

N U M B E R 30

**Local Dynamism and  
the Governance of  
Washington, D.C.:  
A Study on the Scope  
of Civil Society-State  
Engagement**

*Mohamed Halfani*

WOODROW WILSON INTERNATIONAL  
CENTER FOR SCHOLARS

WASHINGTON, D.C., 1999



### **Comparative Urban Studies Occasional Papers Series**

This publication is one of a series of Occasional Papers on Comparative Urban Studies of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. The series includes papers in the humanities and social sciences from Fellows, Guest Scholars, workshops, colloquia, and conferences. The series aims to extend the Center's discussions of urban issues to a wider community in Washington and throughout the world, and to provide, directly or indirectly, scholarly and intellectual context for contemporary policy concerns.

Single copies of Occasional Papers may be obtained without charge by writing to:

**The Comparative Urban Studies Project  
Woodrow Wilson International Center for  
Scholars  
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20004-3027**

**(202) 691-4235  
CUSP@WWICS.SI.EDU**

### **Comparative Urban Studies at the Wilson Center**

Blair A. Ruble and Joseph S. Tulchin, Co-Chairs  
Christina Rosan, Project Coordinator  
Sabine Salandy, Project Intern  
Luba Shara, Project Intern

Since the Comparative Urban Studies Project's inception in 1991, we have sought to link sound academic scholarship and policymaking through international conferences, Guest Scholarships, and publications. Using a multidisciplinary, multiregional approach to urban studies, the Project engages experts from around the world in a substantive evaluation of urban practice.

### **Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars**

The Center is the nation's living memorial to Woodrow Wilson, president of the United States from 1913 to 1921. Created by law in 1968, the Center is Washington, D.C.'s only independent, wide-ranging institute for advanced study where vital current issues and their deep historical background are explored through research and dialogue. Visit the Center on the Worldwide web at <http://www.wilsoncenter.org>

**Director:** Lee H. Hamilton

**Board of Trustees:** Joseph A. Cari, Jr., Chair; Steven Alan Bennett, Vice Chair

**Ex officio trustees:** Madeleine K. Albright, Secretary of State; James H. Billington, Librarian of Congress; John W. Carlin, Archivist of the United States; Penn Kemble, Acting Director, U.S. Information Agency; William R. Ferris, Chair, National Endowment for the Humanities; I. Michael Heyman, Secretary, Smithsonian Institution; Richard W. Riley, Secretary of Education; Donna E. Shalala, Secretary of Health and Human Services

**Trustee designated by the president from within the government:** Samuel R. Berger, National Security Adviser

**Private citizen trustees:** Carol Cartwright; Daniel L. Doctoroff; Jean L. Hennessey; Daniel L. Lamaute; Paul Hae Park; Thomas Reedy; S. Dillon Ripley

**The Wilson Council:** Albert Abramson; Cyrus Ansary; J. Burchenal Ault; Charles F. Barber; Theodore C. Barreaux; Joseph C. Bell, Esq.; John L. Bryant, Jr.; Conrad Cafritz; Nicola L. Caiola; Raoul L. Carroll; Albert V. Casey; Peter B. Clark; William T. Coleman, Jr.; Michael D. DiGiacomo; Frank P. Doyle; Donald G. Drapkin; F. Samuel Eberts III; I. Steven Edelson; John Foster; Barbara Hackman Franklin; Bruce Gelb; Jerry P. Genova; Alma Gildenhorn; Joseph B. Gildenhorn; David F. GirardiCarlo; Michael B. Goldberg; Raymond A. Guenter; Robert R. Harlin; Verna R. Harrah; Eric Hotung; Frances Humphrey Howard; John L. Howard; Darrell E. Issa; Jerry Jasinowski; Brenda LaGrange Johnson; Dennis D. Jorgensen; Shelly Kamins; Anastasia D. Kelly; Christopher Kennan; Steven Kotler; William H. Kremer; Kathleen D. Lacey; Donald S. Lamm; Harold Levy; David Link; David S. Mandel, Esq.; Edwin S. Marks; Robert McCarthy, Esq.; C. Peter McColough; James D. McDonald; Edwin S. Marks; Phillip Merrill; Michael W. Mitchell; Jeremiah L. Murphy; Martha T. Muse; Gerald L. Parsky; L. Richardson Preyer; Robert Quartel; Edward V. Regan; J. Steven Rhodes; Edwin Robbins; Philip E. Rollhaus, Jr.; George P. Shultz; Raja W. Sidawi; Ron Silver; William A. Slaughter; Timothy E. Stapleford; Linda Bryant Valentine, Esq.; Deborah Wince-Smith; Herbert S. Winokur, Jr.

**Mohamed Halfani.** *Local Dynamism and the Governance of Washington, D.C.: A Study on the Scope of Civil Society-State Engagement.* Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars (Comparative Urban Studies Occasional Papers Series, 30), 1999.

Papers do not represent an official position of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. Opinions expressed are solely those of the authors.

#### **About the Author:**

#### **Mohamed Halfani**

Mohamed Halfani, from Tanzania, holds a MA in development studies from the University of Dar es Salaam and a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Toronto, where his work concentrated on urban development in Africa. Halfani is the African regional coordinator for the Global Urban Research Initiative (GURI), funded by the Ford Foundation, and is a senior lecturer at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Dar es Salaam. Halfani has worked as an advisor to the government of Tanzania developing a national plan for the country's political decentralization. He has co-authored several books, including [Vitalizing African Public Administration for Recovery and Development](#), and is particularly interested in the current predicament of African urban communities in today's era of globalization.

