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Civic innovators  
are breathing new  
life into the social  
contract of dynamic  
and fluid modern cities  
through an everyday  
style of democracy.

# The Civic Generation

DAVE CABLE IS LEADING A CITYWIDE VOLUNTEER EFFORT IN CHARLOTTE TO PLANT 10,000 TREES A YEAR FOR THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS. Meg Daly has mobilised a community in Miami to turn the land beneath the Metrorail line into a 10 km linear park for gardening, cycling and walking. In Detroit, Justin Jacobs has created a community of young people by reviving non-competitive team sports, a movement that has proven so popular that his organisation ComePlayDetroit is leading the rejuvenation of the city's iconic Belle Isle recreational facility. Kathryn Ott Lovell, the no-nonsense chief executive of the Fairmount Park Conservancy in Philadelphia, has used all her considerable moxie to turn a lost piece of land near the Eakins Oval into the home of a summer festival that attracts 70,000 people. In San Jose, the softly-spoken Roy Hirabayashi is using the art of San Jose Taiko, Japanese drumming, as a way to bring people from the city's many communities together around his culture.

Using simple, convivial technologies, like planting trees and playing sports, civic innovators are breathing new life into the social contract of their cities through an everyday style of democracy, as people come together to exert greater shared control over city life.

Each of these civic innovators is doing something absolutely vital for the health of their cities. They are creating a social contract that binds people together around the place they live at the grassroots, where it matters most.

The classic idea of a social contract is that citizens jointly decide to create a government to rule over them. Government emerges from the will of the people and government in turn ensures a framework of laws to keep society in good order. The classic social contract is a two-step affair: First it is a contract between citizens to create a legitimate government, and then it is a contract between citizens and the state.

Jane Jacobs

That is not how the social contract works in dynamic and fluid modern cities. In cities, the contract between citizens and the state still matters in the form of policing, zoning, parking regulations and the provision of key services like education, water and waste disposal. Cities need capable mayors and good public administration. Yet much of the time the most important contract is between the citizens themselves—what matters is how we regulate our behaviour, peer to peer, through shared norms and practices.

In successful cities, citizens largely govern one another. Citizens experience democratic self-rule in a city not just when they vote in elections, but also when they inhabit shared public space and use shared resources, like parks, schools and transport systems. Everyday urban democracy

is about norms of reciprocation, give and take, made evident in daily life. That is when we most keenly feel both the responsibilities and the rights of citizenship, our obligations to one another rather than to a distant state above us. This kind of social contract is not formal, set out in documents, but a kind of lived experience, enacted in daily life. It is not created in a single moment, when people come together in a democratic convention; instead, it is continually unfolding. Civic innovators are creating experiences tutoring people in customs and practices of everyday urban democracy, giving people the confidence to write and rewrite the social contract that binds them together to the place where they live.

The result is a sense of shared, emotional commitment among people who identify with where they live. By binding people together around a place, civic innovators are generating a deeper sense of belonging. By creating places that have more meaning for people, those places stand a better chance of being more economically successful because they will attract more commitment and investment.

This report is about how civic innovators are reviving their cities by bringing citizens together to renew the social contract that binds them together. It's about the **skills and techniques** innovators use to make that contract come alive, and it's about the challenges cities face in making sure everyone is included in the process.

U.S. cities are reviving. People are returning to cities—young millennials, immigrants from within and outside the U.S. and baby boomers. Civic innovators are deepening this revival because they are creating a shared attachment to the city. Critics argue that the reviving city is largely designed for the young, trendy, middle classes, for whom city-living has become hip, without doing much for longtime residents, often African American and poor. **The challenge and the opportunity for cities is to grow in a fair and inclusive manner. Whether they do so will depend on what kind of social contract they create.**

### Downtown Detroit's Campus Martius Park

Image Courtesy of ComePlayDetroit



DETROIT, MI: *Campus Martius Park* Image by Flickr User Michigan Municipal League



Cities are being lifted by powerful forces of innovation, cultural change, demographics and globalisation.

# The Turning Tide

AS PEOPLE WANDER HOME FROM WORK TO CATCH A TRAIN OR BUS, RESIDENTS WALK THEIR DOGS IN THE SQUARES AND PARKS LAID OUT BY WILLIAM PENN. They sit and talk, eat and drink, at pavement cafes and on benches. The atmosphere is safe and convivial, relaxed and animated, and mildly celebratory, as if people are marveling at how they get on with one another, not least because 20 years ago the centre of the city, like so many in the U.S., seemed bleak and lifeless. Philadelphia is not alone in feeling a sense of resurgence.

A spirit of optimism is coursing through U.S. cities generating a palpable sense of possibility and opportunity. That is true for all five cities on which this report is based.

**PHILADELPHIA** has turned a corner. For the first time in decades the city's population is growing. Downtown is home to Comcast, the most successful U.S. technology company outside Silicon Valley. Urban Outfitters, another homegrown success story, is the anchor tenant in the vast Navy Yards on the edge of downtown, which will become a new east coast centre for innovation. It's not just Center City that hums with life; so do many of the city's newly cool neighbourhoods such as Fishtown. A steady stream of young people and empty-nester baby boomers are making their way back into a city that styles itself as an affordable mini-Manhattan.

**SAN JOSE** in the heart of Silicon Valley is looking forward to its population growing from 1 million to 1.4 million in the next 25 years, transforming what has been built as a dormitory town into a thriving city. Much of that new population will be accommodated within three miles of its downtown, one of the last opportunities in Silicon Valley to create a relatively dense urban centre. The city could become a new model for a walkable, liveable city with an urban core, closely connected to low-rise residential neighbourhoods, from Latino Mayfair to the ample avenues of the Rose Garden, to the north and the comfortable inner city suburb of Japantown.

**MIAMI**, by turns glamorous, brash, energetic and chaotic, is living out its own extraordinary drama, a globalising city that is the meeting point for the flows of money, people and ideas between Latin and North America. Miami's downtown, once a slightly lost and sometimes threatening place, especially at night, now has 80,000 residents and a daytime population of 220,000, with 6,000 mainly small businesses and 8,000 hotel rooms. In the first decade of the century, Miami built 135 high-rises, mostly in the downtown area, and many more are on the way, along with plans for improved public transport, bike lanes and pedestrianized areas. Crucially, many younger people, some of them the third and fourth generation of families of immigrants, are putting down roots in a city widely regarded by many as a place to visit and pass through. Partly as a result of their commitment, not only is downtown Miami coming back to life, but the city's dispersed networks of power are starting to turn their attention to big shared challenges such as its woefully inadequate public transportation system.

