

# The Resilience of Detroit

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An Application of the Adaptive Cycle Metaphor to  
an American Metropolis

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## Introduction

On Thursday, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the City of Detroit made U.S. history with the largest municipal bankruptcy in the country to date. Approximately \$18 billion in size, it dwarfed the second-largest, Jefferson County, Alabama, by a factor of four. “There is no road map for Detroit’s recovery,” declared the New York Times.<sup>1</sup> Reductions in city services, cuts in benefits and pensions for public sector workers, and reduced borrowing capacity are sure to follow.

Yet this single dramatic event conceals a more complex, variegated, and hopeful reality on the ground in the Motor City. To use a well-worn metaphor, in Detroit flowers are clearly growing through the cracks in the pavement. The [Atlantic Cities](#) news website offers a wealth of stories of Detroit’s triumphs and travails, from profiles of artists and entrepreneurs to the ongoing saga of the city’s fiscal crisis. [Model D Media](#) is a treasure trove of start-up, nonprofit and neighborhood success stories. The Huffington Post recently released a photo essay entitled “[Detroit Is Not Dead](#).” Books about the city continue to draw public interest, from Andrew Herscher’s postmodern design theorizing in *The Unreal Estate Guide to Detroit* to Charlie LeDuff’s hard-boiled, streetwise journalism in *Detroit: An American Autopsy*. Meanwhile, the recent (2012) documentary film *Detropia* paints a bleak portrait of a devastated city kept alive by a handful of intrepid survivors, stragglers, slackers, and creative types. Despite the city’s struggles, optimism remains firmly on the table: 2013 saw the release of *Detroit Future City*, a comprehensive report by the nonprofit Detroit Works Project that proposes a dramatic reimagining of the city’s land use, transportation, neighborhood development, and economic growth strategies.

This paper provides an exploratory study of recent developments in the City of Detroit, from the perspective of resilience theory. Drawing on the adaptive cycle theory of C.S. Holling, I suggest that Detroit is moving through a phase in which underemployed people and resources may be recombined to increase the city’s resilience and productive diversity in the aftermath of long-term decline. To make this case, I draw on existing economic, historical, and journalistic studies of the Detroit metropolitan region, along with testimony from semi-structured interviews conducted on a research trip I undertook with my Ecotrust colleague Sam Beebe in 2012. Our findings are meant to be preliminary, exploratory, and provocative, and to stimulate further research on the social and economic dimensions of urban resilience.

In summary, we find that the revival of Detroit hinges on social equity across race and class, economic diversification including technology start-ups, social enterprises and cooperatives, broad-based civic engagement and public participation in governance, and ecologically sustainable land use patterns including open space, community gardens, and urban agriculture. Making this case requires a careful look not only at Detroit’s present, but its past, which I examine in the next section. Industrial specialization, vertical integration, and firm concentration in the early to middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century caused the Detroit region’s economy to become vulnerable, even at its most prosperous, to business cycle fluctuations, overseas competition in product markets, and geographic shifts in economic activity. The existing crisis of unemployment and poverty in Detroit is best viewed as the long-run effect of these short-run fluctuations and long-run economic changes. Meanwhile, over the course of the twentieth century, long-term patterns of racial residential segregation and employment discrimination wrought

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<sup>1</sup> Davey, Monica and Mary Williams Walsh (2013, July 18): “Billions in Debt, Detroit Tumbles into Insolvency.” *New York Times*. URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/19/us/detroit-files-for-bankruptcy.html?pagewanted=all>

major damage on African American communities in Detroit. This dark history has given rise to the current crisis that afflicts these communities, which comprise the majority of the city.

## **Economic and Social Theories of Detroit's Decline**

The decline of Detroit cannot be traced to a single cause, but must be examined as a complex process. This section presents briefly the existing economic and social theories and studies that explain the decline of Detroit as a major American city. I examine environmental degradation, environmental injustice, and income inequality alongside low economic growth, sparse entrepreneurship, high unemployment, and low income per capita. In the current literature, explanations for the city's struggles tend to be exclusively socially or economically based. Yet these two sets of explanations must be synthesized in order to understand the dynamics of the city.

### **The Death of Distance**

The "death of distance" argument holds that falling costs of transport and communications are primarily to blame for the decline of Detroit and other manufacturing cities in the American Rust Belt (Glaeser and Ponzetto 2007). These declines in key variable costs brought about the flight of manufacturing from urban areas and into areas where costs of land and capital were lower. As a result of the flight of manufacturing from the city, urban property values declined. But falling distance costs also brought about an increase in the returns to innovation in cities, leading to certain cities becoming dense with innovative people and firms. A manufacturing city, Detroit experienced the first effect but not the second; idea-intensive cities such as New York or San Francisco experienced the second effect as well as the first, and became innovation hubs after experiencing industrial decline. The model predicts some plausible effects corroborated by the data; for instance, that inequality will increase in innovative cities due to sectorally specific knowledge spillovers and increasing returns to innovation.

The death of distance theory cannot hold up as a complete explanation for Detroit's decline. In particular, it neglects three important questions. First, it ignores Detroit's history as an innovative and economically diverse metropolis, which lost its edge only after decades of industrial dominance. The death of distance argument treats innovation as essentially exogenous and ignores the task of identifying forces that may cause a city to gain or lose innovative capacity. Second, the model leaves out the role of national and international policies such as trade liberalization, financial deregulation, loose monetary policy, and weakened social safety nets in exacerbating the decline of U.S. manufacturing cities, by encouraging overseas investment, lengthening manufacturing supply chains, and suppressing wages and benefits. Third, the model leaves out the roles of racial inequality and class politics, which led to differential effects of Detroit's decline between the city itself and the suburbs.

It is not possible to understand fully the complex social and economic dynamics of Detroit without addressing the difficult questions of race and class. For instance, although low transport costs certainly influenced manufacturing plants to leave the city of Detroit, so did the pursuit of low labor costs, low taxes, and weak labor unions. The Detroit suburbs lacked the vigorous labor organizing that characterized the city, as did the Sun Belt and the manufacturing cities and special economic zones of the developing world whose manufacturing jobs supplanted those lost in Detroit. Residential racial segregation, meanwhile, prevented many African Americans from following the jobs as they migrated out of the city and into the suburbs; persistent and widespread employment discrimination presented barriers to African

American employment for those who were able to move (Sugrue 1996). The next section addresses the legacy of racial inequality in Detroit.

### **Racial Inequality and Segregation**

Though Detroit did not suffer the Jim Crow laws that pervaded the U.S. South, its history bespeaks persistent and widespread racial inequality nonetheless. Detroit was often called the “northernmost Southern city” for its segregationist city policies, discriminatory employment patterns and persistent prejudices. Sugrue (1996) documents in harrowing detail the struggles over public housing in Detroit during the Depression and post-World War II eras, highlighting the role of white segregationist associations in perpetuating discriminatory housing policies that contributed to the geographic and social isolation of African American communities. In addition, African Americans faced formidable obstacles to employment in most industries, through a wide variety of exclusionary practices by both employers and unions. Detroit’s history of segregation, discrimination and class politics suggests that inequalities of race and class in Detroit are deeply intertwined, and best understood in relation to one another.