#### **About the Comparative Urban Studies Project's International Working Group on the District of Columbia**

Seeking to find new ways to look at old problems, the Woodrow Wilson Center's Comparative Urban Studies Project (CUSP) launched a research program, in 1996, to examine Washington, D.C., as a case study of some of the most complex and difficult urban dilemmas facing the world's cities. The International Working Group on the District of Columbia brings urban specialists from around the world together with an advisory committee comprising prominent civic, business, and political leaders of the District of Columbia who serve as both a resource for the Center's visiting scholars and as an audience for the project's research findings.

Coming to the Woodrow Wilson Center for two summer months from such places as Tanzania, Brazil, Kenya, Mexico, Russia, Spain and Japan, the Urban Guest Scholars—who are architects, economists, sociologists, political scientists, community activists and planners—have been able to apply their extensive knowledge of urban dynamics to the dilemmas that face the nation's capital.

Findings of the International Working Group are published in the Occasional Paper Series and available in CD format. Please contact the Comparative Urban Studies Project for copies of "Washington, C.D." featuring interviews with Guest Scholars and George Liston Seay, producer and host of *Dialogue*, the Woodrow Wilson Center's award winning radio program.

## Executive Summary:

---

*Mohamed Halfani examines the role of civic organizations in the urban governance of Washington, D.C. The apparent vibrancy of civil society in the city, he believes, contrasts with the poor performance of the formal, elected city government. Indeed, one would have expected that a city rich with civic associations could govern itself without intrusion from the federal government, which is what happens in the US capital. Analysis of this paradox becomes the central focus of Halfani's research.*

*Halfani finds that in contrast to many US cities, the renewal programs in Washington, D.C. were predominantly directed and executed by the federal government. The role of civic organizations remained marginal, and mostly reactive. Moreover, civic associations have experienced a number of constraints such as tax exemption status legislation prohibiting political advocacy. Halfani believes that these restrictions, associated with the status of "charitable organization," have reduced the activities and concerns of many organizations to the narrow operational tasks of their programs. They are prevented from questioning the status quo. Halfani comes to the conclusion that the cause of poor management in Washington, D.C. lies in the relationship among the city's civic associations, municipal administration, and federal government.*

---

# **Local Dynamism and the Governance of Washington D.C.:** **A Study on the Scope of Civil Society-State Engagement**

by **Mohamed Halfani**, Institute of Development Studies,  
*University of Dar es Salaam*

Prepared by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars,  
Comparative Urban Studies Project,  
Washington, D.C, 1999

## **Introduction**

There is a resurgence of interest in the notion of the ‘local’ and ‘community’ in urban studies. To a large extent, this is caused by the entrenchment of two prominent dynamics—deepening global linkages coupled with technological changes—that have been dominant during the current transition to the 21st century. These dynamics generate a concern over the fate of ‘place,’ of ‘locality,’ and also of ‘human agency’ at this historical juncture when globalization exalts macro tendencies, fosters stronger systemic linkages, and gradually obliterates boundaries of differences. As technological advances reinforce the ‘network society,’ our attention is directed at the emerging local responses to the changes in the character of community, as well as on the evolving mode of engagement between the state and civil society.

In the case of American urban studies, local exigencies have always been part of a long and rigorous tradition of analyzing urban politics, urban planning, as well as urban economics. Studies relating to specific neighborhoods, political machines, race relations, municipal governance, inter-governmental arrangements, and even baseline compilation of data and information offer profound insights on the dynamics at the local level. Recently the issue has received a new paradigmatic refocus with Robert Putnam’s elucidation on the value of social capital and recent expositions on the notion of the ‘network society’ (Putnam 1993; Castell 1996).

In the specific case of the District of Columbia, the analyses of Howard Gillete, Harry Jaffe, and Sherwood, as well as that of Francine Cary, among many others, and also the frequent review articles in the mainstream media such as the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, reveal a complexity of socio-political dynamics associated with the functioning of the city (Gillete 1995; Jaffe and Sherwood 1994; Cary 1996). In all these cases, however, the central problem is articulated with a view that demonstrates a dominance of the overarching macro system, thus underlining the centrality of federal government, the municipal authority, or even the overall cultural mosaic in determining urban affairs. The city is viewed from above, and this seems to be the dominant perspective in articulating the urban question in Washington, D.C.

Such a perspective diminishes the role and place of local actors in urban governance. One would expect that the deep fractures within the city, the lack of adequate representation at the federal level, the idiosyncratic politics being perpetrated, the embedded tensions deriving from the distortions in governance arrangements and regional configuration would emphasize a need for perspectives that rigorously expose local dynamics, even amidst the dominance of macro forces. However, this element seems to be lacking in Washington studies.

