

**Space and Culture in Washington, D.C.:
A Capital in Search of a City**

By Josep Subirós

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Nobody who has paid any attention to the peculiar features of our present era will doubt for a moment that we are living at a period of most wonderful transition which tends rapidly to accomplish that great end, to which indeed, all history points--the realization of the unity of mankind. . . . The distances which separated the different nations and parts of the globe are rapidly vanishing before the achievements of modern invention, and we can traverse them with incredible ease; the languages of all nations are known, and their acquirement placed within the reach of everybody; thought is communicated with the rapidity, and even by the power of lightning. . . . The products of all quarters of the globe are placed at our disposal, and we have only to choose which is the best and the cheapest for our purposes, and the powers of production are entrusted to the stimulus of competition and capital.

--Prince Albert¹

The societies in which our cities exist are, and have been for centuries, hierarchical; the inequalities among their residents are reflected in the inequalities in the spaces they occupy. With the advent of capitalism and the industrial revolution, those inequalities were more and more concentrated in the cities. . . . Much of what has happened in cities in the last twenty years is simply an extension of these long-term trends--probably more than we, who like novelty and get paid to explore it, want to admit. . . . But much is new. . . .

--Peter Marcuse²

More than any other, American society has fulfilled the expectations merrily predicted by Prince Albert almost one and a half centuries ago. However, it continues to display sharp inequalities that, as Peter Marcuse reminds us, are especially reflected in the social organization of urban space. There is a contradiction between, on the one hand, virtually unlimited economic and technological potential and, on the other, social inequalities that seriously

¹ Inaugural Address of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations, London 1851. Quoted in Michael Sorkin, *Variations on a Theme Park: The New American City and the End of Public Space* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1992), p. 209.

² Peter Marcuse, "Not Chaos, But Walls: Post-Modernism and the Partitioned City," in *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, ed. Sophie Watson and Katherine Gibson (Cambridge Mass., Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1995).

threaten the conviviality and even the viability of the large metropolis. In no other city is this contradiction so particularly pronounced as in Washington, D.C.
The Uniqueness of Washington, D.C.

To speak of any large American city is to speak of urban problems of every type, category, and magnitude. This is especially the case with Washington, D.C. Specific problems have already become anecdotal: the authorities have been forced repeatedly to warn the population of the risks of drinking tap water contaminated by suspicious microorganisms; judges have regularly declared almost half of the buildings housing the city's public schools unfit due to the danger of fire or collapse; the police force lacks the resources to repair its cruisers; citizens who wish to file a complaint at their local police station must bring carbon paper and spare typewriter ribbons along with them; the city's streets are littered with potholes; and so on.

These cruel anecdotes are just the tip of the iceberg of deep structural problems: the unemployment level in Washington, D.C., is twice the national level and almost three times that of the Washington Metropolitan area; its citizens are frightened by high crime rates; the city government is literally bankrupt; and, since the end of 1995, a congressionally appointed federal board supervises all budgetary operations, vetoing or amending those it considers unwise.

How is it possible that the undisputed political capital of the modern world, the seat of the federal government of the United States and the heart of a metropolitan region with one of the highest average per-capita income levels in America, shows, in these and many other aspects, a patient chart similar to many cities in underdeveloped countries? The extreme contradiction between the real and symbolic power of Washington as the federal capital, and the disturbing character of its local problems leads observers to search for and actually find unique causes. The explanations given are rooted either in history or in the current local political and legal structure.³ It is not difficult to agree that the District of Columbia is a unique urban entity within the United States; it is difficult, however, to reach agreement on the nature of this uniqueness.

For some analysts, this distinctiveness--and therefore, the reasons why the city faces these problems--is caused by the peculiar and restrictive Home Rule Act of the local government that places the costs of being a capital city--health,

³ For an excellent historical analysis of the specific urban development of Washington, D.C., and in particular of the tensions and contradictions between the federal perspective and interests and the dynamics of local character, see Howard J. Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

education, roads, safety, and so on--on the shoulders of the city government. Yet, the city receives only modest compensation in the form of federal payments and is prevented from levying taxes on federal property, the diplomatic community, or private nonprofit organizations; these three sectors combined represent 56 percent of the real estate holdings within the city. The local government also cannot tax the activities or movements of hundreds of thousands of suburbanites who work in the city and consume a large share of its services and resources. More importantly, the residents of Washington, D.C., are, politically speaking, second-class citizens: even though they have been able to vote in presidential elections since 1968 and have been able to elect their own city council since 1974, they still lack representation in Congress.

Other observers, generally from the neoliberal right, see no problem with the unique legal and political situation of the city and place at the root of almost all of its troubles the controversial administration of Mayor Marion Barry, who has been running the city government since 1978, with the exception of his forced and partial disappearance from public life between 1990 and 1994. Their analyses emphasize the hardly indisputable fact that during his long and difficult time in office, and in the worst tradition of municipal bosses in the United States, this former civil-rights activist has been able to create a broad base of clients that stems from a local administration that, between 1982 and 1990, grew from 32,000 to 48,700 employees in a population of about 600,000. Of course, what is corruption and waste to some is compensation for historical injustices to others. Barry, like 60 percent of the city, is African-American and he has used positive discrimination to favor black citizens. It comes as no surprise that Barry is practically invulnerable in elections. Moreover, criticism of his performance is seen by a majority of Washingtonians as a reflection of the Anglo-Saxon establishment's resentment and reaction against the political ascendancy of the African-American population.

To an independent observer not influenced by local interests, it is obvious that the government of the District of Columbia has far less power and autonomy and, hence, less responsibility than any ordinary municipality. It is also obvious that the municipal treasury is sinking, that essential public services--from public schools to police, health care services, and road maintenance--are seriously deteriorating, and that Congress and the local authorities blame each other for these problems. This institutional conflict (apparently without solution) and the low quality of public services go hand in hand with a growing degree of social dissatisfaction, a lack of trust with regard to the future of the city, and a sustained loss of population. The District

continues to suffer from this exodus at a time when other American cities have been able to stabilize or even recover demographic levels.⁴

This constant decline in population, concentrated mainly in the upper and middle classes, reduces the size of the taxable base and combines with the effects of the Home Rule Act--which prevents government from levying taxes to cover the costs incurred from the use of the city by suburbanites--to aggravate the financial problems of the municipal government. It should come as no surprise, then, that almost all of the literature and discussion on the structure and urban dynamics of the District tend to concentrate on the economic and fiscal problems of the city, created and/or made worse by the lack of local autonomy, according to some, or by mismanagement, according to others.⁵ Although this approach seems obvious, it is not necessarily correct from either the theoretical or political perspective. In fact, if we put aside for a moment the city's special political-legal circumstances, the definition of its problems based on political, economic, and fiscal elements is insufficient and paradoxical. If there are any guarantees for a capital city, they are solvency and economic stability under all circumstances.

