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MODEL CITIES: LIBERAL MYTHS AND FEDERAL INTERVENTIONIST PROGRAMS

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All federal community development efforts undertaken in the past twenty years have been based on a related series of “liberal” myths about the nature of social change. In succession, each program—from slum clearance to community action—has purported to seek to reform the intergovernmental system by intervening at some crucial point without supplying the resources to change it fundamentally. Model Cities is the most recent in this series of programs, and its history illustrates the scope and limits of the liberal “interventionist” approach.

Federal interventionist programs have often been designed to achieve multiple aims by “leveraging” limited national resources to affect entire patterns of development in poverty neighborhoods. Model Cities attempted to perfect the interventionist approach by combining a number of strategies into one program designed to improve the quality of life in blighted neighborhoods. Each strategy was based on the broad assumption that neither massive institutional change nor a quantum leap in resources was needed to accomplish meaningful social change.

Although its original strategies have proven to be based on a set of untenable premises, Model Cities, in a small but significant number of cities, is providing a framework within which important strategies for

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achieving some urban change are being developed. Ironically, the success of Model Cities in these cities, as much as any other factor, points out the limitations of the program's original conceptions.

OVERVIEW OF THE PROGRAM

The introductory section in the 1966 Demonstration Cities Act declares that "cities of all sizes do not have adequate resources to deal effectively with critical problems . . ." ¹ Model Cities was designed to increase and improve the use of urban resources. ² First, cities participating would receive "supplemental grants" which could be used according to local needs and priorities, within broad federal guidelines. Second, existing intergovernmental resources would be better used through increased coordination of existing programs and agencies and through "innovative and imaginative planning and action." ³

When Model Cities' policies and regulations were written, the approaches embodied in legislation were translated into a series of explicit "leverage" strategies [indicated below in italics]. Each was based on a mixture of shibboleth and truth about the changes required to make unresponsive institutions meet urban needs.

Through requiring *systems planning*, Model Cities tried to make cities use resources more effectively through realistic identification of obstacles and opportunities. ⁴ Model Cities agencies, called City Demonstration Agencies (CDAs), were instructed to analyze "problems," identify "goals," develop "program approaches," set up "strategies," draft "one-year action programs," and develop individual "projects." Each of these steps had to be rationally interrelated and done in a sequential manner.

This rational approach to planning was envisioned as an apolitical means to compel a more efficient use of existing funds and staff and to

1. Demonstration Cities and Metropolitan Development Act, 42 U.S.C. § 3301 (1966).

2. For a history of the program's beginnings, see F. Jordan, *Model Cities in Perspective*, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL. 4-8 (special ed., June 1971) [hereinafter cited as Jordan] and J. James, *The Model Cities Program*, Spring 1971 (a paper prepared for the subcommittee on Housing, Committee on Banking and Currency, U.S. House of Representatives) [hereinafter cited as James].

3. James.

4. Letter #4 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to Community Development Agency, Comprehensive Program Submission Requirement, July 1968. This letter contains 39 pages of detailed procedural requirements for submitting a comprehensive program.

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require the inclusion of relevant, previously excluded factors, into the city's decision-making processes.

The second strategy, *coordinating intergovernmental resources*, was based on the premise that existing governmental programs were defective mainly in funding levels, rather than in content. Concentrated federal categorical program assistance would be made available to Model Cities to fund the major part of the programming. This concentration would allow existing categorical programs to be effective and enable sufficient provision of services to solve the fundamental problems of ghetto neighborhoods.⁵

Citizen participation, a third strategy, was envisioned as a means to force a coalition between residents in model neighborhoods and the elected city officials.⁶ This coalition would be able to pressure the paralyzed bureaucracies which characterize most city governments and make them more open and responsive to new ideas and to residents' articulated needs. However, participants at both federal and local levels held diverse views about the appropriate roles of citizens in such coalitions. Some saw Model Cities as a vehicle for advancing decentralization and citizen control of neighborhood services and community development efforts.⁷ Others viewed the citizen role more minimally and, stressing the role of the chief executive, argued for relegating citizens to an advisory role.⁸