## The City and Its Complex Web of Associations

There seems to be an exuberance of civic associations in the District of Columbia. In 1997, the National Center for Charitable Statistics (NCCS) identified 6,512 registered ‘charitable’ organizations.<sup>1</sup> While the concentration of such organizations in Washington, D.C. can be explained by the capital status of the city, which attracts many national organizations to locate their headquarters here, the operational portfolio of most of these national organizations also includes activities in Washington, D.C. Civic associations are directly engaged in more than half of the 829 agency programs that involve the District government, either as service providers, pressure groups, or regulatory partners. A significant part of the municipal and federal budgetary expenditure is therefore, deployed through civic institutions. Our own review of the profiles of Not-for-Profit Organizations as listed in the 1996/1997 Catalog of Services of the Washington Council of Agencies, supplemented with information from other networks and coalitions, reveals 13 different categories as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1.0**  
**Categories of Associations in D.C. with some examples**

No.	CATEGORY	EXAMPLES
1	Human Service Providers	Bright Beginnings; Jubilee Housing; DC Rape Crisis Center
2	Advocacy organizations	Parents United
3	Think Tanks	DC Agenda; Community Indicators Project; Washington Area Studies
4	Faith organizations	Churches; Mosques; Synagogues
5	Economic Development Corporations	Marshall Heights; Columbia Heights
6	Advisory Councils	Advisory Neighborhood Commissions; Police Advisory Council; Residence Advisory Council
7	Neighborhood Organizations	Neighborhood Civic Assembly; tenant associations
8	“Intermediary” Organizations	Washington Council of Agencies; Enterprise Foundation
9	Cultural Associations	Am Kolel Judaic Resource Center; Centro de Arte
10	Business Improvement Districts	Downtown Business Improvement District; Downtown Partnership
11	Clubs	Manna investment Club; Eastern High School 500 Club



Table one portrays a well-developed array of association life, with organizations involved in a broad range of activities covering almost all the facets of urban development. Most of the organizations in the different categories have been part of their constituencies for many years, and quite a few have outstanding performance records in terms of innovation and achievement. Indeed, historical records also ascertain that the city has had a long and rich history of community formations.

While there is a lot of overlap in the activities performed by the different organizations, each category is fairly distinct in terms of the projects being undertaken, the clientele, and constituency that is being served, and the methods of operations. However, almost in all cases, there is a tendency for the organizations to use one sector as a base, and to strive in operating comprehensively by providing a broader range of services. In this respect, a shelter delivery agency may find a need to also provide employment counseling, health education, and even engage in business development.

Similarly, most of the neighborhood-based associations, such as advisory councils, civic assemblies, neighborhood commissions, and development corporations, are spatially based networks that link and propagate the interests of communities in identifiable areas. The others are more or less voluntary organizations that are created and sustained through the coalescence of interests. The only exceptions are the Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, which are statutory structures linked to the municipal government.

Except for the neighborhood organizations, most of the associations tend to be activist driven associations. The internal energy and propulsion of the targeted beneficiaries do not directly generate the actual dynamism of such organizations. Instead, an active core of individuals, either from within or from outside the target area, maintain an organizational facility aimed at alleviating a social or economic problem. In the long run, there is a possibility that the beneficiaries may engage in the change process. However, in many instances it is the initial core that maintains the institutional impetus.

The actual factors underlying the emergence and proliferation of different categories of associations vary. We have no evidence to ascertain whether at any particular period there were particular reasons for the proliferation of a given type of civic associations (such as a breakdown of service delivery, availability of financial grants, gross disorientation in policy direction, high unemployment, etc). However, discussions with civic activists have revealed that many of the associations operate in areas neglected by the business sector and in which public agencies do not function efficiently.

## **The Paradox**

The apparent robustness and vibrancy of civil society in the District of Columbia contrasts very sharply with the performance of the formal governmental machinery during the last decade. The city is described to be in a serious management crisis for the past ten years. The crisis manifests itself through bureaucratic inefficiency, a pervasive culture of machine politics, poor service delivery, serious weaknesses in infrastructure maintenance, and gross mismanagement of municipal assets, particularly land (*The Washington Post*, 21 July 1997; *The New York Times*, 25 July 1996).



The situation worsened to the point that in 1995 Congress created a Financial Control Board headed by Andrew Brimmer, to control city spending. In the following two years, the Control Board took over operations of D.C. schools and police. And in July 1997, the elected District government was stripped of most of its powers and the Control Board assumed full control of running the city. To Marion Barry, the incumbent mayor of D.C., the move was tantamount to violating and colonizing the city. To many others, it was seen as a consequence of the District's own negligence. The move, in general, was considered to be a paradox for the world's leading democracy to suspend the cardinal principles of democracy in its own capital!

Two weeks after the federally appointed agency had taken over the full authority of running the city of 600,000 people, there were a few small protests around the White House and Capitol Hill. A few civic leaders unsuccessfully attempted to stir up the population to react to the denial of their basic rights. Indeed, one would have expected that a city rich with civic associations and organizations would not have permitted such a governance malaise for such a long period, and that there would have been a more rigorous popular discourse on the implications of weakening an elected government.

What underlies this paradox of a seemingly vibrant association life amidst a decadence in the overall management of the city? Is this a manifestation of the limits of association life? Are Washingtonians unconnected to the broader issues of the management of their city, despite their apparent dynamism? Are they only attuned to certain aspects of the governance process? Or is it a case of strong communities and a weak city? This study seeks to explore these questions by analyzing the predicament of urban governance in D.C. The insights gained from the D.C. exploration can serve as useful points in understanding the connection between community life and municipal management.

