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The Relevance of Regionalism in Washington, DC

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The Washington, DC Metropolitan region is representative of a larger trend in regions across the country: an increase in economic segregation and inequality that negatively affects both the rich and poor. Regionalist scholars propose that taking a region-wide policy approach in areas such as taxation, transportation, and housing can buttress place-based initiatives to create a more sustainable solution. This paper describes current inequality dynamics in the DC Metropolitan region, discusses current approaches to poverty reduction, and then recommends Regionalist policies as viable alternatives. Regionalist policies and successes provide relevant lessons for the DC Metropolitan region in particular as ways to alleviate the problems of inequality.

Introduction

The Washington, DC Metropolitan region presents a microcosm of what is occurring in cities and suburbs across the United States: an increase in economic segregation and inequality affecting both rich and poor residents. Economic segregation is the spatial representation of wealth across cities and regions and results in the separation between the rich and poor. It determines job opportunities, housing options, physical health outcomes, and educational achievement (Dreier et al. 2001). US Department of Housing and Urban Development Secretary Shaun Donovan explains the significance: "Children's futures are determined not by their talent or their actions but by the zip code in which they are raised" (2010). Across the DC Metropolitan region, the experiences of children and parents differ vastly between zip codes. Some benefit from continued growth while others, particularly racial minorities, live in poverty[1].

The DC Metropolitan region also illustrates another trend: the increasing interconnectedness of people, jobs, and economies across cities and suburbs. When suburbanization began in the 1950s and 1960s, the prevalent viewpoint of many scholars and policymakers was that central cities were decrepit while suburbs were wealthy and bustling. Suburban residents viewed concentrated poverty and high unemployment rates as city residents' problems that were disconnected from their lives, thus the two groups of individuals were viewed by planners as seldom crossing paths. However, this view is no longer applicable. The region, rather than the discrete city, is now the dominant demographic unit for both economic and social reasons (Blackwell 2009). Every day there is fluid movement of residents and dollars between government borders, creating strong ties between city dwellers and suburbanites (Post 2004). The problems of poverty are also no longer restricted to the traditional urban core of cities. Metropolitan regions are beginning to experience increased poverty in inner-ring suburbs[2] as central-city poverty spills over into these areas (Dreier et al. 2001).

Income inequality has also increased in the DC Metropolitan region in the last thirty years. Within DC city limits, a favored quarter of residents concentrated in specific areas of the city continues to gain a larger share of wealth from the economic gains over the last thirty years. According to a Center on Budget and Policy Priorities study of income inequality throughout the United States, DC's inequality rose dramatically from the late 1980s to the mid-2000s. By the mid-2000s, rich families (top 20 percent) were making 13.5 times more than the poorest families (lowest 20 percent) in DC, and the very rich families (top 5 percent) were making 26.2 times more than the poorest families. During this time period, only the rich saw their incomes grow significantly; the richest fifth experienced a 58.6 percent earnings increase from the late 1980s, while the poorest fifth experienced virtually no change, with only a 2.5 percent earnings increase. Poor families in DC are now making the same amount that they were in the late 1980s, just under $13,000, while the richest families are making an average of $188,541 (CBPP 2008).

Economic inequality is also illustrated on a larger scale when comparing the wealth of DC to its surrounding counties. The median incomes of the surrounding counties of Maryland and Virginia are substantially higher than those of DC, and they remained high in 2009 despite the recession. As noted in Table 1, the median household incomes of Montgomery County, MD, Arlington County, VA, and Fairfax County, VA far outpaced those of both Prince George's County, MD and DC. Comparing median household incomes does not tell the entire story. Although median household incomes in Prince George's County and DC are higher than the US average, the poverty rates compared to their neighbors and the rest of the nation are relatively high (US Census Bureau 2011f). In DC in particular, the percentage of residents living in poverty is more than double the percentage of their metropolitan neighbors in Maryland and Virginia.

Given the continued inequality and economic segregation in the DC Metropolitan region, it is clear that current interventions may be falling short. This paper first considers the negative ways in which inequality affects DC residents, highlighting crime in particular in two DC Districts. It then presents a broad overview of past and current strategies that the public sector has used to mitigate these negative effects, which lays the groundwork for proposing a new solution. This paper suggests Regionalism is an alternative tool to augment these current strategies because it focuses on increased regional governance and policy action at a regional scale in the areas of transportation, housing and taxes to lessen the effects of inequality. Regionalist policy options and their successes are then analyzed to determine their relevance to solving the DC Metropolitan region's problems.