The legacies of segregation and discrimination persist in metropolitan Detroit today. While the population of the city is 82.7% African American, the population of Oakland County, which contains the city’s northern suburbs, is 77.7% white, and Monroe County, which contains the city’s western suburbs, is 95.1% white (U.S. Census). Using 2010 census data, Logan and Sturtz (2011) found that Detroit was the most segregated U.S. major metropolitan area, measured by both Dissimilarity and Isolation indices for African Americans. This pattern has been associated with marked disparities between white and black residents in Detroit. Median household income in 2008 for white residents of metropolitan Detroit (Detroit-Warren-Livonia MSA) was \$59,323; for black Detroiters it was \$32,018 (US Census Bureau, ACS 2008). While (official) unemployment in that year for white Detroiters was 7.2%, black unemployment was 13.6%. The financial crisis and ensuing Great Recession have had a lasting impact that has affected black Detroiters disproportionately. In 2011, the unemployment rate for white Detroiters was 10.2%, and for black Detroiters it was 18.1%. These figures are underestimates, since they exclude discouraged workers; metropolitan labor force participation rates reveal further disparities, as the 67.6% rate for whites compares to the 52.1% rate for blacks (BLS 2011). While Detroit’s labor force participation rate for whites compares favorably to the national average for 2011 (64.5%), the corresponding figure for blacks compares unfavorably to the national average (61.4%).

Historically, racial inequality played a strong role in the processes of suburbanization, sprawl, and decentralization of unemployment that characterized twentieth-century Detroit. The phenomenon of “white flight” from the central city, which accelerated through the 1950s and 1960s, occurred concurrently with and alongside the decentralization of employment, as manufacturing plants relocated to suburban areas. People followed jobs, jobs followed people; a majority of the region’s African American residents, who had come to Detroit specifically seeking employment, were left behind.

A number of authors have advanced the theory of spatial mismatch in seeking to explain the persistence of unemployment and poverty in African American communities in the United States. This theory holds that geographic isolation makes job acquisition more difficult for racial or ethnic minorities than for dominant or majority ethnic groups. Stoll (2005), for example, documents a positive and statistically significant correlation between employment decentralization (“job sprawl”) and lack of job opportunities for African Americans across metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) of the United States. Using

constructed indicators for each measure, he finds that holding metropolitan population constant, a 10% increase in job sprawl is associated with a 3.1 percentage-point increase in spatial mismatch for African Americans. This finding is of direct relevance to Detroit: in 2000 Detroit MSA had both the highest level of racially determined spatial mismatch and job sprawl of all United States major metropolitan areas (population over 500,000).

Environmental injustice and poor food access are two more important indicators of persistent racial inequality in Detroit. Schultz *et al* (2008) analyzed the determinants of social and physical environmental stress in Detroit by neighborhood, using a variety of indicators to proxy for each stress type. They found that neighborhood composition of African American and Latino residents, as well as the neighborhood poverty rate, were all significant and independent predictors of residents' perceived physical environmental stress, with pollution, traffic, vacancy, and housing conditions used as stress indicators. Neighborhood racial composition remained significant even after adjusting for poverty, indicating a specifically racial component to environmental injustice which is consistent with the literature on that subject (e.g. Bullard 1990). Zenk *et al* (2005) found that low-income African American neighborhoods in Detroit had poorer access to supermarkets than either low-income white neighborhoods or middle- and upper-income neighborhoods of any race or ethnicity. These disadvantages in food access map to significantly higher rates of chronic, diet-related diseases. Poor food access translates into high rates of obesity and chronic disease: obesity rates among black Detroiters in 2009 were 37%, compared to 26% for whites. Overall, the rate of food insecurity among households in Detroit was estimated in 2009 as 30%, over twice the national rate of 14.7%. The Detroit Economic Growth Corporation (DEGC) estimated a \$200 million annual shortfall in grocery demand within the city limits (Pothukuchi 2011).

## **The Resilience of Detroit: A Heuristic Model of Change**

### **Resilience Theory: A Brief Introduction**

Resilience theory is a body of work with origins in systems ecology but with increasing applicability in the social sciences. Analysts and practitioners of resilience provide a number of competing definitions of the concept. Perhaps the most important distinction between definitions is that between engineering resilience and ecological resilience. While engineering resilience is defined as a system's ability to bounce back or recover from a disturbance or stress, ecological resilience consists of a system's ability to adapt to and influence changes, including disturbances and stresses, as they occur, while maintaining its basic functions. A resilience analysis that uses the engineering concept assumes, implicitly, the desirability of returning to the state or trajectory prior to the shock. An ecological resilience analysis makes no such assumption. Most economic resilience studies imply an engineering concept of resilience; for example, such studies may measure an economy's return to a steady-state growth path, measured by GDP per capita. By contrast, an ecological concept of economic resilience will examine indicators such as productive diversity, new business creation, social equity, land use, and civic participation.

Resilience thinkers identify, classify, and measure the factors that influence the degree of resilience prevailing in complex systems; they identify the range of possible equilibria or stable states which may characterize such systems, and the thresholds beyond which systems pass from one state to another. The range of topics addressed in the field is vast and growing, and spans a wide variety of ecological, political, economic, and social domains. Carpenter *et al* (2002) examines fisheries, lakes, and agricultural systems; Walker and Abel (2002) study range lands, and Pendall *et al* (2007) and Foster (2006) focus on

metropolitan regions. Janssen (2002) focuses on the resilience of human societies to climate change, and Westley (2002) takes up the theme of adaptive management as a way to build resilience in social-ecological systems. Foster (2006) provides a case study of the resilience of the Buffalo (NY) metropolitan region in the face of long-term decline, arguing that racial inequalities, fractious class politics, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and an overall culture of mistrust impeded the city's recovery from deindustrialization in the late twentieth century.

Regional resilience can be understood through two major lenses: one strictly economic, the other more broadly social-ecological. The economic lens aims to determine what factors cause or influence an economy to resume its previous path of growth in the aftermath of a shock (Hill *et al* 2008). This approach tends to adopt the engineering definition of resilience: an economy is expected to possess a steady-state growth path dependent on its stocks of the primary factors of production - land, labor, and capital. Resilient economies return to this equilibrium growth path when shocks force them away from it. The social-ecological lens, by contrast, aims to understand the broader social, economic, and ecological forces that drive systemic change, identify systemic vulnerabilities and threats, and assess the ways in which systems adapt to and influence change. This approach adopts the ecological concept of resilience, as social-ecological systems are viewed as inherently complex, adaptive, and evolving. Economies, in this conception, are viewed in terms of their ability to perform functions necessary to the well-being of people and ecosystems: provision of food, fuel, and materials to satisfy basic consumption needs and desires, recycling and disposal of waste, and preservation and restoration of core ecosystem functions, for example. Resilience, in this view, entails adapting to and influencing change, rather than recovering from the changes wrought by exogenous shocks.

