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## Book Review

By **John Maiorano & Ushnish Sengupta**

**Inner City Renovation: How a Social Enterprise Changes Lives and Communities.** By *Marty Donkervoort*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2013. 137 pp. ISBN 9781552665817.

*Inner City Renovation: How a Social Enterprise Changes Lives and Communities* by Marty Donkervoort is a valuable addition to the literature on social enterprise and the social economy. In it, Donkervoort presents the case of Inner City Renovation (ICR), a construction and renovation social enterprise founded to strengthen low-income, inner city neighbourhoods in Winnipeg by providing “quality” jobs with the opportunity for skill development and employee ownership to marginalized inner city individuals. As co-founder, board member, and general manager, Donkervoort provides a rare and invaluable insider’s view of a social enterprise, guiding the reader through ICR from its initial inception in 2001 to his retirement in 2010. Donkervoort documents how he utilized his business acumen and social values to confront the opportunities and challenges facing ICR to improve the livelihood of its employees and community. A postscript provides an update of ICR as of 2013.

Donkervoort approaches the topic with a thoughtfulness he developed over a lifetime of considering the impacts that business decisions can have on an organization’s employees and the community it serves. He offers advice that is both thoughtful and business savvy—sometimes idealistic but predominantly pragmatic. And here lays the strength of his book and its key contribution to the literature: the wealth of experience gained and lessons learned in building a thriving and sustainable social enterprise.

Donkervoort carefully documents the opportunities available to social enterprises in manifesting their missions while outlining the associated challenges they face as they compete against other organizations, often for-profit ones. One of the fundamental concerns for social enterprises is the balancing of their social missions with their financial objectives. Donkervoort’s approach to this issue resonates throughout the book as he continually places the focus on the long-term sustainability of the social enterprise. He stresses the importance of engaging a board of directors and a general manager who are all committed to social values and the mission of the enterprise in order to defend against mission creep. However, this advice is offered with the caveat that the financial health of the organization is of great importance in ensuring the long-term viability of the organization and its mission. ICR is evidence that financial success in a social enterprise is not just a pipe dream as ICR, which was highly reliant on grants in its first few years of operation, achieved 95% of its revenue from providing construction and renovation services by 2010 and 98% by 2012, reflecting a decrease in its grant revenue.



The list below provides a clearer example of topics covered in the book:

- The evolution of a social enterprise's business plan: when to deviate from it and when to stay the course.
- How best to approach a marketing plan when hiring a marginalized work force, some with a history of incarceration or gang activity.
- Opinions on procurement policies and the importance of spending locally to enable true community development.
- The importance of patient capital that provides active support.
- The length of time it takes for a social enterprise to be financially self-sufficient.
- Through documenting the failures of two enterprise initiatives, Inner City Janitorial and Inner City Property Management, Donkervoort outlines ICR's non-linear path to financial sustainability and the importance of learning from failures.
- The importance of psychosocial supports for marginalized employees—recounted through a description of the services of ICR's trained social worker and the triggers that led to his hire.
- The danger of social enterprises being co-opted as islands of success, as different levels of government offload their social responsibilities.
- The importance of purchasing practices for social enterprise and "leakage" of money from the local community.

Donkervoort also provides intimate details of the accomplishments of ICR's social mission. In Part 2 of the book, the journeys of 14 employees are provided to the reader, outlining their personal challenges—which relate to poverty, substance abuse, family challenges, housing issues, and gang ties—along with the impact that ICR had on each of them. At points like these, the book can be inspirational, as the reader experiences the seeds of change that ICR has sown, which Donkervoort has documented so carefully.

Perhaps a deeper analysis of the root causes of poverty in Winnipeg's Aboriginal community, including a long history of colonialism and racism, and the role of social enterprise in addressing the root causes of social issues rather than the symptoms would have augmented the scope of the book. Social enterprise can often have a limited effect on symptoms of larger social issues—for example, addressing the unemployment of a small number of individuals rather than dealing with the more systemic issues and root causes that result in poverty for marginalized groups. Nevertheless, Donkervoort does indicate that a social enterprise with an integrated workforce such as ICR has the opportunity to bring different communities with a history of conflict together to work on community projects. Interestingly, Donkervoort does not attempt to overshoot the mark, reflecting that although broad social change is slow, ICR did manage to achieve incremental change, and that perhaps the full realization of its social mission will take generations.

This book is highly relevant in the field of social enterprise and nonprofit studies, especially for those seeking evidence-based outcomes of practices leading to the successful assimilation and integration of marginalized people in the work force.

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