⁴The population of Washington, D.C., has been dropping from a historical maximum of 802,178 in 1950 to a minimum, for the time being, of 554,000 in 1996. According to a November 1994 poll (The Wirthlin Group, *Public Attitudes toward Issues Facing Washington, D.C. Prepared for The Federal City Council* [November 1994]), 64 percent of Washington, D.C., residents believed at that time that the city was on the "wrong track" (for the entire metropolitan area this number was 79 percent). More significantly, 32 percent of the residents of the District of Columbia expressed their intention to leave the city within the next five years. The motives and concerns expressed behind such negative opinions and attitudes in relation to the city were crime, fiscal mismanagement, and city government; only 2 percent mentioned difficulty in finding employment as the main problem and only another 2 percent mentioned poverty or homelessness. The reasons given for leaving the city were safety (less crime), 31 %; cheaper, 11%; taxes, 11%; quieter, 8%.

⁵ The most impartial observers and analysts agree that responsibility for the grave fiscal situation in which the District finds itself should be equally shared: "To summarize, there are three main causes of the District's worsening financial problems. First, the city government remains bloated and needs to considerably tighten its belt--even as demand for some services increases, and it must greatly improve service delivery. Second, the District is uniquely constrained, when compared with other cities, in recapturing lost tax revenues as the middle class moves to the suburbs. Finally, the Federal payment appears inadequate to compensate the District for revenues foregone and for the cost of services it receives. Any solution must be derived from these basic causes; it will take all the parties to save this city." McKinsey and Company, Inc., "Assessing the District of Columbia's Financial Future. Report to the Federal City Council" (Urban Institute, October 1994 [unpublished report]), p. 8.

The Limits of Economic Explanations

While the most discussed items of city government are financing and taxation, these are not as critical to future well-being as the social and physical conditions of the inner city. Finances will always be a problem, but seldom need to be a crisis. The wealth is available in the cities, metropolitan areas and states to finance city needs. Financial crises are due more to political than economic failure.

--Oliver E. Byrum⁶

As the seat of the federal government, the District of Columbia houses within its modest territory the largest imaginable concentration of public institutions--from government agencies and bodies to museums and other cultural centers--and an impressive array of places and monuments that have deep symbolic value to the nation. These provide the city with distinct advantages as compared with other American cities. First among these is a solid economic and employment base. In spite of some modest downsizing by certain agencies, the federal government guarantees--now and in the future--high levels of employment either directly, through public agencies, or indirectly, through a dynamic private service sector that is tightly linked to government affairs.⁷

⁶ Oliver E. Byrum, *Old problems in New Times: Urban Strategies for the 1990s* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, 1991).

⁷ "The overriding importance of the federal government to the growth and vitality of greater Washington's economy is beyond dispute. In 1992, direct federal outlays in the area totaled almost \$50 billion. When \$27.5 billion in indirect effects are added to that \$50 billion, the total accounts for almost 60% of Washington's gross regional product." Stephen S. Fuller, *The Economic Impact of the George Washington University on the Washington Metropolitan Area* (Greater Washington Research Center, March 1994). "[E]ven with the lower levels of federal spending projected in the worst case forecast, the Washington area's economy would continue to grow, but it would do so at an average annual rate of one percentage point less than would be the case under the best case forecast. . . . The slower economic growth forecast under the worst case scenarios translates into slower private sector employment growth in addition to a greater reduction in the federal workforce. Under the best case forecast, employment would increase by 604,000 jobs between 1995 and 2005 for a 28.8% gain. Under the worst case forecast employment would increase by 291,000 jobs for a gain of 9.1%. . . . Even under the federal spending assumptions associated with budget deficit reduction, the Washington area economy continues to experience real growth; no contraction is forecast." Stephen S. Fuller, *The Impact of Changes in Federal Spending on the Washington Metropolitan Economy. Phase II Report: Forecasts to the Year 2005* (Greater Washington Research Center, January 1996).

Second is the strong symbolic value of many of its institutions and monuments--from the White House and the Capitol to the various memorials--and the abundance and high quality of its cultural centers--particularly its museums--which make Washington the preferred destination for twenty million tourists every year. The District of Columbia, then, enjoys a privileged position in one of the most dynamic and promising economic areas.

Third, and although this is not exclusive to Washington, the District houses an impressive array of universities and other high-level educational and scientific institutions. Aside from their important social and economic contributions, these institutions ensure the permanent availability of a highly diversified and well-trained workforce that has been prepared to adapt to new developments and to economic, technical, and cultural challenges.⁸

It would appear, then, that the economic and employment base, almost immune to the ups and downs of conventional economic cycles, combined with excellent educational tools to face a changing future, should help Washington cultivate an intense, rich, vibrant, diversified, and balanced urban life. This is not the case.

The reality is that in spite of hundreds of thousands of federal jobs and the billions of dollars generated by the presence of the federal government, local life in Washington, D.C., suffers, even more dramatically, from the same problems that affect a majority of large American cities: a recurrent and structural fiscal crisis; severe geographical and social fragmentation; a growing impoverishment of the inner city; the consolidation and stagnation of urban ghettos; and high crime and poverty indexes. This is in stark contrast to the metropolitan area that, since 1950, has seen its population and levels of economic activity and wealth grow exponentially.

The reality is that in spite of its privileged location on the banks of the Potomac River and the extraordinary endowment of parks and cultural sites, Washington, D.C., has a minimal level of city life: the splendid collection of monuments is in an area visited exclusively by tourists; a rather dull downtown area is full of office buildings that come alive only from 9 to 5 and, after hours, is frankly depressing and somewhat dangerous; and there is a high degree of sociogeographical segregation.

⁸ "Part of the region's competitive advantage is its large number of colleges and universities and the more than 300,000 students attending these institutions." Fuller, *Economic Impact of the George Washington University*.

There is no simple or univocal explanation for such a paradox. Although the peculiar and restrictive statute of the local government, so often invoked, plays an important role, there are other equally complex and diverse factors, such as the peculiar anti-urban tradition of the American establishment and its mistrust of public areas; the middle-class dream of moving to the suburbs (fueled by the Administration and by strong private economic forces); the constant outflow of commercial services from the city to the suburbs; the entanglement of social conflicts with racial overtones; the poverty; and the desolation and crime associated with drug abuse in the most depressed areas.

What is evident, and Washington could be a paradigm, is that a solid and stable economic base in macro-economic and statistical terms is a necessary but insufficient condition for the development and maintenance of a healthy and balanced urban structure. Statistical economic well-being is perfectly compatible with a deeply rooted poverty and marginality of wide social sectors, as well as with a general malaise of urban life. If the sound economic base is not combined with a vision or an overall strategy for cohesion and social conviviality, the uneven distribution of wealth becomes an additional source of conflict.