Finally, flexible supplemental grants were to be provided to enable cities to fill the gaps in categorical programs with *innovative programs* to solve problems more effectively than conventional services. The major premise of this approach was that, free from federal and state guidelines in traditional categorical programs, local CDAs would be able to develop programs better suited to the needs of particular

5. Letter #3 from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to Community Development Agencies, Citizen Participation, Nov. 30, 1967. See HUD Technical Assistance Bulletin No. 3 (Dec. 1968); M. Mogulof, Citizen Participation: A Review and Commentary on Federal Policies and Practices, January, 1970 (a paper published by The Urban Institute, 2100 M Street N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037); and BOOZ-ALLEN AND HAMILTON, STUDY OF CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN THE MODEL CITIES PROGRAM (June 30, 1971).

6. *Improving Local Capacity*, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL. 34 (special ed., June 1971). See S. Arnstein, *A Ladder of Citizen Participation*, 35 J. AM. INST. PLANNERS 216-224 (1969).

7. Jordan at 6.

8. KAPLAN, GANS, AND KAHN AND THE RESEARCH GROUP, MODEL CITIES SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDS STUDY 1 (February 1971); Jordan at 4.

neighborhoods.⁹ Program architects saw Model Cities projects as the “cutting edge” of urban change.

An unexamined idea behind the deployment of these strategies was the premise that each would somehow multiply the effect of the others, a type of federal synergy. Moreover, while the program designers shared a commitment to these strategies, the degrees of allegiance to each varied. As a result, the contradictions between the strategies, inherent in the legislation, were not resolved in the regulations. Instead, they were crystallized, and the mixture of myth and truth in each strategy, as well as the contradictions, went unchallenged.

These inadequacies in the legislation would have been less important had the original goal of designating only a handful of Model Cities been followed. However, these flaws became glaring as political necessity forced the expansion of the program into first 63, and then 150 cities, without a commensurate rise in the resources devoted to the program.

On the positive side, Model Cities, as it was initially conceived, was more sophisticated and comprehensive than earlier federal interventionist programs. The program was designed to allow sufficient time for planning. It also included, as previous interventionist programs had not, the participation of citizens, autonomous local agencies, and relevant decision-makers from local general purpose governments. These features, however, were inadequate to outweigh the disadvantages of the program's basic approaches.

FAILURE OF THE ORIGINAL MODEL CITIES STRATEGIES

For a variety of reasons, the initial strategies of the Model Cities program proved unworkable. Not only did each prove to be untenable itself, but in combination each reduced the impact of the others.

The *systems planning* approach mandated by HUD proved overly complex and irrelevant. When urban problems are pervasive and beyond the reach of any available amount of resources, it satisfies only distant bureaucrats to manipulate ancient census data to develop “need” assessments. Yet HUD mandated a quantitative approach, even though called-for data was either unavailable or could only be improvised by ingenious program planners.

9. Jordan at 4.

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The difficulties of devising and manipulating numbers were exacerbated in most cities by lack of local government capacity. Even where local decision-makers were capable, they often lacked commitment to the program and viewed it as a buy-off for vocal minorities. Other cities spent so much time defining the roles of citizens versus city and CDA versus existing agencies that little energy was left for developing plans for spending even supplemental grants, much less categorical federal programs. The conflict between systems planning and citizen participation in this regard was serious.