The Effects of Inequality

The most tangible effects of inequality and economic segregation are ex-

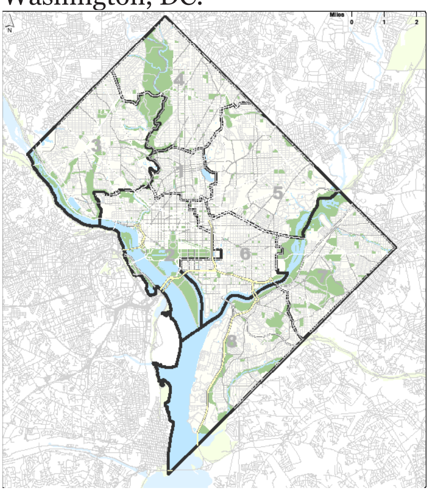
Table 1: DC Metropolitan Region Income and Poverty Demographics, 2009.

Geographic Unit	Median Household Income	Percentage of Residents Below Poverty Level
United States	$51,914	13.6%
District of Columbia	$58,906	17.6%
Prince George's Co., MD	$69,545	7.8%
Montgomery Co., MD	$93,774	6.7%
Arlington Co., VA	$92,703	6.6%
Fairfax Co., VA	$102,325	5.6%

Source: US Census Bureau 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2011d, 2011e, 2011f.

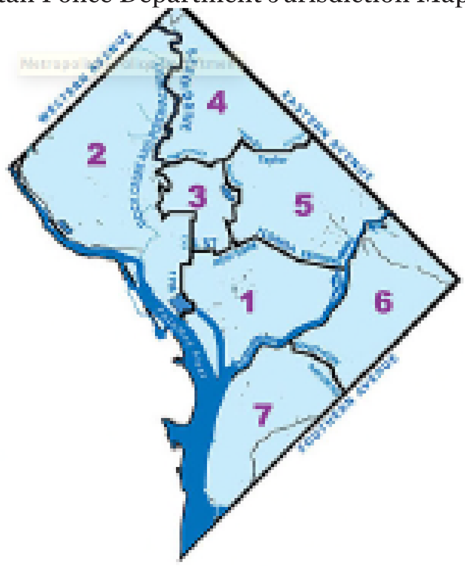
perienced by those living in concentrated poverty[3], a concentration that scholars have found to be the result of decades of federal policies that have suppressed wages, limit educational opportunity, and limit wealth accumulation, particularly among racial minorities (Massey 2007; Massey and Denton 1993; Oliver and Shapiro 1995). Individuals who are black or Hispanic and poor are five times more likely to live in an area of concentrated poverty than their white counterparts, and continue to live in mostly-black or mostly-Hispanic neighborhoods in central cities or inner-ring suburbs (Dreier et al. 2001). Although there are many more whites in this country that are poor (consistent with their larger percentage of the population), the majority of them do not live in areas of concentrated poverty and are thus not as isolated from mainstream society in such a distinct way (Rusk 1999).

Figure 1: Ward Boundaries Map of Washington, DC.



Source: District of Columbia Office of Planning, 2012.

Figure 2: Washington, DC's Metropolitan Police Department Jurisdiction Map.



Source: District of Columbia Metropolitan Police Department Jurisdiction Map, 2011.

As poverty concentrates, so too do problems correlated with poverty—violence, single-parent families, joblessness, and addiction—that affect entire neighborhoods rather than just an individual or family (Massey 2007). A comparison of the number of aggravated assaults and homicides in two Districts in DC from 2001–2009 illustrates the effects of concentrated poverty compared to a wealthy neighborhood. District 2 is in the white affluent Northwest quadrant, most closely analogous to Ward 3, and District 7 is in the black and poor Southeast quadrant, most closely analogous to Ward 8 in terms of geographic area covered. Since the two populations are similar for each Ward, a comparison of total aggravated assaults and homicides is sufficient to show a large disparity in crime incidents. The stronger comparison, however, is in the rate per 1,000 residents for both crimes. The assault rate in District 7 (Southeast) was six times more than in District 2 (Northwest), and the homicide

Table 2: Crime Statistics Totals in Two Washington, DC Districts, 2001–2009.