This paper will adopt the social-ecological lens for the study of the city and metropolitan region of Detroit: Detroit's resilience lies in its capacity to adapt and transform itself to meet the needs and aspirations of its people, rather than its ability to return to the form it took prior to the crisis it has suffered in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The crisis of Detroit, in turn, is much more complex in form and substance than the exogenous shocks to growth, investment, or consumption modeled by standard neoclassical economics. Pendall, Foster and Cowell (2007), in their work on regional resilience, distinguish between two kinds of disturbances, shocks and long-term declines or "slow burns," that imply different views of resilience. While regions tend to recover over time from shocks such as natural disasters, "slow burns" or slow-moving declines often imply fundamental regional transformation. Deindustrialization, sprawl, and environmental degradation are three important types of "slow burn" crises that Detroit has suffered in its recent history. Unlike shocks or temporary disasters, slow declines are uniquely capable of corroding the social and political structures of regions as they create winners and losers, lead to exit or flight by those with the resources or connections to do so successfully, and create social tensions by altering the balance of power. The heightening of racial tensions, polarization, and violence that wracked Detroit in the 1960s can be seen through this lens as a by-product of the "slow burns" of plant closure, suburbanization and job sprawl.

### **The Adaptive Cycle Metaphor**

A core element of resilience theory is a heuristic model of complex systems called the adaptive cycle. The adaptive cycle is too general to support hypothesis testing; Holling and Gunderson (2002) call it "a metaphor to classify systems, order events, and suggest specific questions and testable hypotheses". Yet its usefulness as a structuring metaphor is considerable: it is possible to note features of the cycle in a

wide variety of phenomena, including the rise and decline of firms, industries, and political or jurisdictional entities such as cities. The adaptive cycle metaphor provides us with a useful way of understanding recent events and long-term processes currently underway in Detroit.

The theory of the adaptive cycle has four stages, each represented by a letter variable: growth ( $r$ ), conservation ( $K$ ), release ( $\Omega$ ), and reorganization ( $\alpha$ ).<sup>2</sup> It is commonly represented by a diagram such as Figure 1 (below). Three variables characterize the phases: potential, connectedness, and resilience. Potential refers to the accumulated resources available to the system in question. In the ecosystem context, the resources in question may be biomass or species diversity. In the context of metropolitan regions, the most relevant resources are physical and financial capital and knowledge (or human capital). Connectedness refers to the internal connections between the agents or resources within the system; in the regional context, these may refer to firms (large or small, new or old), political parties, bureaucracies and agencies, foundations and nonprofits, and communities and their organizations (religious institutions and community centers, for example). Some variant of social capital often provides a relevant metric for connectedness. Finally, resilience refers to the system's ability to adapt or respond to changes, including surprises, shocks, or long-term stresses. A system that responds creatively and flexibly to adversity, surprise, or stress is considered to be resilient.

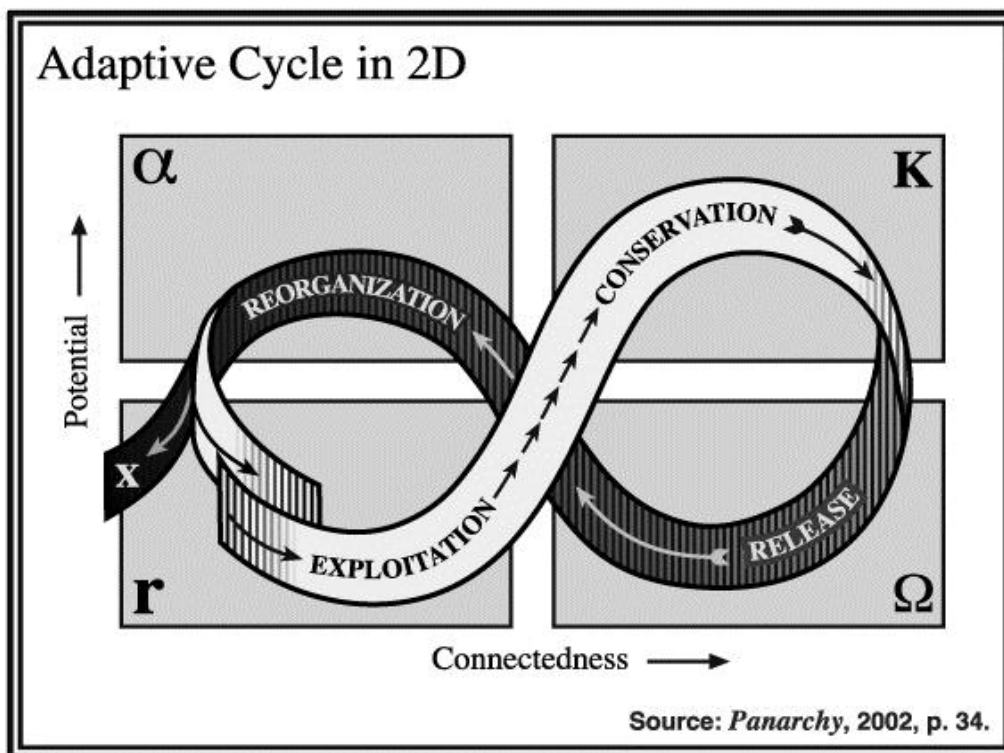


Figure 1: The Adaptive Cycle. Image Source: People and Place (2013).

<sup>2</sup> The growth ( $r$ ) phase is sometimes called the "exploitation" phase. However, for many thinkers the term "exploitation" is laden with negative value judgments; I choose the relatively more neutral "growth" term.



In the growth (or exploitation) phase (r), new resources are brought into use as the system expands. Competition for resources is intense, and the diversity of agents in the system increases as niches are established. Potential is low but rising, connectedness is low but increasing, and resilience is high as rapid changes are absorbed readily by the system. For Detroit, this phase corresponds to the city's dynamic and diverse growth in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when the city was a rapidly expanding center for a wide variety of manufacturing types, including the automobile. Glaeser (2011), for example, compares Detroit in the late nineteenth century to Silicon Valley in the 1960s and 1970s. The city's location along a key transport route, the Detroit River which connects the two Great Lakes of Huron and Erie, made it an ideal location for industrial production and commerce. (The city's name itself is a French word meaning "the Straits," referring to the narrow river as it connects the two large fresh water bodies.)