**CHARLOTTE**, in North Carolina, continues its own remarkable evolution as a global financial centre, immigrant gateway and increasingly diverse and cosmopolitan city. Charlotte looks neat and tidy, but beneath the surface it is paddling hard

and with a scale of ambition that belies its apparently peripheral status. A city that has already successfully transitioned from manufacturing to national and then international financial services is remaking its identity once more as it draws people from all over the U.S. and beyond looking for a place that offers the rare combination of affordability, liveability and economic opportunity.

**DETROIT** is hustling harder. With a new mayor and a sense of self-confidence, the city is out of bankruptcy. All over inner-city Detroit, amidst the scenes of devastation, there are signs of new beginnings: around Eastern Market and the galleries like Spiral Collective on Cass Avenue, the string of new restaurants such as the Selden Standard and coffee shops like Astro in Corktown, and the new Shinola store and the Detroit Institute of Arts. Even Detroiters wearied by false dawns say they feel the city has a moment of opportunity of a kind it has never had before to take its future in its own hands.

These second cities are taking advantage of the rising costs, worsening congestion and relentless pace of life in San Francisco, Boston, Los Angeles, Chicago and New York. People are drawn to second cities because they are smaller and more liveable, yet also increasingly dynamic and connected. It's easier to find yourself at the heart of the conversation about the future of the city.

Like all cities, these five face significant challenges, whether in the form of ingrained poverty, economic uncertainty, educational underperformance or climate change. Detroit is still recovering from a deep crisis made manifest by its depopulation. Philadelphia still carries a heavy weight of poverty. Miami's confidence flies in the face of the threat of rising sea levels.

Yet their infectious optimism has not been spread by boosters employed in city marketing departments. They are being lifted by powerful forces of innovation, demographics, cultural change and globalisation, which are working in cities' favour, bringing with them new people, especially immigrants and young people,

who see in the idea of the city hope and possibility where earlier generations saw danger and despair.

Downtown areas that have long felt deserted are filling with people and cafes, restaurants and art galleries, markets and clubs, start-up businesses and shared workspaces. The city, long synonymous with decline and disinvestment, is now seen as a place of aspiration and growth. It is a remarkable turnaround, which is not just due to larger forces working in the city's favour. People are making it happen, and at the forefront of that movement is a new generation of civic innovators. These are the people remaking these cities.

### The Miami Underline

Image Courtesy of Friends of the Underline





Civic innovators come in many different shapes and sizes. What makes them innovators is not the kind of organisations they come from but what they do and how they do it.

# Civic Innovators

CHARLOTTE MIGHT BE THE ONLY AIRPORT IN THE WORLD TO HAVE A CAR PARK THAT IN EARLY SPRING RESEMBLES AN ORCHARD. The cars are almost hidden from view by the blossoms. For visitors, it sets the tone for what is to come: Charlotte is blessed with trees.

Once its most important natural assets were the streams that fed the cotton mills. Now it's the tree canopy that covers almost half the city. Charlotte is not a garden city so much as a city of "neighbourhoods," and much of its human scale comes from its trees. In any city, trees are a signal of something different. They offer shade, care and colour. Research shows that cities where people can see trees on streets tend to be safer, cleaner, more social and healthier. Trees soften the hard edges of cities, as well as providing important environmental services, cleaning air and water. Well-tended trees also help raise property values, as they are a sign that people care over the long term for where they live.

In 2008, however, a specially commissioned aerial survey showed that the city's continued development threatened the canopy, which was on trend to decline to less than 45% within the next few years,

despite the city council planting about 10,000 trees a year.

TreesCharlotte was formed to reverse that trend and make sure that by 2050 more than half of Charlotte—by then a much larger city—will be covered by trees. To achieve that, the city needs to plant an additional 15,000 trees a year, and to do that it needs to mobilise thousands of volunteers across the city.

It's perhaps surprising then that David Cable, TreesCharlotte's thoughtful and quietly charismatic chief executive, says the programme he runs is not really about trees: "It's mainly a programme to get people out, doing things together, which happens to be planting and tending trees, which they feel good about, and so they form stronger bonds and connections. It's using

trees as a community-building programme. And we've found that the stronger the community, the healthier the trees. Where we go in and plant the trees ourselves because there is no community buy-in, the trees don't do so well. Trees thrive when communities look after them because they have a sense of responsibility for them and ownership by the community."

Dave Cable is knitting together Charlotte, one tree at a time. He is breathing new life into the city's social contract through trees. Across the U.S., civic innovators are creating new ways for cities to work, for all residents. They make the city more than the sum of its parts by pulling together people, places and resources in new ways.

Civic innovators come in many different shapes and sizes, including:

- › PUBLIC LEADERS such as Paul Levy, the driving force behind Philadelphia Centre City's renewal, and Kim Walesh, the deputy city manager in San Jose responsible for the city's growth strategy.
- › SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS like Justin Jacobs, the founder of ComePlayDetroit, and Meg Daly, of the Miami Underline, running independent social enterprises.
- › COMMUNITY DEVELOPERS and protagonists such as The People's Emergency Center in Powelton, Philadelphia and San Jose Taiko.
- › HYBRID ORGANISATIONS, like Fairmount Park Conservancy and Mural Arts in Philadelphia, have one foot in the City Hall administration and another in the more informal power and politics of the community.
- › PHILANTHROPIC AND CULTURAL LEADERS, such as Emily Zimmern, the recently retired head of the Levine Museum of the New South in Charlotte, who used the museum to convene a rolling discussion of how Charlotte needs to adapt to the challenges of becoming a cosmopolitan, global city.
- › PRIVATE BUSINESSES and developers such as the late Tony Goldman, the brains behind the making of Wynwood in Miami. Goldman put Wynwood on the map by commissioning a series of giant murals called the Wynwood Walls, which have kickstarted the area's redevelopment. Dan Gilbert, the founder of Quicken Loans, is a major player in the revival of downtown Detroit. Major banks have played the leading role in shaping Charlotte's development over the past fifty years, not just as a financial centre, but also in terms of culture and education.

What makes these people civic innovators is not the kind of organisations they come from, but what they do and how they do it. They are all seeking to build stronger communities, economically, socially and culturally, pulling the city together in new ways.

Civic innovators operate in a variety of different places and scales within the city, from the downtown core to the edges where the city absorbs new arrivals.

 **DOWNTOWN:** Many are focused on downtown revival, exemplified by Paul Levy in Philadelphia.

 **CITYWIDE:** Shawn McCaney at the William Penn Foundation is funding innovative approaches to public space across the city.

 **LOCAL:** Kira Strong at People's Emergency Center has a tight focus on a few blocks around Lancaster Avenue in Philadelphia.

 **DIGITAL:** In Miami, Chris Sopher and Bruce Pinchbeck are using a digital platform to create a citywide community of mainly young professionals. Luther Keith is using ultra-local storytelling to build a community around his web platform Arise Detroit.