Likewise, it can be argued that the focus on the legal and political uniqueness of the city and the fiscal problems created by this tend to obscure the complexity of the urban problems facing the District of Columbia and its limitless potential. Similarly, the visibility and urgency of the fiscal problems become obstacles to the design and application of possible strategies for medium- and long-term urban development.⁹ To a large extent, the problem facing Washington, D.C., is the failure of the federal and municipal governments both to understand the city as a complex and contradictory entity, constantly in need of strategies for geographical, social, and cultural integration, and to achieve a vision that encourages contact, communication, and exchanges between the different physical and social parts of the city--a vision that facilitates inclusion and productive use of its wide array of human, economic, cultural, and even natural resources; a vision that generates a feeling of pride and collective civic responsibility and a renewed trust in the possibilities for the future.

⁹ "Urban governments tend to see only the advantages of high-profit, high-cost uses of the space. The rationale is typically put in terms of taxes that can be collected on such uses, though this can be shown to be a short-term view that disregards the longer-term costs associated with the impoverishment that this form of development brings about." Saskia Sassen, "Rebuilding the Global City: Economy, Ethnicity and Space," in Anthony D. King, ed., *Re-Presenting the City. Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the 21st Century Metropolis* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), p. 37.

These different levels of analysis should be clearly defined, and it should be made clear that even though the fiscal crisis is the most urgent problem, this does not mean that the root of the problem is exclusively economic or exclusively political. Hence, the first theoretical step should be to abandon a simplistic, purely economic approach that diminishes the complexity of the urban reality of Washington, D.C.

The City as a Complex Artifact

Always and everywhere, American cities have generated conflicting reactions: attraction and repulsion, fascination and fear, love and hate. Every large city has been seen at some point, and sometimes even for centuries, as a little America--a space of promises, freedom, and infinite opportunities. At the same time, there are those who have seen these same cities as the source of all imaginable danger and social disaster, as expressions of the decadence of civilization and culture, as incarnations of evil. We know today that large cities have been and will continue to be multifaceted and contradictory realities: centers of technical innovation and cultural creativity, but also sources of tension and conflict; spaces for emancipation and freedom but also for new forms of oppression and segregation; cradles of opportunity but also havens for misery; spaces for association and creative and productive exchanges but also perfect grounds for crime, organized or not; fertile land for gathering and cooperation but also for loneliness, selfishness, and exclusion.

In other words, every large city presents a complex, socially diverse, and ever-changing scenario in which distinct and often contradictory timings, processes and interests, creative and destructive forces, and ambitions and fears converge. Every city is a stage on which a play without a clearly defined script is being performed, in which the actors continuously improvise and modify their roles. Although this has always been the case, the difference today stems both from the acceleration of change, which reinforces the impression of the fragility and vulnerability of urban life, and from the growing ethnic and cultural diversity of the large cities. The roles in the urban play are performed more often by new citizens who bring with them specific values and cultural references, even distinct linguistic patrimonies.

It is remarkable that in spite of this complexity, or maybe because of it, the problems that affect many cities today tend to be analyzed, with very few exceptions, in economic terms. That is to say that the well-being, stability, prosperity, or decadence of a city is too often seen as a direct function of its ability (or inability) to adapt to changes in the modes of production that cause industries to flee the cities; to the new forms of distribution and marketing that

undermine its competitiveness as a center for commerce; and to the new information and communication technologies that diminish the value of the central city as a hub for services.

More specifically, the problems affecting local governments tend to be seen in fundamentally fiscal terms.¹⁰ It would be absurd to minimize the importance of this factor. If the economy does not work, all other aspects of urban life will inevitably suffer and deteriorate. The viability of a city rests, to a large extent, on a rare combination of the strength and flexibility of its economic foundation. Yet, for a city, and in general for any social entity, a healthy economy does not ensure a good quality of life nor satisfactory social relations. It is not even enough to guarantee its long-term viability, particularly in the present era, when sudden and radical changes in production, distribution, and information systems can dramatically alter the economic structure of a city in a very short period of time.

What happens when a once-flourishing city loses a substantial portion of its traditional economic base? What remains is the urban infrastructure, and above all, its people--that is, its ability to adapt to new situations and its will to preserve city life. This ability will depend mostly on the material and nonmaterial assets already accumulated: the more or less strategic location of the city, its service infrastructure, and especially the intellectual abilities and technical skills of its citizens.¹¹ The will to preserve city life will depend on the existence of a feeling of pride and a sense of belonging, and also on the strength of the link between individual interests and projects and the future of the city.

For this will to exist, city life must be regarded as a highly valuable asset, a part of one's personal experience and plans. It must not be thought of only as a problem or an obstacle, but rather as a favorable framework for the development of individual and social interests and projects. For this internalization to take

¹⁰ "During the 1960s and early 1970s the news media and many public officials agreed that it was basically a problem of improving living conditions for poor people and minority groups concentrated in the cities. Before that the press and city officials had defined the urban problem as the decline of downtown and the flight of the middle class to the suburbs. And in the mid-1970s, when New York and several other big cities teetered at the edge of bankruptcy, opinion leaders redefined the urban problem as finding a way for city government to stay solvent." Bernard J. Frieden and Lynne B. Sagalyn. *Downtown, Inc.: How America Rebuilds Cities* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), p. 290.

¹¹ "The most important component of city-building is its stock of human relationships. A city's future is determined by the skill, training, and capacity for mutual assistance lodged within its people." H.V. Savitch, "Cities in a Global Era: A New Paradigm for the New Millennium," in *Preparing for the Urban Future*, ed. Michael A. Cohen, Blair A. Ruble, Joseph S. Tulchin, and Allison M. Garland (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1996), p 57.

place, the city, apart from being a center of economic activity and opportunity, must provide an attractive environment. The physical and cultural milieu must be an element of attraction, identification, and solidarity.

Cities prosper to the degree in which their negative and unpleasant dimensions are relegated to the background as secondary, subordinate aspects. Cities prosper if they are experienced and understood by their citizens as not only places to earn a living, but to enjoy life. They prosper to the degree in which their negative dimensions are accepted as a reasonable price to pay in order to enjoy the opportunities, vitality, and wealth of urban life.¹² In sum, in addition to being an extremely important economic tool, every city is an equally complex network of social processes and relations, a constellation of public and private spaces, a dynamic web of values and interests.

Any explanation of the city that touches only upon economic factors is dangerously narrow in scope and will hardly provide an adequate theoretical base for an urban revitalization strategy. This is particularly true if such an economic approach is, in turn, understood in a narrow manner, that is, limited to the major production and employment statistics without paying attention given to the quality and diversity of the social fabric and the production process. Moreover, economically oriented and technocratic strategies for urban revitalization--aside from being barely operational in the medium term--often heighten social tensions and weaken the city's ability to adapt and compete.