## **Community and the Governance of the District of Columbia**

The city of Washington D.C. experienced some of its most dramatic transformation in the 20th Century. Since the 1920s, a number of revitalization initiatives have taken place in the areas of housing and infrastructure that have had a profound impact on the physical and social configuration of the city. For much of the first half of the century, the federal government played a leading role in directing and executing these renewal programs. Despite the thriving presence of civic associations, even at this early period, their role remained very marginal, and mostly reactive. In the 1950s, there were attempts by some community organizations to involve themselves proactively by demonstrating a different approach to urban transformation; but these steps were quickly discouraged. By the 1970s, development of the city was mostly driven by the private sector, and local communities could only reactively protect their interests in the few areas they were capable of doing so. However, the advent of Home Rule did open some space for civic engagement in the 1980s, which now seems to be challenged.





## The Urban Renewal Programs

Among the programs of the New Deal and Great Society, were major public programs of slum clearance and the provision of public housing, neighborhood renewal, as well as the construction of mass transit and highways. The planning and execution of these programs not only necessitated a redefinition of policy directions, but it also triggered a massive disruption of social systems for a number of communities.

In spite of the rhetoric of empowering people, and the profound nature of changes fostered by these programs, it appears that civic involvement in directing this transformation was restricted to the press, business interests, professional organizations, and a few influential activists who were well connected to the establishment. Throughout the deliberation of major initiatives, such as the establishment of the Alley Dwelling Authority, the razing and re-building of more gentrified Southwest neighborhoods, or the planning for the radial ways, there were very few civic actors who were closely involved. They included people like Charlotte Hopkins, a housing activist who was well connected to the political establishment, and organizations such as the Washington Housing Association, American Institute of Architects, Washington Urban League, Washington Building Congress, and the Washington Post. These groups and individuals influenced policy inputs, sponsored studies, and made testimonies in public hearings.

Basically, apart from the proclaimed intention of developing neighborhoods, there was an absence of an organized mechanism for involving the communities. The reactive protests of organizations like the Lincoln Civic Association or the Federation of Citizens' Association had a minimum impact, even at these early stages of urban renewal, in part because the sentiment of many public officials was that some decisions needed to come from above.

In the 1960s, we see an attempt by community organizations to reassert themselves and forge a new relationship between government and communities. This is best illustrated by Reverend Walter Fauntroy's initiative that built a coalition of 150 community organizations, churches, and a variety of civic groups, and formed the Model Inner City Community Development Organization (MICCO). For some five years, this coalition unveiled a new interface between public and civic spheres, especially in the re-building of the Shaw neighborhood. The initiative involved neighborhood organizations, residents, and businesses in the planning process. The physical development of the neighborhood was complemented by social and economic planning.

The MICCO initiative was not only given control over the redevelopment process, but the government assigned a Harvard trained lawyer and appointed two church ministers to work with the Fauntroy team in planning for the initiative. The 1967 riots gave a new impetus to citizen participation, as the tragedy was attributed partly to the alienation of residents from the governance of their city.



The short-lived nature of this new mode of association between public and civic sectors began to reveal itself. Misgivings were expressed about the rationale for giving up control of the planning process to outsiders, favoring decentralizing neighborhood-based planning over the traditional method of centralized city control, and investing in inner city neighborhood as opposed to areas in the city's perimeter. By the 1970s, there was a shift towards attracting middle and upper-income people back to the communities.

Of course, the termination of this brief interlude of a more dynamic civic engagement in the governance of the District did not imply a total alienation of civic associations. In fact, in the late 70s and 80s, one sees a more intensified vibrancy in the relationship between the two sectors. To a large extent, this can be attributed to the advent of Home Rule and the slightly expanded political and formal institutional space for civic participation.

## **Private Sector Initiatives**

While the above cases involved massive destruction and complete re-building of neighborhoods through public sector direction, change in Adams Morgan was gradual and mostly driven by private market decisions. However, even in this case, established civil organizations such as the Adams Morgan Organization (AMO), the Kalorama Civic Association (KCA), the Midway Civic Organization (MCO), and even the numerous block clubs in the area seem to have been powerless in their reactions to the change process.

Unlike its counterparts in the Southwest, Northwest's District One, and the Shaw neighborhood, the transformation of the Adams Morgan area was gradual and insipid. Jeffrey Henig analyzed changes in the demographic profile of residents between 1970 and 1980 in terms of numbers, racial composition, and educational levels. He also examined the rate of residents' displacement, as well as changes in the price of buildings, and their conversion into single family homes and condominiums. He concluded that a major process of gentrification had taken place, which had triggered a substantial relocation of residents, a reconfiguration of dwellings, and substantially altered the social profile of the neighborhood (Henig 1982).

The KCA declined from its 1919 stature of being the "symbol of a community of permanent residents, united in outlook, fairly homogenous in background, and concerned with the preservation of the community" (Henig 1982) to being dubbed in the late 1970s as a "mouthpiece for a white, aging, propertied elite, [that] was relegated to the periphery [as changes in the neighborhood continued]" (Henig 1982). Its traditional corpus of values include: protection of the neighborhood from sudden change, preference for private restoration rather than public renewal, encouragement of single-family over multi-family housing, distaste for speculators and nonresident investors, a general preference for a manageable, low density, small-scale environment. Most of its activities include defensive actions through opposing testimonies in public hearings for zoning, and also tendering applications for re-zoning.

The Midway Civic Association was concerned with social issues of unemployment, alcoholism, and family breakdown, and was described to be interested in improving the aesthetic appearance of the neighborhood. It occasionally teamed up with AMO in opposing speculators and absentee landlords; but, rather ironically, it

supported urban renewal. The Business Association was also into aesthetics of the neighborhood and struggled to defend itself against the encroachment of big business and large-scale development—forces that could overwhelm them.