 **EDGE:** Steve Tobocman at Global Detroit focuses on how the city creates effective arrival zones, the places where the city welcomes immigrants and integrates them into city life.

Cities need civic innovators across all these scales, from a diversity of different bases, operating across the entire range of scales from citywide to downtown and into particular communities.

Civic innovators use social technologies to bring people together to make their city more liveable, human and successful.

The defining feature of the social technologies profiled in this report—trees in Charlotte, a bike path in Miami, sports leagues in Detroit—is that they become more efficient as they build more social capital. They are efficient because they are social and convivial. They thrive on the density and diversity that a city provides.





Civic innovators are deploying social technologies, often modular, simple, replicable, adaptable and frugal, that help them achieve scale and reach while running small organisations.

# Social Technologies

IN THE SUMMER OF 2013, A HORRIBLE BIKING ACCIDENT LEFT MEG DALY WITH TWO BROKEN ARMS. Unable to drive to her physical therapist in south Miami, she had no option but to take the Metrorail and then walk the remaining few hundred metres to her appointment. It was July, and the heat and humidity were punishing. Necessity is the mother of invention, and Daly found herself walking in the deep shade created by the Metrorail running above her. For the most part she was completely alone. It was on those walks that she came up with the idea for the Underline.

Daly quickly conceived a plan to create a 10 km linear park, about 100 acres in area, along which people could walk, jog, skate and cycle, in a park that would be a mixture of outdoor gym, art installation and community garden.

Slightly to her surprise, the idea took off. It excited the imagination not just of locals but also architects and foundations. Daly formed the Friends of the Underline, modelled on the civic group that pioneered the High Line in New York and raised the funds for a master plan. She has conducted

scores of community meetings along the route. In 2015, the Underline won the prestigious Pitching the City award from New York's Municipal Arts Society. If Daly is successful, the Underline could become the spine for a network of 250 miles of bike and running trails in and around Miami.

The Underline is a prime example of a social technology. Daly wants to create a system for people moving around that is shared, simple, flexible, low-cost, and inherently more social than either impersonal mass transportation or the solitary car commute. If the Underline ever gets built it will not be just a means for people to get from A to B; they will stop, chat, acknowledge one

another and navigate the shared space. To be safe it has to be social.

Where Meg Daly in Miami is using bikes, David Cable in Charlotte is using trees, Justin Jacobs in Detroit is using sports, Jane Golden at Mural Arts in Philadelphia is using street art and Roy Hiyabashi in San Jose is using drums.

All are deploying social technologies to achieve their goals. It is these technologies, often modular, simple, replicable, adaptable and frugal, that help them achieve scale and reach while running small organisations.

A social technology is a set of tools and practices that bring people together to achieve a shared goal or to enjoy a shared experience. They are inherently social in the sense that they depend on people collaborating to work, without instruction from above. The more social they are, the more efficient they become. The more the tools are used, the more lasting social connection and capital they create. These are convivial technologies, where efficiency and social interaction go hand in glove. Cars and freeways are anti-social technologies: Their efficiency depends on eliminating social interaction and coordination. Public, mass transit

systems are efficient but often impersonal. True social technologies are made more efficient by becoming more social, but that in turn means the users have to be able to adapt them to their different needs. The users have to feel as if they have a say over them. Civic innovators excel at developing social technologies—simple tools for people to get things done together.

Food, from growing and selling to preparing and eating, is perhaps a good example of a pervasive social technology.

Cities are increasingly becoming places where people want to grow food, together. In San Jose, hidden below the dense web of arcing intersections where Highway 101 meets Route 680, Veggielution is a six-acre community garden that started life in 2007 when four San Jose State students started growing vegetables for one another and the local community in their four backyards. In 2015, Veggielution grew about 20,000 lbs. of organic produce, mainly with the help of students and volunteers, with almost two-thirds of the food distributed free or at low cost to the nearby largely Latino Mayfair community. Two mornings a week, long lines form outside the main Catholic church as people wait to collect food parcels.

Food markets are becoming iconic places to see cities at their best—loud and colourful, egalitarian and diverse, tasty and pleasurable. In Philadelphia, the covered Reading Street Terminal market brings together a diverse crowd of mainly locals in search of good food at affordable prices. In Detroit, the Eastern Market has become a magnet not just for visitors but also for new restaurants, shops and businesses. San Jose's downtown city culture will likely spread out from the collection of coffee shops and restaurants at San Pedro market.

Restaurants now play a critical role in branding cities, proclaiming their inventiveness and distinction. Philadelphia has proudly attracted leading chefs away from New York. Philadelphia's answer to Brooklyn—the Fishtown neighborhood—has a coffee roaster and café, *Colombe*, that seems more like a holy site. Coffee is becoming the new fuel for economies driven by collaboration and conversation. A lawyer closely involved in Detroit's painful emergence from bankruptcy said one of the main reasons she was optimistic about the city's future was the news that a local farm-to-plate restaurant, the Selden Standard, had been nominated for a national award. Much of the community regeneration of Brightmoor has started from the Motor City Java and Tea House, which has become

a crucial meeting place for entrepreneurs and civic activists of all stripes.

Food is one of the most immediate ways for a city to integrate and make the most of its immigrant cultures. That is why San Jose's many immigrant communities provide brilliant low-cost food from ceviche tacos in Mayfair to homely katsu don in Japantown, which has 17 family-run Asian restaurants within a handful of blocks. A ten-course lunch in the Grand Century Mall in east San Jose is like a visit to Saigon. Downtown Charlotte is a bland corporate business district, but just beyond the city centre one can enjoy everything from a bucket of traditional fried chicken from Price's Chicken Coop, to Serbian, Greek, Turkish, Mexican and Japanese food along Central Avenue, the arrival strip for immigrant families and food entrepreneurs.

Food is central to the culture and economics of the modern city because it brings people together in enjoyment of their shared differences.

Civic innovators provide the city with its social technologies: simple, modular and adaptive solutions, which people can latch onto very easily. In spreading these innovations, they adopt strategies very different from those favoured by innovators in the private sector.





Civic innovators have to be disruptive, using a sense of dissatisfaction with the state of the city to galvanise change. Yet, in many ways, their approach to innovation is the very opposite of disruptive.

# Complementary Advantage

EVERY BUSINESS IS TAUGHT TO FIND ITS DISTINCTIVE, COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE AND THEN TO PROTECT, NURTURE AND EXPLOIT IT. Civic innovators need something different, a distinctive complementary advantage that allows them **to build wider coalitions to mobilise resources**. That means sharing value rather than controlling it. They find ways to work with others so the sum of the whole is far greater than the parts.