This paper is not an attempt to develop a new general theory of the city and urban space in contemporary America. Therefore, it will not address, for example, such crucial topics as the relations of complementarity or contradiction, of cooperation or conflict between the traditional urban centers and the new metropolis, or the strong heritage of ethnic and cultural divisions alive in today's cities. Instead, its more modest goal is to highlight two themes that, although important to every city, play a decisive role in Washington, D.C., both at the strictly theoretical level and in elaborating a feasible strategy for urban revitalization: (1) the role of the public space as a catalyst for order, cohesion, and urban development; and (2) the cultural dimension of the city as a catalyst for economic development and dynamism, as well as for social integration and articulation.

¹² "Civic pride and good government are probably intertwined. Both have a lot to do with economic vitality." Ralph Dahrendorf, "Does London Need to be Governed?," LWT London Lecture, December 6, 1990.

Space and Power in Washington, D.C.

The material reproduction of the urban society depends on the continual reproduction of space in a fairly concentrated geographical area. Certainly the prime factors have to do with land, labor and capital. Yet the production of space depends in turn on decisions about what should be visible and what should not; concepts of order and disorder; and a strategic interplay between aesthetics and function.

--Sharon Zukin¹³

After having been abandoned for a long period of time when primarily functionalist or formalist thought prevailed, there has been renewed interest recently in studying space as a key element in understanding urban phenomena and the adequate functioning of the city--adequate functioning not in the sense of economic or logistical effectiveness, but as the basic condition for a specific type of sociability, as a space for living together, cooperating, and interacting.

One of the most distinctive characteristics of advanced contemporary societies is the growing globalization, delocalization, and dematerialization of the economic processes. However, this does not imply that the bulk of social relations no longer takes place within precise places and spaces. The terminals that receive and transmit information flows--intangible elements that trigger precise reactions--are still located in concrete places, either in the old or new downtowns, in the old or new suburbs, in the decrepit slums or the shiny edge-cities. The individuals who work at these terminals live in places that are real, places where they work, shop, study, or have fun. They still move within a certain area, one that is fundamentally an urban space, or at least an urbanized space. In addition to these intangible processes and workers in cyberspace, the economy needs a wide spectrum of perfectly conventional products and services and a multitude of workers to produce them while simultaneously determining a specific use for the space. In other words, basic social relations continue to take place within a certain space, and the configuration of this space is not neutral. It constitutes an essential aspect of personal and collective life.

In fact, space (urban or not) is not only the place where our individual and social experiences take place, it is also an integral part of these experiences and contributes decisively to their formation. It is in this space where meanings and memories, interests and projects, tools for gathering and exclusion, for celebration and conflict accumulate and interact. This is why the configuration of the urban space responds not only to specific essential functions and/or to a

¹³ Sharon Zukin, "Space and Symbols in an Age of Decline," in King, *Re-Presenting the City*, p. 44.

certain formal and aesthetic concept in its planning but also acts as a basic mechanism for the expression and development of social relations, relations of the creation and transmission of codes and collective concepts, of opportunities for meeting, interacting, and living together.

Urban space is, in this sense, a playing field for individual and collective experience, for the embodiment of a specific set of rules. However, it is a mobile and flexible playing field that changes according to the prevailing pressures, advances, and retreats of the teams and the players; a playing field and a set of rules that in the beginning benefit some more than others; a playing field that sometimes becomes a battlefield. Every city--in fact, every urban space--is a stage on which the spatial layout reflects specific relations that benefit certain games at the expense of others. Therefore, it is a space that either facilitates or hinders the meeting process, interaction, association, a sense of belonging, creativity, and responsibility and solidarity with respect to a place and its inhabitants. In multicultural cities, marked by rapid changes in population, the configuration of common public spaces is of paramount importance. As the city becomes increasingly socially and culturally diverse and complex, the availability of public spaces and their design and material form become more relevant.¹⁴

The city can never be a community on a larger scale. Inevitably, life in the big city implies that radically different lifestyles exist side by side. The big city is a stage for tensions and conflicts. This is why the existence and proliferation of common spaces and concepts is crucial. American cities tend to disregard this dimension of urban space: "Since the 1970s only a handful of public spaces in U.S. cities have been conceived and built as truly public--for neither profit nor market-based consumption, for association rather than individualism, for spending time rather than spending money."¹⁵

¹⁴ "Public spaces are the primary site of public culture; they are a window into the city's soul. As a sight, moreover, public spaces are an important means of framing a vision of social life in the city, a vision both for those who live there, and interact in urban public spaces every day, and for the tourists, commuters, and wealthy folks who are free to flee the city's needy embrace. Public spaces are important because they are places where strangers mingle freely. But they are also important because they continually negotiate the boundaries and markers of human society. As both site and sight, meeting place and social staging ground, public spaces enable us to conceptualize and represent the city--to make an ideology of it receptivity to strangers, tolerance of difference, and opportunities to enter a fully socialized life, both civic and commercial." Sharon Zukin, *The Cultures of Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), pp. 259-60.

¹⁵Zukin, "Space and Symbols in an Age of Decline," in King, *Re-Presenting the City*, p. 51.

In the United States, economic growth, real estate speculation, and making a profit at any price have often oversimplified the complexity and segregated the diverse elements of the urban phenomenon. As a result, they have very efficiently contributed to destroying and/or preventing the creation of a city life with minimum levels of stability and social integration: "While public space is centrally located, commercial complexes have increased and are policed by security guards, people feel that usable public space in ordinary neighborhoods--safe streets and parks--has decreased. Neighborhood public space is dirty or unsafe, or outside effective public controls. The satisfaction of private needs increasingly drives the construction of significant spaces of public life. This displaces the locus of emotional attachment in the city from the home and the local community to the central commercial complex."¹⁶ It is well known that a majority of the problems afflicting American cities is rooted in the preeminence of economic and functional considerations--guided by private interests in search of short-term profits--over the long-term social, political, and cultural considerations. In Washington, D.C., nevertheless, things are somewhat different.

Washington as an Exception and a Caricature

Washington exists only for the country at large; its local interests not dependent upon its national functions are in effect nothing.

--Frederick Law Olmstead Jr. (1902)¹⁷

It is perhaps in its treatment of urban space that one of the District's most distinctive and unique characteristics--as compared with other American cities--is highlighted. The public dimension of urban space has traditionally been given marginal consideration in most American cities, but the axis created by the National Mall and its immediate surroundings constitutes one of the most meaningfully endowed areas in the world: from Capitol Hill to the Lincoln Memorial, the White House, the Washington Monument, the Jefferson Memorial, the extraordinary Vietnam Memorial (probably the best contemporary monument), and the splendid museums of the Smithsonian Institution, this magnificent complex plays perfectly its role as a historical, political, and cultural referent with national impact.

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 55-56.

¹⁷Quoted in Gillette, *Between Justice and Beauty*, p. 101.