It is worthwhile to mention here a similar predicament of a civic association in another part of the city. The Georgetown Citizens Association, which is considered the oldest civic association, was still focused on its modest aim of “preserving and improving the quality of life in the community.” Vyacheslav Glazychev lists its accomplishments for 1993 as “the establishment of neighborhood watches; providing a mechanism for residents to hire a security guard; surveying street lighting in the residential areas and campaigning for upgrading the system; mounting a campaign for residents to turn on their front lights; and mounting a successful protest that led to the revocation of a local club’s liquor license” (Glazychev 1994).

### **New Modes of Civic Engagement in the 1980s**

With the advent of Home Rule coupled a little later with the ascendancy of ‘Reaganomics’ as a dominant ideology in governance, a new orientation in civic association’s mission emerged. We begin to see an expanded space in governance, a renewed vigor in counter-balancing formal agencies, and increased empowerment. This opportunity triggered a process in which civic associations strive to penetrate the machinery of public policy management, deploying tools of the market in pursuing civic interests.

The most prominent organization emerging in the Home Rule period, is the Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC). Section 738 of the Home Rule charter allocated for Advisory Neighborhood Commissions, which are independent bodies created to advise the government on policy issues affecting the respective neighborhoods. In 1994, there were 37 such commissions composed of representatives from sub-areas of 2,000 residents each. Apart from getting grants from City-Hall, mostly for administrative expenses and to meet very small development project costs, the ANCs are statutorily entitled to be notified of any proposed government action (or private action which has public implication) involving the neighborhood. The statute also designates that commissions’ formal reaction to any proposal has to be seriously considered in the final decision.

From Vyacheslav Glazychev’s account (1994) of the participatory practices of different types of ANCs, one sees a great potential in this institution to provide some space for communities to be proactively involved in decision-making. However, the concentration on routine regulatory processes (mostly relating to planning and zoning) forestalls the possibility of these organizations to engage on systemic managerial issues.

Another organization that was reinvigorated during this period is the Community Development Corporation (CDC). This institution had evolved from the 1960s as part of the initiatives on the War on Poverty and acquired a renewed vigor in the 1980s when they assumed an entrepreneurial approach to community change (Keating et al. 1996; Gittel et al. 1997). A few of them deployed the rules of market practice by skillful venturing into the capital markets and investing in real estate; thus being able to transform the physical outlook of the neighborhoods, creating employment, retaining expenditure incomes, and gaining returns which were re-invested in social change.

The success of Marshall Heights CDC illustrates the new dynamism such organizations have acquired in the 1980s. It was founded in 1979 by a group of citizens who aspired to improve the quality of their community in an area that was considered to be a 'forgotten ward.' Initially the CDC focused on housing rehabilitation and the improvement of infrastructure. By the mid 1990s, it managed to expand its scope of activities to include housing, business and commercial development, human resource development, organizational development, and the development of institutions. Among its outstanding accomplishments has been its ability to attract new businesses into the community and manage a range of programs and services that are beneficial to community members. Essentially, the CDC concept harnesses the entrepreneurial spirit within communities and capitalizes on the macro-economic opportunities available (Marshall Heights 1997).

A similar organization exists in the city's most culturally diverse neighborhood, Columbia Heights. In 1997, the Columbia Heights Community Development Corporation was involved in housing and commercial development in eight housing projects. In its 1996 fiscal year business development portfolio, it offered loan-packaging services to 20 businesses, representing more than \$700,000. It also made four micro loans, two emergency cashflow loans, and assisted in preparing grant requests. Since 1993, the Corporation initiated the formation of a network of social service organizations, schools, churches, tenants associations, community residents and individuals to explore ways of improving community welfare. By 1997, the network had 57 organizations participating (Columbia Heights 1997). Despite the inward nature of these organizations, their capacity to create a base for self-governance and community development is an important component for the reinvigoration of urban civil society and for civic engagement in the broader structures of urban governance. The fact that the CEOs of Community Development Corporations, such as the one in Marshall Heights, are invited to participate in various formal policy forums is an indication of an indication of an expanded space for participation.

At this point, it is useful to mention the special place of faith based organizations, especially the Churches, in serving as a vehicle for community coalescence, mobilization and action, particularly in distressed communities. It has been observed that "religious institutions have a strong presence within inner-city neighborhoods; they operate within a coherent value system, providing the conceptual framework necessary to undertake social reform; and they offer ready-made leadership and possibilities for strategic cooperation (Thomas and Blake 1996). The faith-based organizations provide an established network and infrastructure of associations. In most neighborhoods, church buildings are essentially community centers.

The latest demonstration of the power of faith-based institutions was in 1995 when one of the most controversial religious leaders (Louis Farakhan) convened a meeting of 'one million' men in Washington, D.C. Apart from the significance of such a large number of people responding to call for 'atonement,' it is interesting to note that the Washington community possessed the impressive organizational machinery to summon, accommodate, and maintain peace for several hours with more than a million people from different parts of the country.