As a result of all these factors, Model Cities' planning decisions were generally *ad hoc* and haphazard, although virtually every city met the "paper plan" requirements of HUD. The most effective CDA directors knew the plans were "phony," and produced whatever paper was necessary for HUD to award their cities supplemental grants. Unfortunately, the less effective directors were trapped in a paper web which diverted them from both the immediate operational problems and the development of effective strategies.¹⁰

Although many cities anticipated the promised *coordination and concentration* of federal resources in their Model Cities plan, those resources were seldom delivered. HEW did earmark one-third of its research and development funds for Model Cities use. However, even that commitment represented less than one-half of one per cent of HEW's total non-trust fund appropriation, most of which is allocated to states through formula grants and then distributed to local health, education, and welfare agencies, according to state plans over which the department has limited control.¹¹

The response from other federal agencies was even more disappointing. The Department of Labor's Concentrated Employment Program was linked to some Model Cities plans. However, DOL generally viewed the program as a competitor rather than a resource coordinator on the local level.

HUD often found that it could not coordinate a meaningful re-

10. KAPLAN, GANS, AND KAHN, *THE MODEL CITIES PROGRAM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PLANNING PROCESS IN ELEVEN CITIES* (1970) [Available from U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.]; KAPLAN, GANS, AND KAHN, *THE MODEL CITIES PROGRAM: A HISTORY AND ANALYSIS OF THE PLANNING PROCESS IN ATLANTA, DAYTON AND SEATTLE* (1969) [Available from U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.].

11. S. Gardner, *Impact on a Federal Agency—HEW, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL.* 14 (special ed., June 1971) [hereinafter cited as Gardner]. See note 8, *supra*.

sponse from other federal agencies in the absence of strong Presidential support, which was offered by neither Lyndon Johnson nor Richard Nixon.¹² In addition, the availability of supplemental funds led many cities to ignore other possible sources of federal funds, another example of Model Cities strategy conflict. As a consequence, categorical program funds usually amounted to less than the supplemental grant allocated to most Model Cities.

The ambiguous concept of *citizen participation* continued to pose difficult problems. Large-scale decentralization of services to citizen groups in model neighborhoods was planned in some cities, especially those in which the mayor abdicated from any role in program planning. In these cities, the program's systems planning and resource coordination objectives became especially irrelevant. In most cities, neither the city nor the citizens had a clear idea of how much control each should have, a situation which often resulted in strife. In addition, after a number of cities had their first action years funded, HUD's standards were revised by the Nixon administration, and roles had to be shifted, reducing the power of citizens in some cities.¹³

Innovation in programming was achieved only in a few Model Cities. Frequently cities became so caught up in cumbersome planning requirements, in confusion caused by non-delivery of federal programs, and in the dilemmas of citizen participation, that few innovative or "model" programs were developed. In 1970, after almost three years of Model Cities, HEW inventoried its Washington desk officers, asking for examples of new uses of health, education, and social services funds by CDAs. Almost none were produced.¹⁴ While this may reflect on HEW's information network, it does illustrate the image of the program in the federal government.

Generally, local government staffs and citizens seemed unable to escape conventional or fashionable solutions to problems. Thus most

12. See E. BANFIELD, *MODEL CITIES: A STEP TOWARDS THE NEW FEDERALISM; THE REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE ON MODEL CITIES* (1970) [Available from U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.].

13. Letter #10B from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to the Community Development Agency, Joint OEO-HUD Citizen Participation Agreement, March 1970; W. Bethea, *A Regional Citizen's Group Looks at Model Cities*, 2 *MODEL CITIES SERVICE BULL.* 10 (special ed., June 1971) [hereinafter cited as Bethea].

14. Internal Memoranda of the U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Center for Community Planning, Fall 1970.

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Model Cities programs were mixtures of conventional services and current fads, such as housing development corporations and multi-service centers.¹⁵

MODEL CITIES IN TRANSITION

Model Cities can only be understood in the context of its development. As the stereotyped strategies of the program failed, participants had to redefine their approaches to make their local programs viable.