In the conservation phase (K), the system becomes more rigid and less diverse, as resources become more concentrated and tightly interconnected. Connectedness and accumulated potential are both high, but resilience is low as resources are conserved rather than used for innovation. For Detroit, this process occurred with the consolidation of the auto industry in the early and middle decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jacobs (2000) summarizes the process:

Detroit became specialized at the expense of diversity... Detroit's economy had actually been excellent at generating exports and replacing many chains of imports until its most successful export work - automobile manufacturing - came to dominate the city's economy. By the mid-1920's, the city's versatility had gone into reverse. Independent local suppliers to the car industry dwindled because the car manufacturers absorbed many of them into their own companies and stopped buying from many others in favor of filling their own needs for supplies internally. Surviving independent suppliers concentrated on shaving prices for a few huge customers, didn't seek other customers, and didn't develop nonautomotive sidelines. ... Skilled workers didn't break away from the booming automobile industry to found other kinds of enterprises, (or) seek other economic niches. (Jacobs 2000, 80)

The hierarchical, bureaucratic, and tightly vertically integrated auto industry became a dominant method of organizing economic activity in the industrialized world, to the extent that the French regulation school of political economy named an entire period in economic history, Fordism, after this structure (e.g. Aglietta 1980). Vertical integration of the Big Three automakers led to the closure of hundreds of independent auto parts suppliers. Automation led to further consolidation of the industry, as smaller companies were unable to afford the large-scale capital investments required to adopt the new technologies (Sugrue 1996).

In the third phase of the cycle ( $\Omega$ ), the highly productive, yet rigid system becomes increasingly vulnerable and eventually collapses under pressure, releasing resources into the surrounding environment. Potential decreases as accumulated resources are released; connectedness decreases. Resilience is low during this phase, but the freeing of previously restricted resources and connections sets the stage for its (eventual) increase. In Detroit's case, the breakdown of the auto-dominated economy during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century represents this phase. The relevant pressures consisted of the business cycle, class tensions, racial unrest, and mobile capital; the results of the collapse were unemployment, vacancy, poverty, pollution, drug addiction, and violence.

In the last half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Detroit's economy was hit with a perfect storm of business cycle fluctuations, technological changes and increased capital mobility. The auto industry's extreme sensitivity to consumer demand made industry jobs particularly vulnerable to recessions; four waves of recessions between 1947 and 1963 led to the loss of 134,000 auto manufacturing jobs (Sugrue 1996). Further, beginning in the 1950s employment began to decentralize, as auto companies and large numbers of predominantly white, middle-class residents abandoned the city for the suburbs, increasing urban unemployment and racial polarization.<sup>3</sup> This decentralization of employment was motivated by lower land costs and falling transport costs, but also lower labor costs and the desire to suppress union activity. Meanwhile, auto parts suppliers and metals-related firms followed the auto companies out of the city, exacerbating the trend. Technological changes, driven by capital-intensive automation, further reduced the industry's labor demand, exacerbating unemployment in the city and reducing returns to knowledge, skills and information (Glaeser 2011). As capital became increasingly mobile across borders and industry supply chains became increasingly global, Detroit's automakers began to source parts from all over the world to stay competitive. These cross-cutting trends wrought mass unemployment and abandonment of factories in and around the city.

By the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Detroit was left a shadow of its former self, with high unemployment, endemic crime, crumbling infrastructure, and poor public services. Between 1992 and 2002 alone, the city lost 39% of its manufacturing establishments.<sup>4</sup> The foreclosure crisis in 2008 dealt the latest blow: between 2008 and August 2009, the unemployment rate doubled, peaking at nearly 28%.<sup>5</sup> The realities of life for most of the city's residents are harsh: in 2010, the poverty rate was estimated at 33.3%;<sup>6</sup> the child poverty rate, a shocking 53.6%.<sup>7</sup> The on-time high school graduation rate is a dismal 58%<sup>8</sup>; the rate of functional illiteracy among adults is estimated at 47%.<sup>9</sup> The city has been ravaged by drug addiction and crime, spending decades with the dubious title of the Murder Capital of the United States.

Over and above the struggles faced by its residents, the city faces enormous planning challenges. An estimated 36% of the total number of commercial parcels and 22% of the industrial land in the city lies vacant. A 2010 study estimated the total number of vacant parcels at 91,488.<sup>10</sup> Of these, 44,000 are publicly owned.<sup>11</sup> The population has declined from its peak in 1950 of 1.8 million to 713,000 in 2010.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> In the words of Krugman (2013), the residents of urban Detroit were "stranded by sprawl."

<sup>4</sup> Citizens Research Council (2010): "The Fiscal Condition of the City of Detroit." Livonia, MI: Citizens Research Council of Michigan. URL: <http://www.crcmich.org/PUBLICAT/2010s/2010/memo1098.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012): "Unemployment in the City of Detroit." URL: <http://tinyurl.com/8cpcpeh>. Today in 2012, Detroit's unemployment rate stands at 17.7%, with a low rate of adult labor force participation (55.3%). Source: Citizens Research Council (2010).

<sup>6</sup> Citizens Research Council (2010)

<sup>7</sup> Community Development Advocates of Detroit (2012): <http://cdad-online.org/about/>

<sup>8</sup> Excellent Schools Detroit (2010): "Taking Ownership: Our Pledge to Educate All of Detroit's Children." URL: <http://www.excellentschoolsdetroit.org/sites/default/files/esdplan.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Detroit Literacy Coalition (2012): "Frequently Asked Questions." URL: <http://www.detroitliteracy.org/faq.htm>

<sup>10</sup> Detroit Residential Parcel Survey (2010): "Citywide Report for Vacant Parcels." URL: [http://www.detroitparcelsurvey.org/pdf/reports/DRPS\\_citywide\\_vacantlots.pdf](http://www.detroitparcelsurvey.org/pdf/reports/DRPS_citywide_vacantlots.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> Colasanti, Kathryn, Charlotte Litjens and Michael Hamm (2010): "Growing Food in the City: The Production Potential of Detroit's Vacant Land." East Lansing, MI: The C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University.

The city government and the State of Michigan have become mired in conflict: the state recently assumed control over the city's finances, in the face of staunch opposition from city residents. The recent bankruptcy is merely the latest blow in a long series of setbacks for the city's public sector.

The final phase of the adaptive cycle ( $\alpha$ ) is that of reorganization or regeneration, in which resources are recombined and growth resumes in new and different patterns. Potential increases as resources are accumulated; connectedness is low initially but increases, and resilience is high. Despite its recent bankruptcy, the city of Detroit may now be entering a stage of its development that parallels this phase of the adaptive cycle. The evidence for this new stage will not be found in the public sector, but rather the innovative wings of the private and associative (nonprofit, philanthropic, and civic) sectors. The next section provides a few important pieces of anecdotal evidence meant to inspire a more systematic investigation.