These innovators are often radical in the way they think, challenging convention. In that sense they have to be disruptive, using a sense of dissatisfaction with the state of the city to galvanise change. Yet in many ways their approach to innovation is the very opposite of disruptive.

- › They accept that they have to be evolutionary and cumulative, building on what is there already, rather than wiping the slate clean. They never start from the blank sheet available to a raw start-up in business. They always have to start from the city as it stands, with the constraints, complications and capabilities that entails.
- › Though sometimes they can be impatient, and they can seek to shock, they are not simply disruptive. Instead, they seek to be generative, mobilising more people and resources around what they do, to widen and deepen its impact.

› They are certainly expert and promiscuous convenors, bringing together alliances of supporters. But they are rarely just satisfied with convening: They want to turn talk into action. They mobilise coalitions and movements rather than running an efficient machine.

› They are continuous innovators because their work never seems to be finished. Jane Golden has been running Mural Arts for 25 years. They generally take many small steps to achieve big change. Continuous innovation is not sporadic, episodic, superficial or dependent upon superstars.

› Innovators are often divided into radicals and incrementalists. Civic innovators are both: They are radical incrementalists. They build the momentum for change painstakingly, step by step, but always with big ambitions for system-wide changes, which will make cities more affordable and creative, prosperous and cleaner, and safer and inclusive.

There are few better examples of this painstaking, radical incrementalism community building than the remarkable People's Emergency Center in Philadelphia.

It takes about half an hour to walk the ten blocks of Lancaster Avenue, a long diagonal former trolley car route, from Lee's LA Hair and Nails and the Great Taste restaurant, down to Reed's Coffee house on the corner of 38th street. In that short walk one moves between two starkly different sides of Philadelphia's personality.

At the intersection with 41st, young men promenade and banter in air thick with marijuana. Down at 38th Street they deal in drugs of a different kind: Young medics, dressed in gowns, emerge from the labs, theatres and wards of the Penn Presbyterian Medical Center, itself part of a vast centre of higher knowledge and research with Drexel University at its centre. These are the two worlds that People's Emergency Center (PEC), a community development corporation, is trying to bridge by enabling a new mixed community to develop on and around the Lancaster Avenue corridor. PEC is in the game of building complementary advantage for Lancaster Avenue.

PEC started life as a homeless hostel in the 1970s, but has long since evolved to undertake a wide range of community development activities, from volunteer cleanups to digital literacy programmes. With the support of the William Penn

Foundation, in partnership with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission and through a highly participative planning process, PEC has come up with a plan to reinvest in the 18,000 people and the 600 acres that surround a 1.5-mile stretch of the lower avenue. That plan, painstakingly put together through workshops and focus groups with locals, envisages new schools and roles for young people as community leaders; a renewed stock of housing to be owned by locals and vacant land turned into community parks; and the empty store fronts on the avenue populated by new small businesses, artists, food shops and restaurants.

PEC is constantly generating social technologies designed to bring people together, from large-scale participatory planning to its Block Party in a Box toolkit, which in 2014 was used by 20 neighbourhoods to stage organised street parties.

One sign of its technologies making an impact is a small previously abandoned storefront where a collection of local and international artists have been in residence producing public art for the neighbourhood. One product is a three-story mural in a vacant lot just beyond 41st

that Kira Strong, PEC's vice president for community and economic development, describes as both a playful conversation piece and an evident sign that people are taking care of their community.

All innovation, and especially social innovation, involves building coalitions of support around a new idea. Around Lancaster Avenue, building coalitions among often fractious communities is far from easy. Community leaders often see themselves as competitors for scarce resources and political favour. PEC is attempting to bond together the disparate forces along Lancaster Avenue, bring in new investment (which is not always welcome) and build bridges with near neighbours who are not always on good terms.

Civic innovators build coalitions around a shared commitment to a place. Through that commitment they mobilise resources to flow around communities in new ways so they can meet their needs more effectively.



Philadelphia, PA: *LOVE Park* Image by Wikimedia Commons User Smallbones



Civic innovators manage to have an influence well beyond their own limited organisational scale because they shift the way resources flow within the city.

# Small Is the New Big

CIVIC INNOVATORS SIT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE OFTEN UNRULY, MESSY MIX OF CITY LIFE, WHERE DYNAMICS OF GROWTH AND DECLINE OFTEN COMBINE.

They are consummate and patient coalition builders, knitting together often fractious and competing interests. They believe in their city, what it stands for but also in the idea of the city as a place where people can revel in their shared differences. They are not just hardy and resilient; they tend to be optimistic and practical, looking to build on capabilities and assets rather than focusing on deficits and deficiencies.

Their key skill is to run small organisations that have a wider catalytic impact. By rewriting the social contract of the city, they turn small into big. An outstanding example is the role the Fairmount Park Conservancy (FPC) is playing in Philadelphia.

By the 1980s, Hunting Park in northern Philadelphia had become a largely neglected, often dangerous haunt for people dealing and taking crack cocaine. The FPC made a \$4.5 million investment to create an athletics track, a baseball pitch, tennis courts, a community garden,

an orchard and a regular farmers' market to improve the local community's food options.

Yet the most important creation has not been physical but social: the 150 member strong Hunting Park United, a local voluntary group that is now the park's steward. Kathryn Ott Lovell, the FPC's no-nonsense chief executive, explains: "Parks are a catalyst for community and economic development. A good park, which is looked after, attracts people to the area, brings them out of their homes and that in turn is good for business."

The Fairmount Park Conservancy started life in the 1990s as a mainly white, middle-class institution to look after Philadelphia's watersheds and the extensive, linear Fairmount Park, through which the Schuylkill River flows. The original goal was the preservation and conservation of properties in the park that had fallen into disrepair. Yet the Conservancy has become a remarkable advocacy movement mobilising hundreds of volunteers in communities across the city to support parks large and small. It is not just conserving parks but remaking and reviving them by convening local supporters to make public spaces matter.

A prime example is the Eakins Oval, a sometimes lost and uncertain place, sitting in the no-man's-land between the grandeur of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the ceremonial Benjamin Franklin Parkway leading into the centre of the city. Most of the year the Oval is used as a parking lot. In 2013, working with the Department of Parks and Recreation, Ott Lovell decided to turn it into a summer urban park, with a programme of entertainment and activities that she describes as "scrappy." It attracted 30,000 people. In 2014, FPC commissioned the artist Candy Coated to lay down a brightly-coloured Magic Carpet, and they attracted 70,000 people over a 12-week programme.