As Model Cities undertook their first "action" years, few were able to leverage their resources; in fact, most were unable to spend their first year supplemental grants within twelve months.¹⁶ In terms of dollar amounts, the program's supplemental funds have had a multiplier effect of about 1 to 1, much less than the 1 to 4 envisioned by early program architects.¹⁷ During the first years of the program, no one had a clear vision of what it should realistically accomplish. As a result, many city halls ignored the program either because it seemed unworkable or because it was viewed as simply a successor to the poverty program. Citizens lost faith for similar reasons. In some cities, both citizens and city hall demurred, leaving Model Cities agencies in limbo. To make matters worse, some agencies were staffed with unqualified members of minority neighborhoods as part of an uneasy compromise over control of the program. Although politically acceptable, these staff members were seldom trained in the technical "niceties" of the federal programs and were often unable to represent their communities adequately. As a result, they were ill-equipped to transcend the difficulties of merely getting supplemental grants spent, to say nothing of solving problems of institutional change. Overall, much less was accomplished during the first years of Model Cities than had been anticipated. The program was not a success of social engineering.

Despite these difficulties, Model Cities laid the groundwork in a few cities for significant achievements. As many cities moved from plan-

15. See *Model Cities and The Program Areas*, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL. 42-76 (special ed., June 1971); S. HARRIS ASSOCIATES, LTD., *EARLY PHASE EXPERIENCE OF SELECTIVE MODEL CITIES PROGRAMS* (Aug. 1970) [Available from Sam Harris Associates, Ltd., Washington, D.C.].

16. Survey of 140 Model Cities by Model Cities Service Center, May 1971. For the overall spending rate in Model Cities, see the graph, *Outlay of Supplemental Funds*, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL. 8 (special ed., June 1971).

17. For a comparison of the supplemental to categorical funding ratio, see the graph, *Funding Generated by Model Cities Programs*, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL. 17 (special ed., June 1971).

ning into action, citizen interest was revived as projects appeared, channeling money, jobs, and services into neighborhoods. The appearance of promised supplemental funds also revived involvement of city agencies and finally gave CDAs legitimate status in the bureaucratic community. Simplification of HUD's planning requirements in late 1969 to make them more realistic also gave new life to hopelessly inert CDAs still tangled in paper programs.¹⁸ In a few cities these developments plus different methods of planning and resource manipulation spelled the true success of Model Cities as an effort to effectively assess and meet the problems of poor neighborhoods.

REDEFINITION OF MODEL CITIES STRATEGIES

The result of several years of action in Model Cities has been the development in some cities of second generation strategies to replace those originally part of the program.

In *systems planning*, the focus of the program has shifted from the initial mechanistic application of the systems approach to an incremental approach designed to meet the differing political and institutional needs of each city.¹⁹ Model Cities is now viewed, both locally and nationally, as a way to increase the capacity of the local chief executive.²⁰ This increased capacity involves greater chief executive responsibility for program implementation and provides a means to better evaluate operational performance of local agencies, in non-quantitative but politically meaningful ways.

In many effective CDAs, the director is a planning and coordinating arm of the chief executive, giving him knowledge of state and federal programs and a fresh point of view. The director can thus suggest innovative approaches which might otherwise be lost in the daily grind of maintaining the equilibrium of conventional agencies.²¹ In others, the CDA is providing the chief executive with additional staff to pressure traditional agencies to be more innovative and responsive to low-

18. HUD Circular MC 3140.3, Dec. 1, 1969.

19. G. Horton, *Strengthening Local Government*, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL. 19 (special ed., June 1971).

20. JOINT REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CITY MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION AND THE MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER OF THE NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES, U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS, CITY MANAGEMENT AND MODEL CITIES (June 1971).

21. *Means for Institutional Change*, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL. 38-40 (special ed., June 1971).

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income citizens' needs.²² In many cities, Model Cities increased the ability of local government to coordinate traditionally independent agency activities.