Characteristics of the current wave of Detroit's regeneration are opposite to those of its industrial peak in the twentieth century: regenerative activity is decentralized, bottom-up, participatory, innovative, and inclusive. It is worth noting that the dynamic, socially progressive organizing by low-income residents of color has often been overshadowed in the media by a focus on the predominantly young and white artists, designers, entrepreneurs, and "hipsters" that have recently begun to migrate (or return) to the city. In the city's regeneration, there's a turn towards innovative and ecological methods of land use, such as open space development, urban organic gardening and farming, bike paths and bike lanes, and the use of abandoned buildings and discarded assets. Significantly, this turn towards the land has occurred across the class, race and political spectrum: urban planners, designers and architects have shared the stage with community organizers, neighborhood activists, artists, academics and entrepreneurs.

Detroit's new leaders are a loosely structured, diverse group of people, connected through informal social ties and infused with a collaborative spirit. They come from a variety of backgrounds, cutting across lines of race, class, gender, and age. Their projects include urban farms, small business incubators, an artists' village, and an array of nonprofits oriented towards conflict resolution, environmental justice, and African American empowerment. There is no overarching initiative, no Big Plan, no single industry to supplant the automobile. The lack of a roadmap, identified by the New York Times, may be an asset: how can one map a road that is built at the moment it is traveled?

### **Detroit Regenerates: Agriculture, Business, Civic Engagement**

In June 2012, I traveled to Detroit with colleague Sam Beebe of Ecotrust, searching for signs of urban regeneration. We sought instances of successful community organizing, innovative and resourceful patterns of land use, employment of formerly abandoned resources and buildings, and creative forms of entrepreneurship and craft. We found all of those things in great measure, and met an enthusiastic group of urban dwellers who were generous in sharing their stories in the form of semi-structured interviews.

What follows is a synopsis of new urban activity in Detroit that emerged from these enlightening and fruitful conversations. No weeklong visit could claim to be a comprehensive look at the city's development; nor do the unique people, firms, and organizations we encountered constitute a representative sample. Rather, this partial portrait of new urban activity can be seen as a fleeting glimpse

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<sup>12</sup> Davis, Kristal (2012): "Governmental Fragmentation in Detroit," *McNair Scholars Research Journal*, 4(1), Article 4.

into an enormously complex and dynamic process, which suggests a few overarching trends, of which I examine three in particular: urban agriculture, social enterprise, and public participation.

With the above caveats in mind, this section presents an “ABCs” of urban regeneration in Detroit. I look at three of the defining trends in this complex and multidimensional process, and group them together as Agriculture, Business, and Civic Engagement. The first category, Agriculture, includes communities’ use of land and nature, focusing on urban agriculture and community gardens. The second, Business, focuses predominantly on the growth of social enterprises and business incubators as means to revive and diversify the city’s industries and employment base. The third category, Civic Engagement, looks at current initiatives for broad-based public participation in Detroit’s difficult process of urban planning.

### **Urban Agriculture and Community Gardens**

Should it be a surprise that a city full of unused land, decaying infrastructure, and unemployed people now finds itself in the vanguard of the urban agriculture movement in the United States? The city has over 800 food-producing gardens, and a recent study estimated that the city’s agricultural production capacity could supply up to 76% of its demand for vegetables and 42% for fruits.<sup>13</sup>

Detroit’s urban farming sector is characterized by its diversity and sense of social mission. Earthworks Urban Farm, on Detroit’s Lower East Side, exemplifies that mission: the bulk of its harvest supplies soup kitchens. Its mission is educational as well as charitable: each year, its Earthworks Agricultural Training (EAT) program equips a handful of aspiring urban farmers with skills that range from planting and composting to food marketing and business management. And Earthworks is just one of many thriving, mission-driven urban farms in Detroit. Across the city, for example, seven-acre D Town Farm pursues the mission of increasing food security for Detroit’s majority African American community.<sup>14</sup> In the historic Corktown district, Brother Nature Produce runs the city’s only community-supported agriculture (CSA) program based on an urban farm.<sup>15</sup>

Detroit’s urban agriculturists are frequently touted as a kind of pioneering vanguard. Yet the current urban agriculture movement is merely the continuation of a trend in Detroit’s development that dates back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The city’s early French settlers farmed in long strips called ribbon farms, stretching inland from the Detroit River. During the economic depression of the 1890s, under Mayor Hazen (“Potato Patch”) Pingree, the city required the owners of idle land to allow impoverished families and individuals to grow garden and farm plots for both self-provisioning and market sales. In the 1970s, under Mayor Coleman Young, the city started the Farm-A-Lot program, providing families with seeds, farming implements, and access to vacant land.

As Detroit’s urban agriculture movement develops, its larger significance has become a topic for serious discussion. Patrick Crouch, manager of Earthworks Urban Farm, views urban agriculture first and

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<sup>13</sup> Colasanti, Kathryn, Charlotte Litjens and Michael Hamm (2010): “Growing Food in the City: The Production Potential of Detroit’s Vacant Land.” East Lansing, MI: The C.S. Mott Group for Sustainable Food Systems at Michigan State University.

<sup>14</sup> White, Monica M. (2011): “D Town Farm: African American Resistance to Food Insecurity and the Transformation of Detroit.” *Environmental Practice* 13: 406-417.

<sup>15</sup> Philpott, Tom, “Three projects that are watering Detroit’s ‘food desert.’” *Grist*, 11 September 2010. URL: <http://grist.org/article/food-three-projects-that-are-watering-detroits-food-desert/>

foremost as a tool for community empowerment. “We talk a lot about growing food, but we’re just as interested in growing people and communities,” he explained during our visit to Earthworks<sup>16</sup>. Stephone Terrell, a trainee in the EAT program, suggests hopefully that urban agriculture can provide an alternative to the drug economy: “Instead of growing marijuana, how about cucumbers?” he asks with a smile.<sup>17</sup>

Community empowerment is only one side of the story of Detroit urban agriculture, however. Social entrepreneur Gary Wozniak sees urban agriculture and food production as a potentially important job creator. Wozniak is chief development officer of RecoveryPark, a newly formed commercial nonprofit devoted to urban agriculture and food processing. “We’re looking at large indoor commercial operations,” he explains. “Three crops a year, 5.2 jobs per acre. Add in food processing and distribution and you reach 17.8 jobs per acre.”<sup>18</sup>

Yet striking the proper balance between community and commerce remains an important question for Detroit’s urban agriculture sector. The case of Hantz Farms offers an illustration. In 2009, industrialist and real estate investor John Hantz proposed a large-scale urban farming project in central Detroit, aggregating 1,500 vacant parcels and producing an array of grains, vegetables, and tree crops on a strictly for-profit basis. The plan has attracted considerable opposition from community-based agriculturists such as Patrick Crouch, who warns that large-scale agriculture parcels are likely to dominate communities rather than develop them.<sup>19</sup> Some Detroiters call the project a “land grab”.<sup>20</sup> Though the company has purchased the parcels from the city and stated its intention to begin planting trees, it has taken no action yet. Nonprofit real estate lender Ray Waters identifies such inertia as a pattern endemic to the city: “there’s a huge pronouncement of ‘what we’re going to do’; nobody follows through with it and it just kind of flutters and goes away.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Social Enterprises and Startups**

Vacant land, cheap houses and buildings, and an unemployed and underserved population: the resilience of Detroit depends on innovative ways to recombine these resources into economically productive, socially beneficial organizations. The Ashoka Foundation characterizes social entrepreneurs as “the change agents for society, seizing opportunities others miss ... creating solutions to change society for the better.”<sup>22</sup> This description couldn’t be better applied in the case of Detroit’s urban pioneers.