This was the goal of Thomas Jefferson and Pierre L'Enfant. It has been developed for the last two centuries--not without problems--due primarily to the approval of the McMillan Plan in 1901.

However, in contrast with European capitals, these monuments and symbols were not conceived in urban terms, but rather in strictly national and federal terms. They have never been incorporated into a broader and more complex urban milieu but have been kept isolated in an oasis of monumentality located within an urban conglomerate, threatened by speculation and social and economic segregation. Also, Congress and the federal government have always seen and continue to see Washington, D.C., not as a real and complex city but essentially as the malleable seat of federal institutions and as a symbolic and monumental display of national unity. It is a sublimated, fictitious city, a heterotopia that incarnates, concentrates, and displays all the meaning and symbolic charge of the basic values of the United States.

The problem is that, in spite of all this, Washington, D.C., has become more than a simple display. It has become the nerve center of an important and wealthy metropolitan area. And this center has all of the problems, and more, of any other American city. One of these, certainly not the smallest, is the inadequacy of its urban space to serve as a tool for social integration. Indeed, aside from its monuments and the national character of the public space within the federal enclave and its appendages (such as Arlington National Cemetery), the District suffers from an almost complete lack of meaningful public space with local character.

In sharp contrast to the Mall and the dozens of monuments honoring national heroes that decorate the circles and gardens of downtown Washington, D.C., there is little or no management of public space in the neighborhoods of the regular city, especially in the northeast and southeast portions where most of the African-American population resides. To stroll around the commercial downtown area or through residential neighborhoods, wealthy or poor, is to plunge into monotonous, monofunctional, inward-looking spaces. It is to cross a desert of urban meaning, without memory, without local historic landmarks, without areas devoted to public gathering, without facilities. In other words, it is an urban space lacking all that would encourage a sense of belonging and personal responsibility towards the social environment, the very things that promote communication and the exchange of ideas. The animation and vitality of areas such as DuPont Circle and Adams Morgan, or to a lesser extent, Washington Harbor on weekends, are exceptions that prove that urban spaces with local character and mixed-use can be attractive and viable, that areas with economic, social, and cultural diversity can become major assets and attractions.

This urban schizophrenia is reflected more dramatically in the planning system that regulates the city. Although formally there is only one Comprehensive Plan, there are in fact two plans, prepared, published, and executed independently. The first, in which local authorities have no say, includes the so-called federal elements, that is, all city areas defined as "of federal interest." The second, prepared by the local government but subject to the approval of the federal authorities, deals with local elements.

The outcome is a divided city with a monumental, hypertrophic heart--governed by functional and symbolic criteria that are national in nature--and a periphery that is disorganized, unbalanced, anemic, and lacks historical memory. Therefore, and in spite of the uniqueness of its monumental center, Washington, D.C., offers a good example of the dangers stemming from urban development projects that tend to reduce the necessary and fruitful complexity, diversity, and mixture of the city to an insipid sum of specialized functions, a juxtaposition of social layers that look upon each other with mistrust. This situation is dramatically underscored in the Extending the Legacy Plan, which is currently being prepared and discussed.

Extending the Legacy Plan: More of the Same

Backed by the National Capital Planning Commission, the Extending the Legacy Plan aims at shaping the development of Washington, D.C., as a federal capital and monumental center for the next fifty to one hundred years. The starting point of the plan is the existence of the two separate interests in Washington: federal and local. In the words of the authors of the plan, federal interests refer to the need for new office buildings and service buildings for federal bodies and agencies, and also for new museums and memorials. In view of the magnitude of the anticipated requirements,¹⁸ the plan goes beyond the traditional limits of the federal enclave and extends its administrative, monumental, and symbolic criteria along a number of important routes, such as North and South Capitol Streets, and at the same time suggests ambitious developments in infrastructure and public transportation.

¹⁸ The plan estimates that in the coming years a space will be required to locate about sixty new museums, memorials, and national monuments. National Capital Planning Commission, *Extending the Legacy. Planning America's Capital for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: National Capital Planning Commission, 1996).

The plan does include some interesting proposals, such as recovering a large percentage of the riverfront area for public use and the elimination of some roads that act as physical barriers and divide the city; these could well be part of an overall plan for urban reorganization and revitalization. It would be, or maybe it is, a mistake to think that Extending the Legacy can fulfill this role. This is a plan to physically and formally reshape various elements of the central city with the goal of improving its efficiency and splendor as the federal capital. From the point of view of this plan, the basic users of the city are the hundreds of thousands of suburban residents who work in the District every day and the millions of tourists who flock to the National Mall every year. For example, its recommendations in the area of public transportation and access roads are designed not to create a more attractive, accessible, and vital urban environment for the residents of the District, but rather to better serve a national administrative and monumental center. Even if this is a fundamental element of Washington, D.C., the city cannot be limited--and in reality is not limited--in this way.

Why must future museums, memorials, and national agency headquarters be established in the District? Would it not be reasonable to locate some of them in other cities, alleviating the pressure on an already saturated area while simultaneously injecting much-needed investment and creating attractions in other American cities? I am not suggesting that federal interests are not legitimate but rather, as is underscored by the plan itself, that they are not the best criteria for shaping an urban development strategy. Federal interests tend to eliminate or ignore the social and economic diversity inherent to urban life. They tend to subjugate the complexity of urban problems and needs to the functional and symbolic requirements of the nation's capital. In the area of urban design, the city is reduced to a sampler of national symbols displayed for the education and enjoyment of visitors in a sort of federal theme park. Federal interests--which tend to consider ordinary urban life as a dissonant and often hostile environment that surrounds federal buildings and symbolic national spaces, as an unpleasant backyard that either should be cleaned up or ignored--should not be regarded or understood--as has traditionally happened in Washington, D.C.--as overall urban interests, because they are not and they cannot be.

A city is a complex social entity in which small stores and businesses on safe and busy streets and public spaces are as important as large companies, efficient modes of transportation, and public monuments. On a daily basis in a big city, neighborhood cultural centers are as important as national museums, and the gathering places of a community are just as essential as national memorials. As is the case with any large city that also happens to be a political capital--or as any political capital that has become a large city--Washington, D.C.,

cannot allow itself the luxury of being only a national showcase. The District also needs to be an urban workshop, a diverse social, economic, and cultural nexus. It cannot allow itself to concentrate all of its socially meaningful spaces on the National Mall. It also needs spaces that are meaningful on a local and community level.

A large city not only tolerates differences, it thrives on diversity and rewards it. Therefore, extremely specialized development diminishes the ability of a city to renew itself, to adapt to changes, to debate, and to create. In a rapidly changing world any city that targets only one area for development will soon become inadequate. To a large extent then, the Extending the Legacy Plan only serves to extend the political and monumental dimension of the city, aggravating and perpetuating the problems that currently face the District. Most likely, the legacy of the plan would widen the gap and even the conflict between local and national interests, between wealthy and unifying national spaces and increasingly poor and fragmented ordinary urban spaces. A comprehensive and unified plan that integrates federal and local interests would not solve all of the city's problems. However, as long as there are two plans, it would be naive to hope for any higher degree of integration or urban and social vitality.