Metropolitan Police Department District	Total Population by District/ Ward	Total Homicides	Total Aggravated Assaults	Aggravated Assaults per 1,000 Residents	Homicides per 1,000 Residents
District 2 (NW)	73,718	17	1,280	17.4	0.23
District 7 (SE)	70,914	496	7,666	108.1	64.7

Source: DC Metropolitan Police Department 2011.

rate was 281 times more in Southeast than in Northwest. For a black family living in Southeast, crime is a pervasive, neighborhood-wide problem that is a common part of everyday life, whereas in the Northwest, incidents are sporadic and isolated.

Apart from individual effects, the problem of concentrated crime in specific areas of regions is corrosive to public resources. Nearly one in 31 individuals are under correctional control[4] of some kind in the United States (Pew Center 2009a). In Maryland, it costs $86 per day to keep an inmate in prison, roughly $36,000 per year; the state spends a total of $1.19 billion every year on corrections (Pew Center 2009b). For cities and localities with higher poverty rates, growing portions from state and local budgets are allocated to poverty-related services rather than to public education programs, infrastructure projects, or public sector development projects that individuals of all income levels consume (Pew Center 2009a). Choosing poverty mitigation programs over sustainable economic ones can be costly. For every one-point increase in the poverty rate, cities spend $27.75 per capita more on non-poverty-related services like police, fire, courts, and administration—part of the $1.9 billion spent by Maryland (Dreier et al. 2001). If the poverty rates of DC and Prince George's County continue to rise, so too will the percentage of their budgets allocated to poverty-related programs and corrections rather than economic investments.

The Importance of Cities and Current Approaches

One could argue that because public expenditures are dispersed throughout a region or county, the problems of a declining central city with areas of concentrated poverty bear little weight in the daily lives of those who live and work in outer-ring suburbs. However, despite the expansive economic and social effects of suburbanization, the central city is a vital component of urban life and still serves as a business center and economic focal point. This is especially true in the DC Metropolitan region, which has a very strong economic engine in the city of DC. The economic health of the central area of a city or metropolis is connected to the economic health of both inner-ring and outer-ring suburbs, with a direct correlation between central-city per capita income and suburban income (Dreier et al. 2001; Rusk 1999; Squires and Kubrin 2005). Therefore, revitalizing a city through continued investment by local, national, and international private firms is key to improving the health of an entire metropolitan region (powell 1998). As long as cities can continue to attract high-end investors, they will be able to thrive. Consequently, so will their suburban neighbors. Unfortunately, this market-based development strategy has left some cities and specific areas of DC with many resources from the private sector in good fiscal health while others flounder.

The federal government has responded in various ways throughout the last fifty years to this pattern of uneven development in metropolitan regions and central cities. It first began investing in city-specific initiatives to spur local economies and fund neighborhood-wide organizations and programs on a large scale during the President Lyndon B. Johnson administration's War on Poverty (Judd and Swanstrom 1998). The War on Poverty was fought on many fronts, notably in the government construction of affordable housing for low-income individuals and families and direct federal investment in central city programs. By the 1980s, however, most federal funding for large-scale city renewal projects were replaced with a more decentralized approach, with control of expenditures for programs targeted towards moderate- and low-income residents shifted to state or city administrators (Dreier et al. 2001; Erickson 2009).

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program is a cornerstone of this decentralized approach. Created in 1974 by the President Richard Nixon's administration, this program gives communities block grant funding determined by formula to use for a variety of community development initiatives. In major cities, the Office of the Mayor is responsible for subgranting federal CDBG funds to community development organizations. This flexible funding source makes it possible for cities and local leaders to determine the type of activities to undertake for their specific communities, with a stipulation that 70 percent of all CDBG funding must assist moderate- to low-income residents (HUD 2011). CDBG allocations comprise 38 percent of all federal funding for community development initiatives across the nation. Together with the Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program (47 percent), these two programs comprise 85 percent of all federal investments in community development (Urban Institute 2010).