Now the Conservancy is leading a collaborative programme with the William Penn Foundation and the Knight Foundation to reimagine the civic commons across Philadelphia, with projects ranging from repurposing the East Fairmount Reservoir, in conjunction with the Audubon Society of Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia Outward Bound School, to remaking the Reading Viaduct Rail Park, a raised rail line in the city centre. The FPC cooperates closely—Ott Lovell says sometimes it feels more like a collision—with the city's parks and recreation department. The idea is that the Conservancy will provide the ideas, software and connections to communities, while the department provides much of the hardware, resources and professional skills.

A brilliant extension of that idea is the Pop-Up Pool movement started by Ben Bryant, a Philadelphia designer who is trying to revive the popularity of the city's 70 public swimming pools. Philadelphia has more pools per head of population than any other U.S. city: one for every 22,000 residents, compared to one for 150,000 in New York. There are many reasons why people have turned away from public pools, including worries about hygiene and safety. But one of the main reasons is their austere, barren and utilitarian feel. Bryant is piloting a programme, started at the Francisville

Pool, to turn them into places of leisure, play and relaxation, adding a pop-up park, yoga and Zumba classes, cafes and areas to relax. By making public pools attractive, he is breathing new life into them, and the more people who are attracted, the more attractive they become.

The Conservancy is an outstanding example of how a relatively small, catalytic organisation can convene foundations, city hall, local volunteers, architects and environmentalists in collectively rethinking how public space can animate a city by bringing people together around it.

Civic innovators do not deal in abstracts. They achieve their goals by shifting the flows of resources within cities to the benefit of their communities using a mix of these six approaches:

 **REPURPOSERS:** Reshape how established organisations use their resources. Fairmount Park Conservancy started outside city hall but now has a huge influence over the entire parks and recreation system. The organisation has provided a new operating software for the hardware of the public system.

 **CONNECTORS:** Make more of the distributed resources already in a city by connecting them up. Design Philadelphia has created a citywide design festival by connecting up and providing a shared platform for existing design businesses and initiatives dispersed within the city. The annual festival stages 130 events, which attract thousands of people by making more of the distributed design resources already embedded within the city.

 **MOBILISERS:** Create a sense of shared purpose that people commit resources to, often in-kind. TreesCharlotte is not just connecting resources but mobilising and growing them, in the form of 10,000 trees a year. The trees and the communities that form around them are like cells in a growing civic movement.

 **SHARERS:** Provide new ways for people to share resources. The city was the home of the sharing economy long before Airbnb came on the scene. Cities need density of population to sustain shared infrastructures. Civic innovators are creating new generations of shared solutions, such as car sharing, ride sharing and bus rapid transit. Hunting Park United is an example of how a group of people have come together to make more of an asset by taking shared responsibility for it.

 **OPENERS:** Create access for people to flows of resources from which they have been excluded. Cities are becoming centres of innovation in technology, arts and manufacturing. Many civic innovators, like the Lifeline entrepreneurship programme in Detroit created by Nicole Farmer, are creating ways for people excluded from these flows to get access to them by creating businesses and finding jobs. At Temple University in Philadelphia, a professor of computer science, Yungjin Yim, has created a summer programme for local school children to learn how to develop smartphone apps to give young people, mostly African-Americans, a route into the growing local tech industry.

 **REFRAMERS:** Provide new ideas so people can see opportunities for improving life where there appeared to be none before. Campaigners for improved access for bikes and pedestrians are encouraging cities to reframe how they see streets as places primarily for people rather than cars. That simple but radical reframing, which involves challenging conventional wisdom, entrenched norms and vested interests, creates a new sense of how people can live in a city.

 **RECYCLERS:** Reuse and renew assets written off and left idle.

The urban farmers of Detroit are recycling blighted land and bringing it back into productive life economically and as a focus for community cohesion.

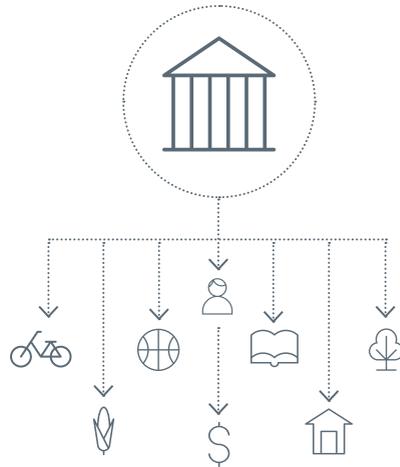
Civic innovators manage to have an influence well beyond their own limited organisational scale because they shift the way resources flow within the city. They do so using one or more often a mix of these strategies: repurpose, connect, mobilise, open, share, reframe, recycle. It is through those strategies that small organisations like Come Pay Detroit can have such a big impact.

Sport and physical activity is becoming vital to how cities signal themselves as an attractive destination for young, jogging and bike-riding professionals, as well as tackling long-term health challenges, such as obesity. Detroit has invested in opening up its river frontage walkway, linking it through the Dequindre Cut recreational path to nearby neighbourhoods. Infrastructure without users is a deadweight. ComePlayDetroit, a non-profit established in 2010 by Justin Jacobs, is a good example of how social technologies can bring infrastructure to life. ComePlayDetroit runs about 100 non-competitive, informal sports leagues, primarily aimed at young people, to get

them to socialise while taking physical exercise. About 20,000 people took part in ComePlayDetroit activities in its first four years, and the project's track record helped it to win the contract to rejuvenate the recreation facilities on the iconic Belle Isle in a partnership with Beiderman Redevelopment Ventures, the firm behind the rejuvenation of Bryant Park in New York. In the 1950s and '60s, Belle Isle was an aspirational leisure destination for Detroiters, but it had long since fallen into disrepair. ComePlayDetroit has developed a simple social technology—a way to bring young people together in non-competitive team sports—which will breathe new life into the faded assets of Belle Isle. Informal mobilising power is being translated into formal institutional resources, which ComePlayDetroit will reshape, revive and repurpose.

Civic innovators master the art of how small organisations can have a big impact. Equally intelligent large organisations also understand how they can connect more deeply and effectively with the daily life of the city. These big-to-small organisations tend to be either motherships or motherboards.

Motherships are large anchor institutions, which lend the weight of their resources—facilities, brand, convening power, legitimacy and political connections—for the good of smaller organisations and initiatives. Motherships can come in many forms but in most of these cities two stand out: universities and cultural institutions. A classic example is in Detroit, where Wayne State University and the Detroit Institute of Arts have both stood their ground as the private sector has left downtown.



Universities play a critical role in many of these cities, providing not just jobs and students, but also knowledge and wider international connections. Universities can be vital convenors of discussions about

the future of the city, as the role of the Urban Institute at UNC at Charlotte shows. San Jose State will be central to the remaking and rejuvenation of downtown San Jose, as Drexel and Temple will be to the future of the north side of Philadelphia. Engaged, creative and thoughtful universities provide vital anchors for communities and resources for other civic innovators to draw upon.