The Lack of Local Vision

The other side of the problem is, of course, weakness in local planning--the absence of an urban development strategy promoted and driven by the municipal government according to a local perspective. It is true that legal and budgetary constraints seriously limit the planning abilities of the local government. Yet, it is also true that large investments made by private business, particularly during the last fifteen years, could have helped if guided by an integral and balanced urban development project. This has not been the case.

In fact, the boom in private investment in real estate has aggravated the social and geographical fissures plaguing the city. This has been the result, to a large extent, of the lack of a global vision in urban development. It is interesting to note what Dennis E. Gale wrote ten years ago:

There is little evidence that the District government has done more than react to events as they occur. Typically, Washington's local government is predisposed to accommodate, rather than guide, the thrust of real estate activity. . . . But so far the District government has been reluctant to take a forceful, proactive stance to direct land use and development activity there [in the old downtown] through the Comprehensive Plan. Relying instead on the zoning ordinance, it has too often reacted to development

initiatives as they arise. With no coordinated vision for the future, no firm direction in mind, and a disjointed set of land-use controls, the District will probably surprise no one if it shows little effort to balance interests in the old downtown or in the CBD [Central Business District] in its entirety. Paradoxically, this situation appears to result not from the lack of a talented or able District planning staff but rather from the mayor's preference, like that of most mayors, to keep his options open as long as possible. Rather than commit the city to a clear direction for the future, rather than set explicit priorities among competing land uses and social purposes, he has opted for a nearly formless planning process, which allows arbitrary and inconsistent decision making.¹⁹

Absence of planning and excessive zoning: a combination that is lethal to the much-needed diversity and complexity of urban life. As Gale suggested, the problem does not lie in the absence of technical skill but in the lack of political will and/or vision. This is demonstrated by the low rank assigned to the Office of Planning, a mere appendage--without budgetary clout--of the Office of Business Services and Economic Development. It is also shown in the complete absence of any strategy to address the use of space as a public good, to give balance and order to city life. It is true, as Gale states, that this lack of will is linked to a political style that chooses to keep all options permanently open so that prevailing interests can always be accommodated. But it is also evident that the city is not understood as the complex social entity that it is; instead, the District and even its government are seen in purely economic terms. This attitude is confirmed and reinforced as long as urban problems are defined, by all those involved, as economic and fiscal problems.

This is dramatically underscored in "A Vision for America's First City," in which Marion Barry summarizes his more recent proposals to put the city back on the right track. Far from addressing the complex and interconnected nature of the city's problems, Barry defines the goals of the local government in business and market terms:

In a successful transformation, service must begin by defining the customer for each function and then determining how the service can be provided more efficiently. With this foundation, our new government is seen as a series of "businesses"--divided into "retail" and "wholesale" categories. In our "retail" services we serve customers directly. "Wholesale" businesses serve the retail businesses. . . .When completed, this new transformed government will

¹⁹ Dennis E. Gale, *D.C. Inner-City Revitalization and Minority Suburbanization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987).

have ten primary "businesses." The six retail businesses that will serve our citizens and customers directly are: Public Protection, Physical Infrastructure, Business Services and Economic Development, Education, Human Development, Comprehensive Health. Our wholesale businesses--those which serve customers inside of government--include: Policy, Public Management, Financial Management, Legal Services."²⁰

It would be difficult to find a better caricature of the city reduced to an economic unit and of municipal government managed as a business. In this vision there is no room, not even rhetorically, for the local administration to concern itself with urban planning. It is an anti-urban vision that is relatively common in underdeveloped countries and that invariably tends to worsen instead of alleviate the exact problems it was intended to resolve.²¹ Therefore, the severe deficiencies affecting the planning and designing of urban space in Washington, D.C., and particularly the total absence of a local urbanization policy, are not only due to the insensitivity of federal interests. Similar responsibility falls on the local administration, which systematically ignores the crucial importance of space as a strategic factor for articulation, cohesion, and urban development.

²⁰ "A Vision for America's First City. A Transformed Government for the People of Washington, D.C. " Remarks by Mayor Marion Barry, Jr. , on the presentation of his Transformation Initiative, February 14, 1996.

²¹ "Rarely have municipal governments in the primate cities of small developing countries enjoyed the free conditions necessary for them to operate effectively. They are commonly subjugated by national government located in the same city and make do with scant resources. . . . Urban management becomes crisis management." John Connell and John Lea, "Distant Places, Other Cities? Urban Life in Contemporary Papua New Guinea," in Watson and Gibson, *Postmodern Cities and Spaces*, pp. 176-77.

The Cultural Sector as a Catalyst for Urban Integration and Economic Reanimation

These are some of the things we look for in city life: variety, quality, surprise. Of course we want work and a house, and good schools, safe streets and reliable transport, but we ask for considerably more from cities. They should offer public places, squares and parks and waterfronts, in which it is a pleasure to be. There should be choices, of theaters and cinemas, of book and record shops, of bars and restaurants. Most of all there should be other people to meet, with whom to share these amenities. These are the elements that make up a city's life and its culture, which determine whether a community enjoys itself or simply survives.

--Mark Fisher²²

Cultural life and the cultural fabric of the city can be subject to an analysis similar to that of the urban space. No other American city enjoys such a wealth of public cultural institutions as does Washington, D.C. As with public space, however, there is a brutal imbalance between the power of federal institutions and initiatives and that of their local counterparts. The difficulties and level of marginalization faced by local cultural organizations in the District are similar to, if not worse than, those found in most American cities.

This is especially troubling at a time when the cultural dimension of city life is more important than ever. In increasingly de-industrialized cities, subject to a frantic pace of change and renovation, emphasis on the provision of intangible services and of a vital and creative cultural life is a primary source of economic activity. On the other hand, in cities that are increasingly multicultural, culture itself becomes a decisive factor in socialization and integration, or, in its absence, in fragmentation and conflict.