This decentralized approach continues to be a primary way for many areas to fund social service organizations or anti-poverty measures in cities. This approach was characterized by the proliferation of Community Development Corporations (CDCs), which are organizations focused on small business matters, affordable housing, and community services for a specific area or neighborhood in a city or region. Proponents laud this approach because they claim CDCs are able to effectively tailor programs to the neighborhood or community in need rather than having a one-size-fits-all federal government intervention. CDCs continue to receive bipartisan support, as they limit the role of the federal government while empowering local organizations to work directly in their constituent communities in need (Erickson 2009).

Critics of CDCs note that while this approach may be more politically palatable, the problem of scale continues to erode the true effectiveness of these organizations because the majority of CDC budgets average less than $1 million (Dreier et al. 2001). The structure of subgranting from the CDBG program may also create a barrier to effectiveness for CDCs. At the height of CDCs in the 1980s and 1990s, only a select few in a city were chosen for subgrant funding from the CDBG program. This competitive environment, opponents contend, removes the impetus for collaboration between city neighborhoods and city-suburb organizations to tackle larger problems that plague higher-poverty neighborhoods, such as a lack of affordable housing and educational opportunities (Rusk 1999).

Finally, critics of CDCs also note that the siloed nature of these organizations limits their ability to transform larger neighborhood areas. These organizations and the cities or neighborhoods that rely on these types of in-place solutions may often fail to consider how their central-city neighborhoods are structurally connected with the rest of the region. Experts argue that the structural systems that have the greatest effect on region-wide problems are what need to change, not just the pockets of poverty, because these pockets are connected to the entire metropolitan region (Orfield 1997, 2002). Until the problems of cities like DC are placed in their proper geographical context that includes housing market, labor market, and educational system affects, ad hoc initiatives at decreasing poverty and social equity "will remain palliatives—a series of small, broken arrows in an increasingly empty quiver" (Orfield 2002, 72).

An Alternative Solution: Regionalism

Regionalism may be a way to improve social equity in cities that pleases both proponents and opponents of decentralized strategies. Regionalism is a set of ideas to inform local development patterns and regional governance in order to meet region-wide needs (Briggs 2005). Regionalists investigate the ways in which inter-local competition between cities and suburbs leads to the types of economic segregation and inequality experienced in metropolitan regions like DC and propose solutions from a regional point of view (Orfield and Luce 2010). They advocate for region-wide measures in certain policy areas to improve fiscal efficiency, economic competitiveness, environmental sustainability, and social equity (Orfield and Luce 2010). Regionalists contend that there are problems that extend beyond city limits, and there are structural systems that cut across jurisdictional boundaries. Therefore, policy solutions should also be at this scale.

The goal of Regionalists is to determine the appropriate, most effective size of government services that can solve large social and environmental problems of metropolitan regions. They do not advocate for a wholesale dismantlement and consolidation of local and township governments for all public service delivery. Local governments can often be the most effective government actors to deliver a service, but those not attuned to the structural dynamics of the entire region can perpetuate, or even create, disparities among neighborhoods and state residents. For example, local governments can enact exclusionary zoning policies or fail to provide affordable housing for low- to moderate-income residents.

Regionalists believe that policy areas that function on a regional scale include the housing market, the labor market, the environment, and the education system, and that broader thinking and greater coordination between city or township leaders can be more effective in mitigating or preventing social problems. Regionalism focuses on altering the structural systems that function either directly or indirectly to provide housing, jobs, and education to an entire metropolitan region instead of working piecemeal through jurisdictional governments, some of which do not have the tax capacity[5] to compete with their wealthier neighbors. This can be done through cooperation and policymaking between both the central city, which may be resource rich or poor, and the outer metropolitan areas. Regionalists look to the ways that state and local governments can work together to capture resources of rapidly growing outer metropolitan areas, close the inequality gap, and collaborate with local organizations to improve residents' quality of life.

There is no clear or exhaustive list of Regionalist policies. The most implemented policies include regional transportation and other infrastructure systems, land-use planning centered around inclusionary zoning, growth management programs enacting urban growth boundaries, annexation of surrounding land to create larger tax-bases for a city, and tax-base revenue sharing (Orfield and Luce 2010; Rusk 1999). Some of these policies are specifically designed to connect the resources of city and inner-ring suburbs to outer-ring suburbs that have higher levels of school achievement, employment, and tax capacity. By capturing resources and revenues, regional policies make it possible for low-income families to access affordable housing in communities of their choice and for struggling areas to fund services for revitalization. Other policies are designed to protect environmental degradation due to unfettered development in outer-ring suburbs. This paper focuses on the regionalist policies that are more relevant to the DC Metropolitan region.