Enlightened cultural institutions are also motherships. A prime example is the way the Levine Museum of the New South has led debates in Charlotte about its changing identity. This included Emily Zimmern, the director, leading a taskforce on Charlotte's approach to the integration of documented and undocumented immigrants. In San Jose, the Tech Museum's president and CEO Tim Ritchie says it aims to be visitor-facing by day and community-facing by night. The annual Tech Challenge, for example, draws hundreds of entries from local schools each year. The Tech wants to be the hub for a community, not just a place to visit.

Motherboards are the shared operating platforms and systems that make cities work at scale, supporting many different kinds of initiatives.

A prime example is the way that advocates of cycling and walking in local communities are combining with advocates of large-scale investment in light rail and shared transport solutions. Public, mass transit, combined with cycling and walking, will be vital to the future liveability of all these cities. Civic innovators bring to life the hard infrastructures of the city.

San Jose, for example, started life as an agricultural hub, but has increasingly become synonymous with easy access to Route 101 running from San Francisco south through Silicon Valley. The city is implementing plans for a bus rapid transit system, modelled on Bogota, Colombia, while also building out miles of bike lanes and planning for the eventual expansion of the Bay Area Rapid Transit System. In Miami, one cause that brings together environmentalists, hip millennials and mainstream business is the need for a proper light and long-distance rail commuter services. Charlotte, a city centre ringed by freeways, is already enjoying the benefits of a north-south light rail line, which has connected the University of North Carolina to downtown for the first time, and encouraged the development of apartment blocks that add to the city's density along its route.



Getting an answer to the question – “who is the new social contract for?” – will be a messy, difficult process that will involve a good deal of conflict as well as much creative collaboration. It will be hard work, not undertaken lightly.

# A Deeper Contract

THE PATH TO THE SHINOLA STORE, JUST OFF CASS AVENUE IN MIDTOWN DETROIT, CAN BE FOUND BY FOLLOWING THE TRAIL OF MAINLY YOUNG PEOPLE CARRYING SMART LITTLE BLACK BAGS CONTAINING THEIR EXPENSIVE PURCHASES. The store is the hub for a little quarter of shops, galleries, bars, restaurants, microbreweries and coffee roasters, that adjoins part of an historic neighbourhood of remarkable restored 19th century homes. The young woman selling me my \$700 watch, made in a factory just down the road which employs about 700 people, explains that she drives in from the suburbs to work, while also being a student at nearby Wayne State University. She is working in a city her parents turned their backs on. But she does not actually live there, not yet at least.

Just round the corner in the wonderfully idiosyncratic Spiral Collective gallery, Dell Pryor, an impossibly elegant 80-something, provides a perspective with a longer lineage. Pryor has been trying to create an artists' quarter in Detroit—she wanted it to be like Chelsea in New York—for the best part of 40 years with mixed success. “It’s great that Shinola is just around the corner, bringing all these people here,” she says. “I just wish they would remember we’ve been here a long time, plugging away. I’d just like not to be forgotten.”

What is at stake in those two conversations is who the future of Detroit will be for. If the social contract is being rewritten, who will take part in that process and on whose terms will it be written?

There will be no future for Detroit without more firms like Shinola. Yet if that future excludes longtime residents like Dell Pryor, who have kept with the city through its long depression, then renewal will feed a sense of exclusion and resentment.

The answer to that question—“who is the new social contract for?”—will not arrive neatly packaged, settled once and for all by a vote or a political decision. It will be a messy, difficult process that will involve a good deal of conflict as well as much creative collaboration. In short it will be hard work, not undertaken lightly, as a few days in Detroit testifies.

At a discussion over lunch, Maggie Desantis, a veteran community organiser, echoes Dell Pryor’s question but adds a sharp edge: “I’m not going to be told by white hipsters what to do in a city I’ve been fighting for over three decades,” she proclaims. A stung Justin Jacobs, the founder of ComePlayDetroit shoots back, his own anger barely contained: “This city needs to welcome everyone who wants to come and really make a contribution to it. And they should come; the city needs them to come. But they should not have to go through a loyalty test before they can make a contribution.” Newcomers who are excited by the city nevertheless say that they have never been so quickly pigeonholed and labelled.

The charismatic and willowy Garlin Gilchrist III, Deputy Technology Director for Civic Community Engagement for the

city of Detroit, ruefully acknowledges in a subsequent discussion,

“We have no shortage of identity and pride in Detroit; that’s not where the problem is.”

Another young professional whose arrival in Detroit three years earlier was featured on the front page of a local paper as a sign that the city had turned the corner ruefully reflects: “Since then, Midtown Detroit has continued to lose population. For all that is going on there, the demographics are still going in the wrong direction.” An expert on Michigan cities tells me later that no city has ever overcome the demographic implosion of Detroit: “I just don’t see how the numbers stack up to keep it from going back into bankruptcy.” But then there is no city like Detroit, as Luther Keith shows.

Keith, a veteran Detroit journalist turned community activist, brims with optimism undaunted by his city’s long struggle against division and decline. “This is a place of hope and possibility,” he affirms. Everyone around the table, most of them also community leaders, nods in agreement. And there is more optimism and more cause for optimism in Detroit around than might be apparent from a distance.

On a Saturday night, sitting at the heaving bar of one of a clutch of trendy restaurants that are popping up in newly fashionable neighbourhoods across the city, a young woman who recently decamped with her boyfriend from an apartment in Brooklyn no bigger than a shoe box explains their reasons for coming: “This is an internationally important city. Everyone’s eyes are on Detroit. You can make a real difference here. We can afford a family house in which we can bring up a family. There’s a community of people doing the same thing to be a part of it. There’s a great coffee shop from Portland just down the road.”

Detroit provides them with a heightened sense of community lacking in other cities and that gives their lives a sense of meaning and purpose.

Down at the Eastern Market that Saturday morning it is not the colours and the smells that strike one but the sound of the people. That’s because most of the time Detroit does not sound like a city: Arriving in downtown earlier that morning, the most striking thing is the quiet. Midtown Detroit on a Saturday sounds more like a village than a city. Since 1950, Detroit has lots

more than 1 million people and hundreds of thousands of jobs. Much of the real estate in Midtown is still empty, standing like silent witnesses to the city’s implosion.

Yet Detroit is slowly piecing together a new social contract, which could sustain the city’s resurgence. A lawyer closely involved in navigating the city out of its bankruptcy, proudly wearing the regalia of a committed Detroit Tigers fan, explains in a shared taxi ride to the game that the election of a mayor who is competent and can be trusted is an essential step forward, a new beginning. The city, she explains, needs “adult supervision.” More effective city government is restoring the city’s finances, which means people will have to pay for their water rather than assuming it is free—just one essential part of a new social contract to sustain public services. Piece by piece the city is being put back together.