Shaka Senghor serves as a prime example. While serving a nineteen-year prison sentence, he took refuge in books – reading 1500 of them, by his estimation – and began writing a series of novels that chronicled the shocking violence, tragic poverty, and drug addiction that characterized his former life on the streets. After his release, he started two interrelated organizations: a publishing company called Drop a Gem, and a nonprofit called Live in Peace. Drop a Gem provides an outlet for urban novelists and journalists. Live in Peace teaches young people skills in conflict resolution, self-esteem, and self-expression through writing. But Senghor’s vision extends beyond these two programs. “Ultimately my goal is to create Peace

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<sup>16</sup> Patrick Crouch, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Stephone Terrell, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>18</sup> Gary Wozniak, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Patrick Crouch, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Gallagher, John, John Wisely and Matt Helms: “Council OKs sale of 1,500 lots for urban farming project.” *Detroit Free Press*, December 11, 2012.

<sup>21</sup> Ray Waters, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Ashoka Foundation, “What is a social entrepreneur?” URL: [http://www.ashoka.org/social\\_entrepreneur/](http://www.ashoka.org/social_entrepreneur/)

Ambassadors,” he explains. “I want to empower the students to start their own program, and extend it to where they’re actually facilitating it.”<sup>23</sup>

Gary Wozniak, chief development officer for RecoveryPark, applies the principles of social entrepreneurship to Detroit’s problems of drug addiction and unemployment. A newly formed nonprofit, once in operation Recovery Park will employ recovering addicts in urban agriculture and food production. But in Wozniak’s vision, RecoveryPark is not just a job creator; it is an opportunity to participate in business ownership. The project is designed as a network of interrelated worker-owned cooperatives inspired by the Mondragon model (e.g. Whyte and Whyte 1988) in which each worker is given an ownership share in the business and can vote on company policies. Wozniak explains: “You can build wealth by working a job, but you build true wealth by owning your job.”<sup>24</sup>

Beyond individual enterprises, social business incubators have begun to proliferate throughout the city. Ponyride, a workspace for creative social enterprise occupying a 1930s-vintage factory space in the Corktown district, is one such incubator. Founder and board member Philip Cooley and his cohorts rent out the space at rock-bottom rates to an impressive stable of socially minded start-ups and artisanal businesses. These include the Empowerment Plan, brainchild of 22-year-old Veronika Scott, which produces self-heating garments for the homeless.<sup>25</sup> The space also houses a fencing studio, a printing press, a designer blue jeans label, and a dance troupe. “When we give people space, amazing things happen,” notes Cooley.<sup>26</sup>

A few miles away in Midtown, Tom and Peggy Brennan have masterminded the Green Garage, a center for startup development that turns the conventional wisdom about entrepreneurship on its head. “When you look into the core of a business, do you see a gear turning or a heart beating?” asks Tom Brennan, enthusiastically promoting a vision of businesses as living, breathing organisms. Entrepreneurship, he argues, “begins with the natural process of playing,” which ultimately gives rise to the “seed” of the business.<sup>27</sup> Taking this approach, the Green Garage connects start-ups with the resources they need to grow – which may not include loans or equity capital until a relatively late stage. This creative approach has attracted dozens of “businesses-in-residence,” including video production, design, food production, public policy consulting, renewable energy, and public relations.

In addition to these standouts, the city contains a small but dynamic group of technology-oriented start-up incubators, aiming to create an innovation cluster in the mold of Silicon Valley or Boston’s Route 128. Detroit Venture Partners (DVP) is perhaps the most extroverted of this group. Located in the Madison building in downtown Detroit, a renovated theater now owned by the Rock Ventures (Quicken Loans) group of companies, DVP proclaims itself to be “on a crazed mission” to revitalize the city through technological innovation.<sup>28</sup> Their portfolio includes an app developer, a customizable news aggregator, a number of marketing research and analytics companies, a developer of a game-based user authentication

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<sup>23</sup> Shaka Senghor, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>24</sup> Gary Wozniak, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Restauri, Denise (March 3, 2012): “Sleeping Bag Coat for the Homeless Leads to a Garment Industry,” *Forbes*. URL: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/deniserestauri/2012/03/01/sleeping-bag-coat-for-the-homeless-leads-to-a-garment-industry/>

<sup>26</sup> Order & Other (2012): “Ponyride, a Creative Incubator Community.” URL: <http://vimeo.com/34518274>

<sup>27</sup> Tom Brennan, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Detroit Venture Partners (2012), URL: <http://detroitventurepartners.com/>

tool (a more fun alternative to Captcha), and a wide array of social media, networking, and professional services companies. To provide another important example of an incubator, a tour of the city's business incubators would be incomplete without mention of [TechTown](#), a technology startup shop affiliated with Wayne State University that provides workspace, mentoring, and capital-raising assistance to would-be entrepreneurs.

The sectoral diversity on display in this very brief cross-section of Detroit's entrepreneurial activity suggests an increase in urban resilience akin to the  $\alpha$ -phase of the adaptive cycle. Skeptics may view these technologically and financially sophisticated forms of entrepreneurship as essentially an exclusive insider's game, tinged with racial and class biases in access to knowledge and capital. Yet this tendency too is being challenged by programs such as [Student Ventures](#), which aims to bridge the digital divide by exposing middle and high school students in low-income minority communities to the worlds of entrepreneurship and digital technology, and promoting increased engagement in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education to that end.

### **Civic Engagement and the Public Sector**

Successful economies depend on thriving public sectors as well as private sectors: economic prosperity requires the provision of public goods and services such as infrastructure, education, health care, and social safety nets. But how can a city provide effective public services in the face of recent bankruptcy and long-term population decline, capital flight, mass unemployment, crime, and blight? Who will keep the water running and the lights on? In Detroit today, the public sector is space for both collaboration and contestation, as inherently conflictive questions of "right-sizing" city infrastructure take place alongside a vibrant long-term visioning process.