Regional Governance Potential: Rusk's Little Boxes and Big Boxes

Regional policymaking successfully occurs when cooperation between local and municipal governments aligns around a common delivery of services, a development agenda, or a taxing structure. Regional governance, therefore, explicitly excludes decisions of a single unit of government such as a city or county acting on its own (Wolman and Levy 2011). In many cases, governance is implemented through a series of voluntary agreements about common goals. These are agreed upon by a decision making body of local leaders on a Metropolitan Regional Council or a similar planning body. The DC Metropolitan region's body is the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. All metropolitan areas have some type of regional planning body with differing levels of power, much of which is predicated on the political relationship between elected leaders from each jurisdiction (Wolman and Levy 2011).

As noted by many scholars, one of the greatest challenges in creating these coalitions is the vast difference in the number of governmental structures within each region (Orfield 2002; Orfield and Luce 2010; Rusk 1999; Weir et al. 2005; Wolman and Levy 2011). David Rusk, in his study of metropolitan regions across the country, describes them in terms of little boxes and big boxes (1999). Little-box regions and states are those that have a high number of governments and elected leaders per 100,000 residents, and big box regions are those with relatively few governing bodies making land-use and taxing decisions for the majority of metropolitan residents. Fragmentation of governmental units in metropolitan regions varies greatly; in the Philadelphia Metropolitan region (Southeastern PA) there are 238 units of government (Rusk 2011b), whereas the San Diego Metropolitan region only has 19 units of government (Orfield 2002).

Rusk notes that little box regions are far less effective at implementing progressive zoning and tax policies that increase equity because turf wars between political leaders and municipalities hinder cooperation (1999). These wars are primarily due to the revenue sources of local governments. Local governments' primary source of revenue is property tax resources, and intra-regional competition for these resources is a significant roadblock for collaboration in a fragmented region. Many local governments, working within the previously described market-based framework, would rather develop commercial or industrial buildings instead of moderately-priced housing county-wide because the property value and thus the tax capacity are higher on commercial properties (Orfield and Luce 2010). This revenue structure does not provide many incentives for local governments to collaborate on county-wide or region-wide initiatives to promote equity, especially ones that alter taxing or housing systems. The fragmentation of metropolitan regions into many local governments is a formidable barrier to effective growth management and strategic planning, and it creates distinct areas of affluence and poverty (Orfield and Luce 2010).

The type of government is a critical factor to consider when determining whether regional policy and its implementation are feasible for a metropolitan region. For political leaders in a big box government, working towards regional policies can lead to more effective zoning decisions and service delivery choices because they have less competition and can make more substantial policy changes. Even for community members, these actions can be more effective: "When you're a regional activist in a big box, if you move a government structure, you can affect a far greater slice of land and population than you could with a little box government," notes Rusk (2011a). Among the country's past regionalist policy success stories, nearly all of them are examples of either big box government action or regional governance structures that make little boxes act like big boxes (Rusk 1999).

Relevant Regional Policy Successes

One of the most cited examples of regional policy success is the tax-base revenue sharing agreement, or the Fiscal Disparities Program, of the Twin Cities Metropolitan area. The Fiscal Disparities Program began in the early 1971 and is administered by a regional governing body, the Metropolitan Council. The goal of the program is to reduce the tax capacity disparities between affluent and poor areas of the region in order to avoid problems that come with inequality. In the agreement, 148 taxing jurisdictions in the seven counties must give 40 percent of the increase in the commercial-industrial tax base since 1971 into a common regional pool (Orfield 2010). This collected surplus revenue is then distributed by the Metropolitan Council to municipalities based on the ratio of total market value of property per capita (the tax capacity) of each municipality. Currently, 32 percent of the region's commercial-industrial tax base contributes their surplus assessed value to the pool (Orfield 2010). With the Metropolitan Council leadership and state government approval on the planning, collection and dispersal of this fund, the region has been able to act like a big box in this tax program despite there being over 200 districts and municipalities in the Twin Cities area (Orfield 2010).