Yet the crowd at the Tigers’ game is mainly from the suburbs, not even day-trippers to the city that is home to their team. They want only to dip in and out of the city rather than being part of the social contract that will renew it. Yet even that may change; the new apartments around the circle outside the stadium have all been sold. Signs of life are returning to a city core, bringing new people, voices and expectations.

A thoughtful young African-American woman, brimming with ambition, tells me the day afterwards, almost in a hush, that the new Mayor Duggan regime is just the return of old style machine politics. “There is no new beginning in this,” she says. “It’s the old story being rerun.” The racial divisions between inner city Detroit and its suburbs will be played out in the centre of the city as it comes back to life, she says. Her question is this: Is Detroit regenerating just because white, middle-class people have decided it’s hip (and they cannot afford New York)? “Urban trickle-down economics from the white middle class to poor blacks will not work. That will not genuinely include people in Detroit’s future success,” she says. “Something more deliberate, bold and creative will be required.”

A new social contract is all very well, but the city needs an economic base. Over dinner, a Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper columnist asks a group of us, plaintively, if there are any examples of cities around the world that have replaced the lost manual labour and unskilled jobs of the mass production industry. Everyone scratches their heads. What we offer as answers seem barely more than straws in the wind. A city cannot create a viable social contract that includes all its citizens

unless it also has a viable economic base that can provide them with livelihoods in an era in which technology is filleting unskilled jobs from most organisations.

At the extreme in Detroit, that struggle to create a new social contract and a viable community is even more violent and visceral.

Out in blighted Brightmoor, a young mother showing me the water reclamation projects she runs, which feed the district’s burgeoning market gardens, explains how she had to learn to shoot a rifle because after dark it’s like living on a lawless frontier. Yet she has chosen here to bring up two daughters.

Once a prosperous working class community where young men would proudly display gleaming cars outside neatly-painted clapper board cottages set amidst woodland, Brightmoor became everything that Detroit stood for in the dark imaginations of those who did not live there—an apocalyptic scene of empty lots and burned-out houses. Tourists come to compare it to Chernobyl, she says.

Yet large parts of Brightmoor are now being reimagined by mainly white, educated homesteaders, who are creating a new ideal of rural community within a former industrial city. It’s not hard to see Brightmoor

as an urban pasture land of rolling fields, streams and trees, interspersed with public and private market gardens. In the winter, children will sled down the slopes through the trees. In the summer, the creek could be a nature trail for local schools. Brightmoor is festooned with expressions of public love, like swings from trees and rough circular benches, in gardens with names like the Lamphere Community Garden and Louise May's Seed Park. All this caring for the place and for one another, consciously evokes the frontier spirit and homesteading values of thrift and simplicity, self-help and community.

Amidst the gardens she points out the houses that have large SUVs with blacked-out windows parked outside them, in open sight overseeing the serving of drugs mainly to people driving through from the suburbs—another local industry, with its own codes and norms, but definitely not a part of the formal social contract.

Yet in Detroit nothing is ever simple. Just after lunch that day in a conversation in Corktown, Nicole Farmer, the force behind LifeLine, an entrepreneurship training programme for people with few skills, declares: "I was a mother at 14. I have taken everything this city has had to offer, and believe me it has a lot. But what kept me going and got me through

all of that was the love I got in Brightmoor. For me Brightmoor was very important."

**Detroit: deeply troubled, completely confounding and utterly irresistible.**

Rewriting the social contract in Detroit will require painstaking, difficult work, often involving conflict and argument, to build trust, create shared agendas and to share rewards and responsibilities. It will take many years. That process will only succeed if it makes a tangible difference to all parts of the city and not just for those newcomers with money, skills and resources. Yet if Detroit does not learn how to embrace new people, new ideas and change, it has no future.

There is a real hope in these cities that they have turned a page. Yet two major issues face these cities as civic innovators within them attempt to rewrite their social contract: Who will be included, and will it make a tangible difference to the economic outlook for these cities, especially for those without high skills and incomes?

#### WHO IS INCLUDED?

To grow and innovate, cities need new ideas and new people. In an aging society, U.S. cities will need a flow of

young millennials and new immigrants. Successful cities will be good at attracting and then rapidly integrating immigrants. Conversely, cities where communities are closed, inward looking and distrustful of outsiders will find the future harder. While the "big I" of integration might be achieved through legislation, regulation and reforms to public systems, the "little i" of daily integration, which is just as significant, is achieved through countless small acts of connection, empathy and entrepreneurship through organisations such as Global Detroit and the Welcoming Committee for New Pennsylvanians.

Being open to outsiders means that successful cities need to be at ease with the idea that their identity needs to shift and flex rather than being fixed. Helping cities to navigate a changing identity, which can accommodate the past and the future, continuity amidst rapid change, is a vital task for civic innovators.

Cities such as Detroit, which has a powerful sense of its identity, may find this harder than younger, more open and transient places such as Miami, San Jose and Charlotte. Yet places that are open to outsiders can, as a result, seem to lack a core identity: What makes them so easily accessible is also what can make them

seem rather bland. In both Charlotte and San Jose, for example, many people have come from somewhere else. Charlotte has turned itself into first a national banking centre and now an international one. Since the 1990s, it has attracted immigrants from the north and west of the U.S. and from all over the world. The result, however, is a city that is searching for a confident sense of identity. San Jose's very success at the heart of Silicon Valley seems to rest on it lacking a distinct identity. As one person put it: "Living in San Jose is a bit like a giant conference call. People go to Washington to be involved in politics and power, not because Washington is a city they love. People come to San Jose to be involved in tech, that is what pulls them in, not the city itself." Another person who has worked at a senior level within the city administration explained: "There's not a there there, in San Jose."

Nor is everyone convinced there needs to be. San Francisco and Silicon Valley are strong brands in their own right. Many people feel a strong sense of attachment to particular neighbourhoods like Rose Garden and Japantown, and so see no need to be attached to the city of San Jose itself, which can at times seem like a dormitory for people who commute to work elsewhere in Silicon Valley.

Culture in all its forms will provide the most important way for these cities to create bridges and points of shared reference, not least through food.

Cities need to learn, too, how to bridge between new and old forms of power. Cities are the most potent breeding ground for new forms of power that are more collaborative, lateral and self-organising. Yet this new power needs to find ways to connect, influence and work with the older, established, often disconnected and yet still critical, older forms of power in city hall, big business and political machines. One example of such a connection being made is the community of designers, artists, social activists and tech entrepreneurs that has gelled around Ignite Philly, an evening of fifteen five-minute talks from locals, delivered to the packed upstairs room of a down-at-heel-looking pub in Fishtown called Johnny Brenda's, on subjects ranging from making bread and the joy of beer, to how to turn a major thoroughfare into a cycle friendly boulevard and the attractions of imported Austrian Christmas rituals. The founders of Ignite Philly, irreverent and proudly self-consciously brash, now find themselves invited to sit in on discussions among some of the most powerful people in the city.