Indeed, the very history of evolution of churches among African-Americans is associated with seeking spiritual identity and self-determination. In the District of Columbia, alongside the mainstream Christian denominations, there are affiliate churches of the eight largest historically black denominations (African Methodist Episcopal; African Methodist Episcopal Zion; Christian Methodist Episcopal; Church of God in Christ; National Baptist

Convention of America, Inc.; National Baptist Convention, U.S.A., Inc.; National Missionary Baptist Convention of America; Progressive National Baptist Convention, Inc.). There are also affiliates of Muslim denominations such as the Nation of Islam and the American Muslim Mission. It is important also to mention a prominent presence of other faith groups such as Jews, Buddhists, Bahais, and many others in the region.

Throughout the historical development of D.C. church leaders have astutely employed the institution to mobilize their congregations on major social reform issues such as civil rights, poverty, and shelter. Church ministers have played a leading role in advocating for socially sensitive approaches to urban change, both through protests as well as operational initiatives.

D.C. also benefits from the presence of independent national think tanks that are based in town, and whose services are more conveniently accessed by local residents and associations. The Urban Institute, Community Information Exchange, Institute for Policy Research, Institute of Urban Development Research, Center for Voting and Democracy, and even the World Bank—which has recently developed a special initiative to improve the management of the city—generate and disseminate expertise and information to the D.C. community.

There are also several other think tanks that are specifically concerned with analyzing local trends and designing constructive inputs to the policy process. While the most influential think tank is the D.C. Agenda, others include: Campaign for New Community, which is co-sponsored by the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington and the Council of Churches of Greater Washington; the George Washington University's Center for Washington Area Studies; and the Metro Washington Community Indicators Project.

As stated earlier, there has been a proliferation of organizations engaged in service provision in the last decade. While most of these are mainly involved in delivering human services such as shelter assistance, education and training, health care, security, and food, they are now increasingly involving themselves in policy advocacy work. While most of this work is directed at increasing resources, there are indications of attention given to the other systemic aspect of policy management.

During the last decade this aspect has acquired a new impetus with the formation of organizations which are solely involved with advocacy work. These include: Washington Lawyers Committees for Civil Rights, D.C. Action for Children, and the D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence. One such body that has gained media prominence lately is the Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools—which promotes public school advocacy, parental involvement and school improvement.

The institutionalization of networking and coalition formation has also enhanced the influence of associations in the policy processes. For example, it is reported in the May/June 1997 issue of the Washington Council of Agencies' newsletter that 27 human service providers had formed a coalition called The Organization of Human Service Providers and Consumers (TOHSPAC) "to define common concerns involving the District of Columbia's human service and public health systems and to forge productive working relationships with government leaders, including the Mayor's office, the Council of the District of Columbia, the Control Board,

Federal legislators and the community as a whole” (Washington Council of Agencies 1997). Intermediary organizations such as the Washington Council of Agencies play an important role in building stronger partnership among associations, consolidating advocacy efforts, fostering good organizational management, and providing services to the network members.

Apart from creating business chambers, the private sector has also become involved at the city level. In 1996, the D.C. Council approved legislation authorizing the creation of Business Improvement Districts (BIDs). Commercial property owners and tenants within a given geographic area constitute themselves into an independent nonprofit corporation and through a self-imposed tax provide services that local governments are not delivering. The first of such districts was launched in November 1997 and covers the area bounded by Massachusetts Avenue, Interstate 395, Constitution Avenue, and 16th Street NW; it includes the neighborhoods of Penn Quarter, Gallery Place, Chinatown, McPherson Square, and Franklin Square.

With an annual budget of \$7.7 million, the move is aimed at providing security, maintenance, cleaning and marketing so as to make the area safe and clean to attract customers. Such initiatives have worked successfully in other major cities, including Philadelphia and Baltimore. A smaller version of this, which is also less capital intensive, is illustrated by the *Dupont Circle Merchant and Professional Association* (D.C. MAP). In this case, the business community around the Dupont Circle area have constituted themselves into a nonprofit organization to design ways of improving services, reducing crime, increasing parking, and improving the beauty of their neighborhood .

The formation of clubs for social improvement is also proving to be another mode of association. For example, in 1986 a Mutual Homebuyers Club was created with the objective of assisting families become homeowners. The club, which by 1996 had 114 participants organized into eight small chapters, meets every month and participants go through joint counseling to develop the following qualities: (1) self-esteem, self-worth, and self-reliance; (2) power to control personal destiny; (3) understanding the home buying process; (4) team work skills; and (5) decision-making techniques. The final objective of this particular club is for its members to develop the skills of financial planning, home purchasing, and basic home maintenance. Similar groups exist in the areas of investment, educational development, culture, recreation and art.

## **Extended Space?**

The above sketch portrays a high level of activity in the civic sphere of the District of Columbia. The number and type of associations has increased substantially and the range of their activities has widened. Instead of interacting with government organs solely through organized protests and submission of testimonies at local hearings, civic associations are now more operationally involved and they are increasingly engaged in proactive initiatives. There are more organized lines of communication between civic institutions with the formation of a coherent block of networks and coalitions. Is this evidence of a reconfiguration of the governance space in the District? Are we seeing the beginnings of the inclusion of communities, associations, and neighborhoods in the aspired partnership between the public, private, and civic sectors in managing urban development? At one level, there are a number of indications to affirm these propositions.