It is important to establish that culture does not imply only the most sophisticated creations of the human spirit--of science and philosophy, of fine arts and literature--or their production, promotion, and conservation by specialized and exclusive institutions. To talk about culture means also to talk about forms of expression and communication accessible to everyone, about techniques and processes for small-scale crafts and high-tech cultural media, such as video animation, computer graphics, electronic music, and desk-top

²²"Introduction," in *Whose Cities?*, ed. Mark Fisher and Ursula Owen (London: Penguin Books, 1991), p. 1.

publishing. It implies talking about ways of voicing ideas that are key in shaping the collective conscience and in developing new production processes. To talk about culture is to talk about forms of expression and production that find their niche in the socially and economically diversified fabric of urban life. It is with respect to this that Ken Warpole wrote:

Urban policy in the late twentieth century is now inseparable of cultural policy. The one must inform the other. Both will depend on creating a working economic base. . . . The new urban mix, the successful city core, requires all kinds of activities--residential accommodation, a decent transportation infrastructure, facilities for leisure and recreation and, above all, places in which to work. . . . The disasters of urban zoning and the rigid separation of the commercial, civic, retailing, manufacturing, entertainment and residential areas have produced fragmented and deracinated urban cultures linked only by ring roads, service roads, daily traffic and local radio bulletins. The return to mixed-use planning, of bringing residential accommodation and environmental-friendly manufacturing back into the city center should be welcomed. Many of the new, high-quality specialist manufacturing sectors have strong design and cultural features; the cultural industries sector, including fashion, publishing, sound recording, film and video, photography, crafts and visual arts, is a growing sector in the modern economy, and works best in a city center environment where producers and distributors can work in close relationship with each other.²³

Once again, Washington, D.C., has enormous potential in this field. The size of the cultural sector in the District offers almost unlimited possibilities. Yet, this potential is unevenly and only partially realized and does not fit in well with the structure and dynamic of the city.

The Economic Impact of the Cultural Sector in Washington, D.C.

The economic importance of the cultural sector in Washington, D.C. , has been documented in a useful, although incomplete manner, in studies conducted by Stephen S. Fuller and by the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities. In his analysis of the economic impact of the Smithsonian Institution, Fuller shows that it generated a total of 6.7 billion dollars in economic activity in the Washington Metropolitan area in 1993, which makes it one of the main economic engines of the city:

²³ Ken Warpole, "Trading Places: The City Workshop," in Fisher and Owen, *Whose Cities?*, pp. 143-51.

The importance of the Smithsonian's total economic impact in Metropolitan Washington's economy can be seen by comparing it to the region's largest economic generators. The single largest source of local economic impact is the Department of Defense. Its total direct and indirect impacts are estimated at \$24.9 billion. Based on two recent studies, it has been estimated that the 25 colleges and universities in the Washington metropolitan area had a total local economic impact of \$17.3 billion in 1993. . . . The Smithsonian Institution's \$6.7 billion economic impact represents five percent of metropolitan Washington's 1993 gross regional product of \$140.2 billion. This fact positions the Smithsonian Institution as a major source of local economic activity and business development potential.²⁴

These figures become even more relevant taking into consideration the multiplicative effect of cultural spending and its ability to attract external resources: "91% of the \$6.7 billion total [is] derived from the spending of out-of-town visitors to Smithsonian facilities, and nine percent [is] derived from direct spending by the Smithsonian. . . . For each dollar that the Smithsonian Institution spent in the Washington area in 1993, an additional \$16.35 in economic activity was generated in metropolitan Washington's economy. . . . The Smithsonian generated over \$352 million in local and state tax revenue in 1993. The main component of that revenue was \$250 million that derived from visitor spending."²⁵

It is important to note that although almost all of the centers and museums that make up the Smithsonian Institution are located in Washington, D.C., the District captured only 50.7 percent of the Smithsonian's total economic impact on the Washington metropolitan area. This is because "the larger and more self-contained and self-sufficient the economy, the larger the retained indirect benefits. The simpler and more geographically constrained the economy, the more the secondary economic benefits leak out to surrounding jurisdictions or beyond."²⁶

²⁴ Stephen S. Fuller, *The Economic Impact of the Smithsonian Institution on the Washington Metropolitan Area* (Greater Washington Research Center, June 1994).

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

The study by the D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities confirms and expands this data: "The District of Columbia, with a permanent population of close to 600,000, had a resident workforce of approximately 285,000 in 1993. Of this, 5,076--1.8%--worked for arts organizations within Washington's boundaries or were self-employed artists who were residents of the city. Additional jobs created by the ripple effect brought the total contribution of the arts to the District's employment rolls to 3%. . . . All in all, total economic impact of the arts and cultural organizations in the District other than the Smithsonian group is estimated at \$1.4 billion."²⁷ Therefore, the combined economic weight of the Smithsonian Institution and the local and/or private cultural entities reached \$8.1 billion. If we add the \$17.3 billion economic impact of schools and universities in the area, the total volume exceeds that of activities related to the Department of Defense.

If the economic impact of the cultural sector is important, its social impact is no less significant: "A factor not to be underestimated, but up to this point inadequately understood and poorly supported, is the contribution that neighborhood organizations make through drama, dance, music and visual arts instruction in helping neighborhood residents reflect their ideas and imagination, raise their self-esteem, express their culture, improve their environment, and meet social and welfare concerns through arts disciplines."²⁸ In fact, it can be argued that this social dimension should receive more attention. From the political and urbanistic point of view, the ability of culture to generate a sense of belonging, cohesion, and civic articulation is key.

In all advanced countries, cultural projects are an essential vector in urban restructuring and social integration strategies, from the restoration and transformation of obsolete industrial and commercial spaces into new cultural venues to the encouragement of artistic expression by ethnic minorities; from public policies aimed at preserving the historical patrimony to training and employment programs for the young that combine the sensitivity of traditional arts with the possibilities generated by new technologies. Therefore, it would appear that the active support of cultural organizations and programs should be a priority for the local government. This is not the case: from 1990 to 1994, the

²⁷ Government of the District of Columbia, *Partnership for Cultural Action. A Cultural Plan for Washington, D.C.* (Washington, D.C.: D.C. Commission on the Arts and Humanities, February 1996).

²⁸Ibid.

budget for the Office of Arts and Humanities was \$3 million out of a total local budget of \$5 billion; in 1996, the D.C. government, during a rampant fiscal crisis, reduced its overall budget by about 10 percent, but the budget of the Office of Arts and Humanities, in contrast, was reduced by 50 percent, to a mere \$1.6 million.

If both the treatment of the urban space and the cultural policy adopted by the city are deficient in terms of their contribution to the local planning and development of Washington, D.C., the problem is most serious at the point of intersection: local spaces and cultural facilities. It is both sad and astonishing to learn that in the entire District of Columbia there is not a single public cultural institution that is local in nature. The local government does not have, in any neighborhood within the entire city, a single public cultural center.

Conclusion: A Lack of Urbanity

From the perspective of this paper (influenced by the European experience, particularly by Barcelona's urban revitalization strategy of the 1980s and early 1990--a distinct and specific experience, although meaningful in this context), the problem that afflicts Washington, D.C., is not strictly economic or political in nature, but is rather a problem of urbanity, or lack thereof. The problem lies with pervasive political and cultural strategies that are based on the division and fragmentation of the urban entity: political division and fragmentation among the local and federal powers; spatial and territorial division and fragmentation--within the municipality and between the municipality and the metropolitan area; and economic, social, ethnic, and cultural divisions and fragmentation within the District.