An elaborate process of civic engagement is underway in Detroit today, under the aegis of the Detroit Works Project, a citywide planning initiative founded in 2010 by the office of Mayor Dave Bing. After several contentious public meetings, the project foundered. A period of reflection over the winter and spring of 2011 led to a division into two tracks: short-term actions and long-term planning. While short-term actions remain within the mayor's office, long-term planning was handed over to a group of nonprofit organizations working to create an overarching vision for the city's future. In the pursuit of this vision, the organizations sought to engage the public to the greatest possible degree. That's where the Detroit Collaborative Design Center, and its executive director, Dr. Dan Pitera, play a unique and defining role.

"There's a perception that civic engagement equals meetings," Pitera notes. "We disagree; we take out 'meetings' and put in 'relationships.'" The Design Center, in pursuing those relationships, has engaged what Pitera calls a "mosaic of tactics," ranging from street teams to volunteer "ambassadors," roundtable discussions to online games, and a mobile information kiosk called the Roaming Table. Over the six months of the civic engagement effort, the group has reached approximately 40,000 people and engaged in about 9,000 conversations, or "meaningful interactions."<sup>29</sup>

The motivating force behind the Detroit Works Project goes far beyond a narrow vision of economic growth or even economic revitalization; the defining theme is quality of life. Through the elaborate process of civic engagement, the project has defined fourteen elements to Detroit's quality of life, ranging

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<sup>29</sup> Pitera, Dan, pers. comm., June 2012.

from safety to education, jobs, health and beyond. From each quality of life element, the project has identified imperatives, or in Pitera's words, "things we must do." And finally, the project works to develop strategies for how to meet each imperative, and indicators to detect whether each has been met. Pitera summarizes the project's bottom line succinctly: "If the quality of life has not improved, the work is for naught."<sup>30</sup>

Citywide civic engagement is only one part of the complex picture of Detroit's regeneration process. Neighborhood by neighborhood, voluntary groups of citizens have begun to create vibrant living environments from the bottom up. For example, in the blight-stricken Brightmoor district of northwest Detroit, a [neighborhood association](#) has taken control of a section of the district and renamed it the Brightmoor Farmway. The association has built over 30 community gardens and pocket parks, publishes a newsletter and offers youth programs in gardening and the arts. It's spawned two youth-based businesses, one selling fresh produce and another woodworking. For Kirk Mayes, executive director of the Brightmoor Alliance, a community development corporation (CDC) in the district, the relationships forged by these projects are the keys to the Farmway's success. "They're doing more than just gardening," he notes. "They are building community."<sup>31</sup>

The story of Clark Park in Southwest Detroit, the city's largest Latino neighborhood, offers another example. In the early 1990s, facing city budget cuts and suffering from neglect, the park was slated to be closed. In response, a group of volunteers formed the Clark Park Coalition to preserve the park. "Little by little we developed some great relationships with people in the community, foundations, corporations and the city," relates Anthony Benavides, the Coalition's executive director. Today, Clark Park offers an impressive array of sports programs in ice hockey, soccer, tennis, lacrosse, baseball, and golf, as well as tutoring, computer classes, and field trips. The park has become a center for picnics, graduation parties, *quinceaneras*, and community events. The Coalition is now a 501c (3) nonprofit with a staff of six and an extensive network of volunteers that includes the Cranbrook School and the Ford Motor Company. Says Benavides: "Clark Park is our town center now, our town square in Southwest."<sup>32</sup>

Early in 2013, the Detroit Works Project Long-Term Vision released its defining planning document, the outcome of its extensive civic engagement process: *Detroit Future City*. The document outlines a comprehensive vision for the future of the city, including chapters devoted to Economic Growth, Land Use, Public Land, City Systems, Neighborhoods, and Civic Engagement. Packed with information, data planning and design elements, and anecdotes, the document offers Detroiters a road map to a revitalized city marked by smarter public services, more efficient and sustainable land use, employment growth in key areas, and thriving neighborhoods.

The vision presented in *Detroit Future City* appears compelling from a distance, but without grassroots activity to ensure broad-based public participation it would be little more than abstract theory. The journalism provided by Model D Media, an online news and media site devoted to Detroit, suggests that such activity is occurring and may be growing as the city's revitalization effort gains momentum. Model D's "[Detroit by District](#)" article series has begun identifying dynamic neighborhood leaders and profiling the activity occurring in their districts. The [Osborn Neighborhood Alliance](#) of northeast Detroit, for

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<sup>30</sup> Dan Pitera, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>31</sup> Kirk Mayes, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>32</sup> Anthony Benavides, pers. comm., June 2012.



example, led by community organizer [Quincy Jones](#), has rehabbed and now maintains four neighborhood parks and a community garden, organizes an array of after-school programs, supports local small, independent businesses, and is building a Parent Mentor program to increase parental involvement in the neighborhood public schools.

This groundswell of activity may be fighting an uphill battle: at the same moment as grassroots activity has begun its upswing, the city itself has lost control over its finances. On March 14, 2013, Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder appointed lawyer and corporate restructuring expert Kevyn Orr to assume the role of emergency financial manager for the City of Detroit. For many Detroiters, the appointment of such a position represents defeat. One of our interview respondents characterized an emergency financial manager as “this Czar who can do anything he wants to do... he can be the nasty bad guy who strips the city of all its assets and resources, sells it off, and then leaves us in worse condition than we were before, with no resources.” Michigan Democratic Party Chair Lon Johnson has labeled the appointment a “hostile takeover.”<sup>33</sup> Whether Orr will play this “bad cop” role remains to be seen; the city will have the option to vote him out after 18 months.

### **Conclusion: Detroit Rising?**

The innovations at work in Detroit are remarkable in their diversity and creative spark: from urban agriculture to social enterprise incubation, from conflict resolution to civic participation, Detroiters have displayed remarkable persistence in the face of adversity. Can these efforts reach the kind of scale needed to transform an entire city? Despite the efforts of the urban innovators, it’s clear that positive change has not reached all corners of the city. Shaka Senghor notes that the youth of Detroit remain underserved by the public school system: “The reality is if we can’t work with the youth, the city is never going to change.”<sup>34</sup> Further, the current pattern of development reinforces inequality between neighborhoods: while rapidly redeveloping areas such as Midtown benefit from strong public services and police protection, other areas of the city suffer neglect, and the health and safety of residents suffers as a result.