Cities that want to grow need to include new people and ideas, alongside the old.

The social contract in a city cannot be fixed; it needs to unfold and adapt as the city itself changes. An effective social contract needs to be open and inclusive. It cannot be imposed from on high, nor become the property of just one group. Managing these conversations within a city cannot be left to City Hall, nor to business. Good cities need a wide range of civic innovators conducting these conversations across different parts of the city.

### FAIR GROWTH

Cities do not just need a new social contract. They need a robust economic base. Here they seem to face an unenviable choice.

The route out of economic stagnation seems to involve forms of growth that are grouped under the banner of gentrification, which brings with it investment but which can seemingly do little for already-established communities. New people move into and enjoy the city but seemingly at the expense of those who have lived there a long time, some in poverty. Cities are growing, but often that brings with it widening inequality.

Civic innovators are devising alternatives, which are the starting point for a new narrative of inclusive, fair economic growth in cities. That will mean tackling five key issues >



**EDUCATION:** Cities are struggling, often with limited success, to improve public education systems that provide an essential bedrock for shared culture and economic opportunity. Cities without good schools find it hard to retain families and to develop homegrown talent. The failure to improve these systems only drives further fragmentation with the growth of private, magnet and charter schools, along with homeschooling.



**POVERTY:** Even cities that are growing are finding it hard to break down pockets of deeply ingrained poverty. Philadelphia is the starkest example. The city is doing well: Comcast, for example, is building a vast new city centre building. Yet that will not touch many of the poorest communities, which are no more than a mile away. One of four Philadelphians lives below the poverty line. That's a heavy burden to carry for the economy, the tax base and public services.



**INEQUALITY:** U.S. cities are in danger of sorting themselves into places where only the very well-off and the poor live. The middle class, especially families, on median incomes may find city living increasingly unattractive. Cities can survive without middle-class families and children. But places designed for the young, single and childless can seem transitional and lack a sense of attachment.



**DISINVESTMENT:** Community development corporations, like PEC in Philadelphia, are doing sterling work to revive blasted areas like Lancaster Avenue. Yet compared to the scale of disinvestment from the city, this is a drop in the ocean. Civic innovation needs to attract and mobilise significant flows of investment into the cities, which will require financial and commercial innovation as well. Mobilising that kind of investment will require new alliances between foundations, financiers, city administrations and civic innovators.



**SUSTAINABILITY:** All cities must thrive in the face of deep uncertainty about their future. Detroit has suffered a decades-long crisis, which still threatens it. Cities that were once centres of manufacturing are only just finding successful new ways forward based on innovation, creative industries and culture. All of that will happen against a backdrop of rising environmental challenges and costs. That in turn means cities will need to make significant shared investments in energy and transport systems. As a former mayor of Miami Beach put it: "Miami is at the very start of a 100-year boom, if we can stay afloat."

None of these challenges should dampen the new optimism about the outlook for the U.S. city. However, it should put in perspective the challenges facing the hopeful generation of civic innovators profiled in this report. As they pull their cities together to find a shared sense of purpose, they are working against powerful forces threatening to pull it apart, separating and segmenting people, so they have less in common and less at stake in their shared life. In the years to come, cities will need many such innovators, creating new institutions and reanimating old ones.

There is no better example of how that is done and why it matters than the remarkable Miami Dade College (MDC), in the heart of downtown Miami. If Miami has a social contract, it is embodied in this college.

Miami Dade College started life in 1960 with 2,000 students. It now caters to about 165,000 a year, giving it one of the largest graduating classes of African-American and Hispanic students in the U.S. Two-thirds of MDC students come from low-income families. Students only need a high school diploma to get in and pay fees of \$3,500 per annum. That may not sound like much, but the average household income of a MDC student is

\$15,000-\$18,000 a year. Often students are the first generation in their family to get a college degree. Parents and students make significant sacrifices to make it possible. Eduardo J. Padron, MDC's president, who arrived in Florida at the age of 15 as a refugee from Cuba and has been college president since 1995, says there is a hunger to learn among MDC students that is reminiscent of the developing world. For these ambitious, striving families, education is not seen as an entitlement but a vital investment.

MDC is a microcosm of Miami and a model of how to knit together a diverse society. Students come from 184 different countries; their national flags fly from the balconies around the open atrium of the main campus building. It is a celebration of shared purpose and ambition amidst enormous cultural difference.

The college, Padron says, is all about economic opportunity, or as he puts it, MDC is turning hopes and dreams into jobs and incomes. But it also provides people with a sense of pride and belonging to a city in which they are just putting down roots.

Often students with poor English skills need extra help, but they more than make up for that with motivation. There are no discipline problems at MDC, Padron explains proudly. Everyone comes

motivated to succeed. For these young people, getting a college degree is a vital stepping stone, not just to higher incomes but also to become a part of society.

The college is about far more than churning out students with qualifications. At every opportunity, students are encouraged to become entrepreneurs and problem solvers. That's not just because there are thousands of small businesses in Miami, but because Padron expects young people will work in an economy in which they will have several jobs, using a shifting array of technologies. That is why MDC is constantly developing new courses, including lately robotics, data science, animation and games design.

The college is also encouraging them to become engaged and critical citizens. It runs the largest "service learning" programme in the U.S., for example. All presidential hopefuls make a stop at MDC. And the college sees its role in the city as much more than education. It started both book and film festivals to reanimate the downtown area where its main campus is located.

If Miami develops anything like a social contract, then it will trace its roots back to the classrooms and corridors of MDC. If Miami is to find leaders capable of

meeting the challenges it faces, they are likely to have come through MDC. More cities will need more institutions of the scale, ambition and depth of MDC.

To achieve that, civic innovators will need to show that they are not just reanimating the city to provide a lifestyle backdrop for young hipsters but tackling really significant challenges, for example around education, investment and employment. They will need to show how small, nimble innovative organisations can reshape the agendas of large institutions, which have the bulk and ballast that cities need. With their help, cities will need to develop a robust and resilient economic base, which provides fair and inclusive growth with jobs for those with modest skills and median incomes, as well as those with college degrees. They will have to translate the jobs, homes, tourists and consumer spending into the intangible assets of belonging, attachment, pride and commitment.

There is much to be done. But at the very least cities are in with a good chance, because for the first time for decades they are swimming with the tide.

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