The problem is created by a prevalent unilateralism that oversimplifies the complexity of the urban phenomenon. It is a school of thought that attributes precise functions to specific spaces, avoiding the interaction of uses and users and ignoring the fact that the wealth of a city depends on its ability to articulate and interrelate diverse elements. Although these divisions and fissures have deep historical roots, they can be changed.

The circumstances of economic growth in the United States have fostered the migration of the middle class to the suburbs, have oversimplified the complexity and segregated the diverse elements of the urban phenomenon, and have helped to destroy and/or prevent the creation of a city life with minimum levels of stability and social integration. In Washington, D.C., however, the most important variable is the preeminence of a national political paradigm, which is responsible for the artificial simplification of urban complexity, for the artificial

isolation of its many dimensions, and for favoring some to the detriment of others. It is the U.S. Congress that purposely keeps the municipal government of Washington, D.C., poor and impotent amidst a sea of metropolitan power and abundance.

In Washington, D.C., the two anti-urban trends converge: on the one hand, the mistrust and sense of superiority of the state versus the local autonomy, and on the other, the destruction of the urban environment created by speculation: corporate interests above social interests, things above people, prices above value, function above meaning. Unfortunately, in the District, these two traditional anti-urban trends--the one promoted by the state and the other promoted by economic speculation--are complemented and reinforced by a short-sighted municipal vision that is dominated by immediate concerns, specifically financial problems, and by electoral interests.

At each and every level, then, there is a lack of a global and sophisticated understanding of the city and its future. As long as this understanding is not realized, and along with it a strategy for urban development, the District will continue to suffer from the same kind of problems and waste the vast resources and potential that lie within its boundaries.

In this context, the methodological conclusions reached by a number of panels organized by the Urban Land Institute to design local strategies for the revitalization of run-down neighborhoods are particularly relevant: "... the panel's purpose, in each case, was to recommend strategies that the local government, working in partnership with the private sector and neighborhood organizations, could follow to improve the residents' living conditions and their access to a wider range of social and economic opportunities. It was hoped that doing so also would reinforce a sense of community within each neighborhood and reconnect the neighborhood and the individual residents with the larger metropolitan community."²⁹

To achieve the desired results, the panels advised that the individual neighborhoods under scrutiny would need the following:

- economic and social diversity
- physical improvements
- improved economic opportunities
- public and social services
- good public schools and improved public safety

²⁹ Diane R. Suchman, *Revitalizing Low-Income Neighborhoods. Recommendations from ULI Advisory Services Panels* (Washington, D.C.: The Urban Land Institute, 1994).

To achieve these ends, the panels suggested an approach characterized by several traits, the need for which seems universal: First and foremost, comprehensiveness. As emphasized by the panels, cities must address the communities' full range of needs comprehensively, instead of focusing on individual issues, problems, or programs, such as housing or job training. To ensure a comprehensive approach, city departments responsible for such varied activities as planning, economic development, social services, and education must plan and participate together in revitalization efforts.

Revitalization activities need to be undertaken in conformance with a comprehensive, long-term community plan that articulates the community's and city's agreed-upon vision for the neighborhood. A community plan ensures that individual efforts proceed toward a general goal, regardless of the order in which actions are taken. Other needed traits include coordination, community participation, concentration of resources, and commitment.

The recommendations formulated by the Urban Land Institute for a neighborhood or small community are applicable on a municipal scale to Washington, D.C., and many other cities. Of course, when the center of attention moves away from a specific neighborhood to the entire municipality, the relevant context becomes metropolitan in nature. However, the problem that immediately arises--and which is not addressed in this paper--is the integration of the District within the whole of the metropolitan area.

If a realistic revitalization strategy for a specific neighborhood requires viewing the city as a whole, then any revitalization strategy for a city requires consideration of the entire metropolitan area. The central city will only regain its vitality if it is able to insert itself, economically, socially, and culturally, into the metropolitan framework.³⁰ The restructuring of such links involves not only a political/legal/institutional rearrangement--whose design and viability goes beyond the goals of this paper, it also implies: (a) a different view of the economic and social role of the central city in relation to the metropolitan area; and (b) a different understanding of the behavior of non-economic factors within an eventual urban revitalization strategy for Washington, D.C., one in which the elements of culture and space should have a paramount role.

³⁰ As David Rusk wrote with respect to a different topic, a unified urban government that encompasses the entirety of the real city tends to unify and integrate the city and its citizens and to promote comprehensive socioeconomic development. A divided government, fragmented into many territorial jurisdictions, tends to divide and segregate and is often accompanied by economic turmoil and a widening of inequalities within the metropolitan area. See David Rusk, *Cities Without Suburbs* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1993).

Such a vision and strategy should be deeply rooted in the local reality and should be developed, at least in part, independently from the new institutional and metropolitan framework. In fact, it is plausible to think that only through the realization of that vision and strategy, and only once they are operational, would it be possible to reach agreement on a new institutional and metropolitan arrangement. As long as they are absent, discussions will be bogged down by political, financial, and managerial issues, and the quality and urban attractiveness of Washington, D.C., will continue to deteriorate.

Washington, D.C., potentially has the best of two worlds. It is a great political capital and the core of a prosperous metropolitan area. In actuality, however, far from having achieved a positive synergy between both dimensions--as in other capital cities--mistrust and conflict prevail. As a result, today only the most powerful contenders--federal interests and large private interests--emerge apparently victorious. This is why the key to the future of the District, at least politically, will be the ability to establish a productive relationship and promote interaction between that aspect of the city which is the nation's capital and that which is a conventional, complex, and vital urban entity. However, the possibility remains--and this is the dominant element under federal control, which the Extending the Legacy Plan seems to reinforce--that federal institutions will continue to unilaterally impose upon the city the role of the District as the nation's capital to the detriment of local autonomy and local life. The perception of the local urban milieu as a polluted social environment that needs to be minimized or endured is founded on a mirage. Without a strong, diverse, and autonomous local life, the nation's capital will be a palace built on quicksand. For Washington, D.C., to work efficiently as the nation's capital it must also function efficiently as a conventional city.

Any policy that does not face the contradiction between these two dimensions is doomed to failure. If this contradiction remains, new memorials, museums, monumental spaces, and buildings in the city center will attract more tourists and generate more jobs for suburbanites, but urban life encircling these monuments will be stagnant, subject to the law of the survival of the fittest. The monumental center will remain under siege, surrounded by old and new ghettos. The residents of Washington, D.C., who can afford to do so will continue to flee to the suburbs in search of safety, better schools and services, better stores, and a higher quality of life. And the authorities, local and federal, will still be unable to deliver on what should be their main goal: to give residents both the means to live and the desire to stay.

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