Yet these challenges may just end up being more fuel for the fire. For Tom Brennan, “people are drawn to the reality of the human challenge and planetary challenge that is here.” Nonprofit real estate lender John Schoeniger, a key figure in the redevelopment of Corktown, corroborates: “You want to be close to ground zero, where the fighting is the hardest.”<sup>35</sup> Phil Cooley agrees: “When things are easy, you tend to get complacent and lazy. When things are tough, you get back to work. You become innovative again.”<sup>36</sup> And Dan Pitera, a Detroit resident since 1998, notes a shift in mentality: “If you came here five or ten years ago, people you’d talk to would be incredibly negative about this place. And they’ve shifted. They’ve begun to say, wait a minute, this place is full of assets and opportunity.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Woods, Ashley (2013), “Detroit Emergency Manager: Gov. Rick Snyder Announces State Financial Takeover.” *Huffington Post*, March 14, 2013. URL: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/14/detroit-emergency-manager\\_n\\_2871371.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/14/detroit-emergency-manager_n_2871371.html)

<sup>34</sup> Shaka Senghor, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>35</sup> John Schoeniger, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>36</sup> Philip Cooley, pers. comm., June 2012.

<sup>37</sup> Dan Pitera, pers. comm., June 2012.

What role can economic analysis play in the revival of Detroit? Can economists help? The existing economic and broadly social scientific literature on Detroit seems better suited to explaining the present than creating the future. For example, the works of Sugrue (1996) and Glaeser and Ponzetto (2007) offer complementary (or perhaps competing) explanations for how the present state of affairs in Detroit came about. While Sugrue offers a powerful indictment of the enormous harm done by segregation and discrimination, Glaeser identifies the impersonal market forces that contributed to metropolitan stagnation. But where do these analyses leave us? How does one untangle the complex interlocking factors that could lead to the unlocking of hidden potential within the population, built assets and natural environment? How does one track the city's progress as it struggles to re-emerge from malaise?

The task of developing good indicators offers one good starting point for measuring the city's progress, a project in which economists can play a key role. Data collection within the city has recently improved thanks to the recently founded [Data Driven Detroit](#) (D3), an open data project that tracks and publishes neighborhood-level social, economic, and environmental indicators in a variety of forms, including maps and spreadsheets. One of D3's projects, the [One D Scorecard](#), tracks indicators from metropolitan Detroit in five categories: educational preparedness, economic prosperity, quality of life, social equity, and regional transit. Another recent project, a report on Greater Downtown Detroit, was recently completed by the Hudson-Webber foundation in collaboration with D3. However, so far at least, no indicators or metrics of the magnitude or impact of non-traditional categories of activity such as social entrepreneurship, urban agriculture, civic participation, or creative innovation have been constructed for or applied to the city. To track the progress of the city, such indicators should be proposed and developed.

Yet indicators are not enough; putting hard numbers to complex social realities can obscure important dimensions of the process, such as trust, cooperation, and collaboration across communities. In their work on urban social-ecological resilience, Ernstson *et al* (2010) highlight the importance of cultures of collaboration and effective social movements. They argue that inequality in access to resources increases the vulnerability of disadvantaged groups by denying them the benefits of ecosystem services. Illustrative examples include New Orleans, in which poor and predominantly black residents have borne the brunt of Hurricane Katrina due to geographically vulnerable residences, and Cape Town, in which black neighborhoods tend to be clustered in biologically sensitive areas due to the monopolization of prime land by whites. Likewise, Tyler and Moench (2012), in their work on urban climate resilience, highlight the importance of participatory, inclusive and accountable institutions. They write: "The most important linkages are the institutional links between agents and systems... measures to address ecosystem degradation or climate risk are unlikely to succeed without recognition of the underlying injustices." (Tyler and Moench 2012, 319)

These theories of urban resilience suggest that in order to revive its economy, Detroit must address inequalities in access to employment, property, and capital as well as public resources such as education, health care, good food, open space, and a clean environment. Just as the city must replace its former pattern of corporate concentration with economic diversity, it must replace its former pattern of segregation by fostering racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity within and across neighborhoods, while ensuring equality of opportunity and access to resources. Equity may not only be a superior growth model (Treuhaft, Blackwell and Pastor 2011), but a superior resilience model as well.

Building social equity into Detroit's revival is easier said than done: problems of food access, chronic disease, inadequate education, alcoholism and drug addiction, environmental injustice, chronic unemployment, substandard housing, and structural inequalities persist in the context of the city's ongoing fiscal crisis. How can Detroiters channel effectively the vibrant entrepreneurial energy currently afoot in the city towards addressing these social ills? How can the revival of key neighborhoods such as Midtown and Corktown benefit all the residents who currently live there and forestall displacement of the poorest (i.e. gentrification)? The phenomenon of a dynamic private sector and stagnating public sector mirrors a larger historical tendency in American society, to focus on private benefits for individuals and small groups, and underemphasize the public good, creating what Galbraith (1958) so eloquently referred to as "private affluence amidst public squalor."

Initiatives such as the Detroit Works Project and its rigorous process of public engagement may provide an important part of the solution. The "mosaic of tactics" developed by Pitera and his colleagues serve as a set of strategies that address Detroit's structural inequalities through extensive, broad-based participation that includes the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of the city. The translation of such participatory energies into long-term governance structures remains a key challenge. Ernston *et al* (2010), for example, find that the "civic ecology" practices of post-Katrina New Orleans have led to citizen empowerment and built social capital and sense of place, while generating urban ecosystem services and providing opportunities for social-ecological learning. They conclude with a call for collaborative governance, knowledge networking, and a focus on social and environmental justice in the distribution of ecosystem services.

Detroit's vibrant, socially conscious entrepreneurial energy may have a long road ahead of it. Ed Glaeser, author of the recent (2011) book *Triumph of the City*, writes:

The path back for declining industrial towns is long and hard. Over decades, they must undo the cursed legacy of big factories and heavy industry. They must return to their roots as places of small-scale entrepreneurship and commerce. Apart from investing in education and maintaining core public services with moderate taxes and regulations, governments can do little to speed this process. Not every city will come back, but human creativity is strong, especially when reinforced by urban density. (Glaeser 2011, 67)

John Gallagher, in his recent book *Reimagining Detroit*, (2010) corroborates:

Should it succeed, this new economy will look very different from the economy of Detroit's Auto Century. It'll be small and nimble rather than big and lethargic. It'll answer more quickly to its customers than to Wall Street stockpickers. There'll be fewer suits and more khaki and jeans, and there'll be more local owners and fewer corporate downsizing experts.... This new economy will depend on entrepreneurs, just as the economies of Seattle and Silicon Valley have depended upon them for years. (Gallagher 2010, 120)

The success of Detroit's revival is not certain. Large sections of the city may be in danger of passing a threshold beyond which widespread, large-scale reorganization is impossible or highly unlikely: in other words, a poverty trap. Holling *et al* (2002) writes: "If an adaptive cycle collapses because the potential and diversity have been eradicated by misuse or an external force, an impoverished state can result with low connectedness, low potential, and low resilience, creating a poverty trap." The lessons learned by the

rise, fall, and nascent revival of Detroit will have far-reaching implications for urban policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Glaeser (2011) notes, the lessons we learn from our cities will determine whether our urban species will flourish in the years to come.

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