. Their work, they argued, was in the environment where people live.

The work of ACE evolved along the incipient environmental justice movement in the US. As Lord and Shutkin worked with community organisers, collected health data, argued cases on behalf of their constituents in court, the Clinton Administration passed Executive Order 12,898 which codified environmental justice principles into the work of the US government. Schools of Public Health in the US turned their attention to environmental risks in cities, such as the Harvard School of Public Health's "Sick Cities" study in 1993. Today, environmental justice policies or policies that seek to prevent environmental injustice exist in 42 US states. Alongside all of this, the urban sustainability movement was emerging as a result of Local Agenda 21. This last piece brought a spatial component to the work of environmental justice advocates and offered a connection to city government.

As ACE took on a life of its own, Lord and Shutkin redirected their activities. Both Shutkin and Lord knew that they could not act as executive directors. If they moved into that position ACE would not be able to help the community at its fullest. Lord went on to create Urban Ecology Institute (UEI) at Boston College. For Lord, UEI was to bring the resources, knowledge, skills, and energy of the university to key needs of the city. Shutkin went on to teach at MIT for several years. The next step in the story that is of interest to this paper is Lord's work to "privatise" his visions of a 'just city' in a private sector endeavor. It is to this work that we now turn.

Privatising the "just city"

Lord's transition to the private sector was a deliberate one. For him, the next frontier of social change was to involve cross cutting organisations. The division of labour that had existed between for-profit and not-for-profit organisations had to be overcome. No longer could for-profits be focused solely on self-interested growth with not-for-profits there to pick up the slack. For Lord, there was a "missing piece about economic power and building jobs at the local level" (Lord, interview, May 2013). His vision is to use private finance to develop green jobs that would build an economic base in communities of need. "There was a need to leverage private capital to make change around climate change and ideally around sustainability and real job creation in cities" (Lord, interview, May 2013).

Lord's enterprise offers eco-innovation services in the form of building retrofits to reduce the energy costs of customers through increased energy efficiency. These services are no different from those offered by other companies in the green building sector. What the environmental justice driven approach has brought to the new business model is a reevaluation of goals where venture capital in form of environmental services is used as means to achieve defined environmental justice outcomes (e.g. through social employment

contracts with clients and a focus on disadvantaged and poor neighbourhoods). For example, through certain calculations one can determine how many jobs a private (or public) sector investment can bring to a community, but Lord wants to direct those investments to communities in need. In the same way that he and Shutkin did two decades ago with the government and philanthropic communities, Lord is doing the same in the private sector. He is creating business plans that look and feel very conventional to investors. For example, his recent venture, which is to do green retrofits in buildings over 35,000 sq/ft, gives investors the look and feel of a “mezzanine”³ real estate investment. This is a conventional investment where investors expect in the neighbourhood of 10-14% return on their money. The building owners get a savings on their energy costs. Lord’s firm is working with the Boston Impact Initiative to ensure that for at least some of the projects, people in the community are trained for jobs and get experience doing ‘green’ work.

Like his earlier career as an environmental justice advocate, Lord is part of a new movement educating, synthesizing, and creating a new investment lexicon. In the 1990s, Lord and Shutkin would have to go to court to get standing for the community they represented. They would have to use medical records, dose-response data, and pollutant concentrations to demonstrate to public health officials that “hot spots” of exposure existed in the ACE community. They were not the only ones doing it. It was happening around the US (see Bullard 1993). Today, Lord is working with angel investors and institutions from across the country to create an investment lexicon and practice that brings together social benefits with economic gains. He has worked to create a new investment product around green retrofits. He has found investors who have a social conscience who want to balance their portfolios with projects that have a positive, well-distributed, economic impact. Just ecopreneurship brings in both strong social and environmental ideologies and values that resemble those discussed in the green and social economy but does not balance one over the other. Just as most examples of green entrepreneurship, the case study illustrates how just ecopreneurship can operate within existing economic structures and actually harness capitalist strategies (mezzanine real estate investment) to realise just and green transitions. The illustrative example shows how strong problem-solving capacities and action research skills are being carried over from the activist and non-profit section to the private sector. At the same time, ideologies and objectives are not driven solely by profit maximisation and growth objectives but remain focused on generating shared and even value promoting qualitative growth.

5. Conclusion

Just entrepreneurship as illustrated in the case study raises questions about what happens when we look at entrepreneurs that are just and green. Agyeman (2013) and others have emphasised the need to find alternatives to existing capitalist structures, for example, through barter, loan, and shared economies. We presented an example of just entrepreneurship to illustrate how sustainabilities can operate from within and harness

³ A mezzanine real estate investment is a conventional investment where the lender does not receive direct collateral, but, if the borrower fails to pay back the loan, the lender acquires a percentage of ownership. Given that this is real estate, the lender would get a portion of the building should the borrower fail to pay.

the institutional structures of neoliberal economic relations. Conceptually, the environmental justice framework offers a different entry point to understanding objectives, drivers, and dynamics behind green entrepreneurship and green economy transitions. It hence can offer explanations to where and how entrepreneurs get their inspirations from. It also illustrates how just sustainabilities can operate within institutional structures without compromising environmental and social over economic concerns.

In practical terms, the core point is that the environmental justice movement through its strong emphasis on skills development, problem-solving and action research can offer specific skillsets, support networks and maybe most importantly strong beliefs and values (i.e. religion) of what just and green societies should look like that can equip individuals to start just enterprises. Further and while maybe (still) uncommon and certainly not indicative of paradigmatic shifts in economic thinking, single case studies can offer cross-fertilisation between conceptualisations of green entrepreneurship and environmental justice that open up a discussion on possible just and green futures. As called for by O'Neill and Gibbs (2014) more in-depth case studies are needed to gather information on the motivations and inspirations of green entrepreneurs and the environmental justice movement could be seen as one niche that helps us explain the emergence of new entrepreneurial thinking.

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