The program works to distribute this surplus revenue to jurisdictions that are valuable to a region but do not have a high tax capacity to serve its citizens. Saint Paul, Minnesota, is an example of a jurisdiction that would receive a relatively larger share of the pool because it has below-average tax capacity due to high poverty rates and many untaxed government buildings. Saint Paul's high-tax capacity suburbs would receive relatively less from this pool because they have both wealthier residents who can contribute to the tax base and more commercial-industrial properties that pay property taxes (Orfield 2002; Rusk 1999). Most municipalities, containing 64 percent of the region's population, receive money from the pool with an understanding that declining areas receive more in order to limit tax base disparities (Orfield 2010). If a local government receives more money from the pool, it may have a greater incentive to develop affordable housing or contribute to local organizations providing services in poorer neighborhoods with higher costs to the public sector.

Myron Orfield, noted scholar and former Minnesota State legislator, has spent his career advocating for this policy and studying its effects in the Twin Cities. With data from 1993 to 2001, he reported a reduction of tax-base inequality of roughly 20 percent overall (2010) as measured by the Gini coefficient, a commonly used measure of fiscal inequality on a scale from zero, which reflects complete equality to one, which reflects complete inequality. The largest effect was between the areas with the most tax capacity and the least tax capacity, with a large Gini coefficient (.45) when compared. The program reduced the ratio of highest to lowest tax base per household from 28 to eight. Given the current Gini coefficient of the DC Metropolitan region hovering near .40, the highest and most unequal of any metropolitan region (Orfield 2010), this approach is one worth investigating.

In addition to tax-base revenue sharing, housing policy is another tool that regionalists have used to decrease inequality because it can function on a scale beyond local government. Housing and zoning policy that works in a larger box can steer development towards inclusive and affordable opportunities in higher-income neighborhoods. These opportunities can reverse some of the neighborhood effects that constrain economic mobility of those in poor areas (Rusk 1999). Montgomery Country, Maryland, is an example of a resource-rich suburb that has used regionalist housing policy successfully since the late 1970s through the Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit (MPDU) program. This program effectively created the nation's first inclusionary zoning law, shifted the demographics of the county to accommodate racially diverse groups, and allowed low-income families to increase their quality of life and their educational and employment outcomes (Rusk 1999; Schwartz 2010).

The MPDU program enacted in 1976 has made it possible for low-income black and Hispanic residents both inside and outside of Montgomery County to take advantage of the opportunities available during a 40-year period of rapid and continued growth. The MPDU ordinance mandated that: 1.) 12 to 15 percent of new housing developments of over 50 units be moderately priced, 2.) a third of those moderately priced units be acquired by the Housing Opportunities Commission (Montgomery County's housing authority) to operate under public housing regulations for further subsidized households, 3.) the maximum income limit for living in an MPDU be 65 percent of the county's median household income, 4.) rents be controlled for 20 years, and 5.) sale and resale prices be controlled for 10 years (Rusk 1999; Schwartz 2010). The program's rent control terms were particularly significant because they enabled families to enter Montgomery County and stay there in the long term. This gave children a footing in the low-poverty school system and adults opportunities to find longer-term employment prospects in the area.

Since the beginning of the program, there have been a total of roughly 13,000 units of affordable housing developed in the MPDU program (Rosenthal 2005). What is most relevant for policymakers focused on social equity, though, is the number of units further subsidized by the Housing Opportunity Commission for families who would not be able to afford housing even at the affordable rate in Montgomery County. Following the same regulations as HUD's Housing Choice Voucher program, rent is subsidized so that low-income families pay one-third of their monthly adjusted gross income towards the cost of the unit based on fair market rent values for the area (HUD 2011). Under this program, a family with an adjusted gross income of $1200 a month would pay no more than $400 per month towards rent, for example. The Housing Opportunities Commission has provided further rent subsidies aligned with other public housing programs to 992 families. This has provided safe and stable housing to families who would most likely otherwise be in lower-quality public housing developments in higher-poverty areas (Schwartz 2010).