First, the creation of ANCs was an important step in the devolution of decision-making powers to the neighborhood level. The commissions provide a formalized linkage between communities and the municipal council. The statutory privileges accorded to the ANCs boost the capacity of residents to participate in decision making. Survey accounts of the functioning of ANCs reveal how some neighborhoods have used this power to influence the types of development which are desirable in their neighborhoods, to ensure accountability of public officials, to promote a sense of ownership and neighborhood identity. Of course, even prior to the establishment of ANCs, residents did have an ability to regulate investments at the neighborhood level—through the system of public hearings for zoning applications, or by seeking court injunction in the execution of public decisions. However, the system of Neighborhood Commissions establishes a less confrontational and more interactive relationship between the civic and government levels.

The effectiveness of ANC operations depends on the social profile of neighborhoods. In those community with a high number of professional residents, ANCs have been quite effective in advocating the many interests of the residents. The high levels of technicality and legality in which city affairs are conducted demand an availability of expertise (lawyers, architects, financial experts, and engineers) to make intervention in decision-making effective. This creates a serious impediment for ANCs in poor neighborhoods. The fact that these agencies have not been assisted with capacity building, either from the government or civic sector, weakens their cumulative effectiveness.

Secondly, there is an apparent favorable disposition towards community based management style, at least on the part of the city's political and managerial functionaries. Mayor Barry's prematurely preempted "Transformation Initiative" underlined an attempt to create a service delivery system built upon a community foundation (Washington, D.C. Government 1996). Similarly, a strategic agenda proposed by the highly influential think tank, D.C. Agenda, also designates priority areas that strongly emphasis community participation (DC Agenda 1997). And at a more operational level, civic leaders have been increasingly invited to participate in advisory boards, commissions and councils.

Of course, within the prevailing situation of a cash strapped municipal regime, it is tactically prudent (and also politically correct!) to involve the civic sector as an inexpensive way of delivering services. In fact, community self-reliance is also a means of compensating for managerial inefficiencies on the part of municipal agencies responsible for providing the given service. Nonetheless, even if the expressed intention of promoting 'community development' is taken positively, much of it is on paper and will remain so for the next four years when the Control Board completes its management reforms - whose orientation is far from being community driven. At the same time, the involvement of civic leaders and representatives in government organs has been highly idiosyncratic.

A third indication of a closer partnership between the civic and public sectors in D.C. is in the area of service delivery. The success of non-profit organizations to harness resources from government and other sponsors in order to cater to the needs of sectors and social groups has opened a new avenue in the relationship between the two levels. By negotiating for services to be provided to hitherto neglected sectors of the urban system,

community agencies are making inputs toward defining policy priorities and also influencing the process of budgetary allocation. The fact that representative of service providers are sometimes invited to participate in the actual defining of sector policies is further evidence that they are not merely performing a technical sub-contractual chore.

Apart from the electoral mechanism and the system of public hearings, there are also several legislative and juridical tools that enable the civic sector to exercise leverage in the management of neighborhood and city affairs. The most widely deployed is the seeking of judicial recourse when there is evidence of a violation of codes, regulations, laws, or even proof of gross inefficiency in exercising managerial operations. The suit filed by Parents United over the violation of fire codes in public schools in 1996 is one recent illustration of this power. In fact, by 1997 four major agencies were under court receivership for failing to perform according to designated standards.

## **Constraints to Civic Engagement**

The above empowerment facets that seem to have emerged in the last twenty years are hampered by a number of systemic constraints. The most complicated is the legislative clause 501(c) 3 that provides for the status of a 'charitable organization,' particularly in acquiring tax exemption. This legislation prohibits civic associations from engaging in 'political advocacy,' which generally covers all interventions in the realm of principles, general policy, and systems management. Civic associations in the District are thus condemned to restrict their activities and concerns only to the narrow operational tasks of their programs. In this respect, the civil society is disabled from questioning the status quo.

Another structural limitation relates to the financial dependency of most non-profit organizations on the federal and district government. Except for the few Community Development Corporations that have succeeded in building an asset base, and contributions from philanthropic organizations, most of the funding for activities undertaken by local associations comes from the government. Apart from fostering a dependence relationship, this situation weakens civic institutional capacity to break from the development agenda defined by the government. Activities that are undertaken by local organizations have to subscribe to the funding priorities of the state and city government.

The structure of governance of this capital city has also acted as a serious impediment to local dynamism. Even after Home Rule, the District community has not been a serious political actor in the macro politics of this nation. While the elected city government was compelled to conduct populist politics to ensure re-election, its managerial orientation was directed at satisfying the federal government and Congress. The extraordinary control the higher levels of government have in the management of the city compelled an upward orientation of the city government. At the same time, a lack of effective representation of the district population in the national structure has denied its citizens clout in the political system. Local dynamism was politically orphaned and reduced to survivalism.



The general mode of associations in the District is also self impeding. There is a distinct element of clientilism in the operational behavior of civil organizations. An association in the district is more or less the members who constitute it. Its activities are directed at providing services to ‘others’ that remain ‘clients’, outside the association. The apparent exclusivity of associations in the district contributes to the failure to create a ‘civil society’ that can act as a galvanizing force for change. The larger society is always left out of the rich array of associations. Similarly, the quest to de-personalize the organizations (probably to conform to 501-c-3) also creates a situation in which the assets of association members, as well as the targeted population (the so called beneficiaries or clients), are separated from the association process.