The MPDU program has enabled longitudinal data gathering about the children who were able to live in MPDU apartments and attend Montgomery County Public Schools. A study by Heather Schwartz for the Century Foundation investigated the ways in which economic integration of high-poverty students in low-poverty schools (schools with less than 20 percent of students in poverty) can close the seemingly intractable educational achievement disparities between poor black and Hispanic students and middle- to high-income white students. Among the families and children studied in 2001–2007, the average family income for those in MPDU housing was $21,047, compared to the average family income of $90,000 in the rest of the county (Schwartz 2010). Not only did MPDU's economic integration approach improve the living environment of children, but the study found that children's interaction in low-poverty settings can have a more dramatic effect on long-term educational outcomes than increasing the amount of educational resources in high-poverty schools (Schwartz 2010).

Due to a child's ability to stay in a MPDU unit in the long term, students who were living in this type of housing and attending a low-poverty school were able to catch up academically to their non-poor district-mates by the end of elementary school. Overall, the initial differences in academic performance between these two groups were cut in half for math and by one-third for reading, resulting in substantial progress within six years (Schwartz 2010). For children living in a MPDU that was further subsidized and attending a low-poverty school, the ability of their families to live affordably in an affluent area in the long term allowed them to overcome educational setbacks and set them on a path to escape poverty in their future.

An important feature of the Fiscal Disparities Program in Minnesota, the MPDU program in Maryland, and other regionalist policy successes is that their leadership is at the state or county level, not at the federal level and rarely within individual municipalities. States and counties are the most powerful vehicles for these policies because they have the power to set zoning guidelines and tax rates, key factors in both economic growth and distribution of public services for low-income residents. It is also important to note that regional policies like this can be enacted by coalitions of government leaders without the need for a new regional government structure.

DC Metropolitan Region Characteristics and Potential for Regional Policies

The DC Metropolitan region's characteristics may not seem inviting for a regional approach, and the challenges are quite daunting. Southeast DC and inner-ring suburbs of Prince George's County continue to grow poorer while the affluent in Northwest DC, Maryland, and Northern Virginia experience growing wealth and have bustling economies. The region is also unique in that it is made up of more than one state government, which may pose a further challenge for region-wide policy implementation. In order to pass any sort of region-wide policy or zoning ordinance, leaders at the state level may need to act more collaboratively than other metropolitan regions in the nation. This may be done through stronger actions by the Council of Government leadership or another regional coalition, which may have to include federal government participation because of the funding structure of DC's government.

Perhaps most vexing to the creation and action of a regional coalition in the DC Metropolitan region may be the political polarization of urban and suburban residents towards inclusionary and region-wide policies. Competing urban and suburban interests have been challenging for government leaders in other parts of the country who try to implement regional reforms and who come up against opponents who believe strongly that home rule is the most effective way to govern. In their analysis of state legislatures, Weir and colleagues found that suburban and urban mistrust in the Chicago area was linked with both racial animosity and fear of the "urban power," especially between a strong Democratic city and its conservative neighbors (2005). Political polarization, seen in parts of DC and the greater region as a whole, may further hinder cooperation as each area creates its own niche of services and priorities. The challenge for leaders interested in regional policy implementation in an environment like DC's is finding the common interests between urban and suburban government leaders.

There are characteristics of this region, however, that do not stand in the way of regional policy implementation. Despite its multi-state makeup and the current state of inequality, DC is still a big box area of governance, compared to some of its metropolitan counterparts. The state of Maryland administers its zoning and taxing entirely at the county level (there are 23 counties in the entire state), and Virginia has governments at the county level with dependent towns (which levy both county and town taxes) and independent cities. Including DC, then, there are roughly 25 governments in the DC Metropolitan region, of which only six or eight exercise the most decision making power (Rusk 2011a; Vicino 2008). It seems much more feasible to gather the county councils, executives, and planners of those eight governments around a table to make decisions about regional governance than leaders from a more fragmented region. Regional leaders have also collaborated before in other region-wide projects, such as the Washington Area Metropolitan Transit Authority and the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. If leaders in other policy areas such as housing or taxing heed the lessons learned from collaboration in these ventures, programs and policy functioning on a regional scale might be more feasible to implement.

The DC Metropolitan region also has the advantage of being a metropolitan area with a thriving central city. With the addition of 29,000 new residents to DC, it is a far cry from other cities still reeling from the recession (US Census Bureau 2011b). The DC Metropolitan region is one of the wealthiest in the nation, with all median incomes above the national average (some by nearly double) and suburban education systems that continue to outperform other parts of the country. DC's unique makeup with the presence of the federal government as a permanent economic engine at its center also has the potential to offset some of the aspects of sprawl that tend to tear other metropolitan regions apart. The economic engine is not the problem in this case; the resources to solve the problems of inequality are available. As David Rusk notes, "There's nothing special that couldn't make it work" (2011a).

Looking Forward

The policies of Regionalism are promising and relevant for the DC Metropolitan region. Although tax-base revenue sharing helps solve the problem of tax-base inequality, it seems unreasonable to implement a new taxing structure given the multi-state makeup of the region. It is not unreasonable, however, to use housing policy as a starting point for regional action and cooperation. Housing is the lynchpin for an individual's quality of life (Blackwell 2005). When children are housed in a low-poverty neighborhood, their educational outcomes improve in the long term, and they create a more robustly skilled labor market (Schwartz 2010). Adults also have greater access to jobs, services, and recreation that can improve families' overall well-being (Rusk 1999). Economic integration spurred by inclusionary zoning policies such as those administered in Montgomery County may work to decrease inequality for the DC Metropolitan region as a whole, particularly if inclusionary policies were implemented on a larger, more cooperative scale.

DC established an inclusionary zoning law in 2006, following the lead of Montgomery County (DHCD 2010). If other housing authorities of the region established these ordinances in higher-income, scattered-site developments, more affordable housing units could be available across the region in the long term. This would both stabilize more low-income families who would be able to access subsidized units in wealthier neighborhoods and help reduce the poverty level of declining neighborhoods through introduction of mixed-use development. For a family living in crime-ridden Southeast DC, an opportunity to live in a neighborhood with greater resources can change the trajectory of their lives.

However, dismantling the decentralized social service networks of regions across the country is not recommended. Community groups serve vital functions in low-income communities. Policymakers and local leaders must buttress these smaller-scale initiatives with more permanent policy solutions and regional interventions on a larger scale that can repair the tattered safety net. The shared fate of

DC and Prince George's County can be a starting point for dialogue and coalition building. The demographic and neighborhood changes of both areas within the past decade demonstrate the prevalence of poverty and violence and create common ground on which different policymakers and leaders can converge.

This investigation skims the surface of the problems of inequality and its effects on those living in poverty and on the public sector, but the need for different solutions is evident. If a region continues to rely only on small-scale, decentralized solutions, it may become more unequal and its local budgets more constrained. Taking a broader view with Regionalist policies has shown how, if scaled up even further and across state borders, the DC Metropolitan region can become more desegregated and gain more social equity. Policymakers and leaders in DC and in other regions in similar situations should consider Regionalist policies of collaboration to improve the lives of all residents, regardless of what zip code they live in.

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Notes:

1. The Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty annually. If an individual or family's money income is less than the threshold for their family type, they are considered "in poverty." In 2009, the date at which population data was pulled for Table 1, the poverty threshold for a single individual was $10,956. For a family of four (two adults and two children), which is the statistical unit most commonly used, the poverty threshold was

$21,756 (US Census Bureau 2009, 2012).
2. The term "first ring suburbs" is also at times referred to as "inner ring" suburbs in the urban development literature. These are the first official "suburbs" outside the urban core of a city that were established during the initial suburbanization in the mid-20th century. As the urban sprawl phenomenon has continued to push less dense development out of the city core, the United States has begun to see the deterioration of these communities with increased poverty and violence (Dreier et al. 2001).
3. Urban sociologists and scholars, led by the work of William Julius Wilson in The Truly Disadvantaged in 1987 and later Paul Jargowsky in Poverty and Place in 1997, consider "concentrated poverty" a neighborhood in which 40 percent or more of residents live below the poverty line (Dreier et al. 2001, 22, 47)
4. Correction control refers to individuals currently in state or federal prison, county jails, and those under community supervision such as probation or parole (Pew Center 2009a).
5. Tax capacity is "the revenue the property tax would generate if the locality taxed its capacity at 100 percent. Determining tax capacity per household is then the proper measure of local ability to raise revenue" (Orfield 2010).

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