Finally, the societal fractures within the District create a severe barrier for enhanced dynamism. The deep racial divisions, disjunctures between city and capital, socio-political fragmentation along the four quadrants, and the substantial income differences deprive the city of the necessary synergy arising from the fusion of local responses and local action. Indeed, there may be thousands of associations, but structurally they do not forge a common front. At the same time, much as in the two decades after Home Rule there has been a remarkable revitalization in civil engagement, the new governance dispensation, particularly suspension of the democratic framework for urban governance, may destroy all the achievements gained.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>This is a fiscal nomenclature used to identify civic associations that are exempted from paying taxes on their activities.

## References:

- Ali, Mir. M. and Jerome Paige. 1988. “Revitalizing District of Columbia Neighborhoods.” *Studies in D.C. History and Public Policy*, No. 11. Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research and Urban Policy, University of the District of Columbia.
- Cary, Francine. 1996. *Urban Odyssey: A Multicultural History of Washington, D.C.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press Inc.
- Castell, Manuel. 1996. *The Rise of the Network Society*. Cambridge, England: Blackwell Publishers.
- Columbia Heights, Community Development Corporation. 1997a. “DCCH Current Project Report” (Winter). Washington, D.C.: Columbia Heights Development Corporation.
- Columbia Heights, Community Development Corporation. 1997b. “Human Services Directory” (May). Washington, D.C.: Columbia Heights Development Corporation.

D.C. Agenda. 1997a. "Task Force on District of Columbia Governance: Final Report and Recommendations" (April). Washington, D.C.: DC Agenda.

D.C. Agenda. 1997b. "Update" (Fall 1996; Winter 1997). Washington, D.C.: DC Agenda.

Gillete, Howard. 1995. *Between Justice and Beauty: Race, Planning and Failure of Urban Policy in Washington, D.C.* Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Gittel, Marilyn, Kathe Newman, and Isolda Ortega. 1997. *Building Civic Capacity: Best CDC Practices.* New York: Howard Samuels State Management and Policy Center. The Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York.

Glazychev, Vyacheslav. 1994. Notes on Neighborhood Activity in Washington D.C. Unpublished paper. Washington, D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center.

Harris, Charles Wesley. 1995. *Congress and the Governance of the Nation's Capital: The Conflict of Federal and Local Interests.* Washington D.C.: The George Washington University Press.

Henig, Jeffrey R. 1982. "Gentrification in Adams Morgan: Political and Commercial Consequences of Neighborhood Change" (June). Occasional Paper, No. 9. Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, Center for Washington Area Studies.

Jaffe, Harry S. and Tom Sherwood. 1994. *Dream City: Race, Power, and the Decline of Washington D.C.* New York: Simon and Schuster.

Keating, W. Dennis, Norman Krumhoz, and Philip Star. 1996. *Revitalizing Urban Neighborhoods.* Kansas: University Press of Kansas.

King, Anthony. ed. 1996. *Re-Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the 21st Century Metropolis.* New York: New York University Press.

Marshall Heights, Community Development Organization. 1997. "Marshall Heights CDC Goes Shopping: Capitalizing on Opportunities in Keeping Up With Best Practices" (March 14, pp. 1-6). Washington D.C.: Office of Community Planning and Development, US Dept of Housing and Urban Development.

Martz, Wendelyn A. 1995. "Neighborhood-Based Planning: 5 Case Studies" (March, Planning Advisory Service Report, No. 455). Washington, D.C.: American Planning Association.

*The New York Times*, 25 July 1996.

- Putnam, Robert D. 1995. "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" in *Journal of Democracy* 6 (January) 1: 65-79
- . 1996. "Democracy, Development, and the Civic Community: Evidence from an Italian Experience" in *Culture and Development*, eds. Ismail Serageldin and June Taboroff. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- . 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Rodgers, Augustus and Leonard J. Tartaglia. 1990. "Constricting Resources: A Black Self-Help Initiative" *Administration in Social Work* 14, 2:125-137
- Sassen, Saskia. 1996. "Cities and Communities in the Global Economy". *American Behavioral Scientist* 39 (March/April) 5: 629-639.
- . 1996. "Whose City is it? Globalization and the Formation of New Claims" *Public Culture* 8: 205-223.
- Speicher, Anna. 1992. "Community Involvement in Public Education: Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools." Occasional Paper, No. 11, August. Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, Center for Washington Area Studies.
- Thomas, June and Reynard Blake Jr. 1996. "Faith-Based Community Development and African-American Neighborhoods," in *Revitalizing Urban Neighborhoods*, eds. Dennis Keating, Norman Krumholz, and Phillip Star. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas.
- Washington Council of Agencies. 1997. "The Nonprofit Agenda" (May/June). Washington, D.C.: Washington Council of Agencies.
- . 1997. "The Nonprofit Agenda" (July/ August). Washington, D.C.: Washington Council of Agencies.
- . 1997. "Catalog of Services 1996/97." Washington, D.C.: Washington Council of Agencies.
- Washington, D.C. Government. 1996. "Strategic Plan" (December 12). Washington, D.C.: District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority.
- Washington, D.C. Government. 1997. "District of Columbia FY 1998 Budget and Financial Plan. Executive Summary" (June). Washington, D.C.: Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority.

Washington, D.C. Government. 1997. "Toward a More Equitable Relationship: Structuring the District of Columbia's State Functions." Washington, D.C.: District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Assistance Authority.

Washington D.C., Government. 1996. "A Vision for America's First City: A Transformed Government For the People of Washington, D.C." Washington, D.C.: Office of the Mayor.

*The Washington Post*, 21 July 1997.