In the area of *resource coordination and concentration*, the disappointing amount of categorical funds made available for Model Cities forced most CDAs to shift their concern to redirecting existing federal project-grant and formula-grant funds into the Model Neighborhood. To obtain these funds, cities are trying to educate federal, state, and local administrators to be more responsive to inner-city priorities.²³

The most effective CDA directors have learned to manipulate the federal system, using its own rhetoric to make it deliver resources and technical assistance. One city invested two years in combining a number of federal and state-administered categorical programs with Model Cities supplemental money to fund a comprehensive health services system in the Model Neighborhood.²⁴

In a number of states, Model Cities is used to make state agencies more responsive to local needs. These efforts are becoming increasingly important, as Model Cities moves into second and third "action" years. There is a need to transfer projects to more traditional funding sources to free supplemental funds or to assure continuation of projects when Model Cities is over.²⁵

In *citizen participation*, the issue of neighborhood control is no longer as compelling as it was. A number of cities are slowly and painfully developing models of shared power which more adequately distinguish between the appropriate roles of city officials and citizens. Model Cities is an important transitional arena for emerging minority politics. In a few, CDAs are playing critical roles in helping "reform" mayors change local bureaucracies on behalf of black and brown constituents.²⁶

In the area of *innovation*, "model" programs are appearing in some cities; but more importantly, the Model Cities program is expanding

22. See note 6 *supra*.

23. Gardner at 17. For an excellent theoretical discussion of this and other important aspects of the program see J. SUNDQUIST with D. DAVIS, MAKING FEDERALISM WORK ch. 3 (1969).

24. HEALTH DIVISION, SEATTLE MODEL CITIES PROGRAM, WORK PROGRAM: PREPAID HEALTH COVERAGE PLAN (March 1970).

25. *Improving State-Local Relationships*, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL. 22 (special ed., June 1971).

26. Bethea at 10.

the use of these innovations which were tested on a smaller scale. The Office of Economic Opportunity's original fourteen Housing Development Corporations (HDCs) have been followed by over 90 HDCs in Model Cities.²⁷ The fourteen-city pilot Multi-Service Center program is being duplicated to some extent in almost every model city.²⁸ The need to provide technical assistance to expedite innovations has been recognized, and both the federal government and the cities have provided assistance to an unparalleled extent.

ENTREPRENEURIAL PLANNING

More important than the redefinition of Model Cities strategies has been the development of a new approach to urban problem solving. A few CDA directors have used the complex melange of the Model Cities experience to develop a resource utilization approach best called "entrepreneurial." Its developers have melded the strategies of system planning, resource concentration, citizen participation, and technical innovation into a combined approach to institutional change.²⁹ This utilizes elements of the original Model Cities strategies only as they are tactically useful for achieving change and does not view them as valid in themselves. The conversion of these strategies into tactical resources marks the beginning of a realistic approach to social planning in this country.

Social change can be achieved, as these Model Cities approaches have demonstrated, not through social panaceas, but through an entrepreneurial approach to power relationships, political patronage, and intergovernmental programs. The CDA directors who utilize this approach use part of the Model Cities' planning vocabulary to influence bureaucrats intimidated by jargon, supply information and specific demands to citizens groups for them to use against vulnerable local agency heads, use the rhetoric of federal program standards to require performance from state and local agencies, and use flexible supplemental money to "buy into" the planning and delivery of other municipal services. Strategies are chosen for either programmatic or

27. *Housing Development*, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL. 57-58 (special ed., June 1971).

28. *Social Service Delivery*, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL. 67-68 (special ed., June 1971).

29. For a related discussion, see J. King, *Strategic Planning Versus Service Delivery Planning*, and S. Gardner, *The CDA Director as a Political Manager*, 2 MODEL CITIES SERVICE CENTER BULL. (Fall 1971).

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political reasons when they can provide a rationale for institutional change.

While traditional distinctions between long and short range, comprehensive and functional planning continue to be relevant, this non-ideological and incremental approach to planning, concerned primarily with institutional change, represents an important new force in local government. Instead of trying to institutionalize liberal panaceas, cities using this approach are beginning to deal with actual problems.

However, the full nature of this new approach has not been perceived by most Model Cities participants, much less used. Many CDAs are still trying to implement distorted versions of original program objectives. Still others have retreated from those early aims and adopted narrow goals which have resulted in using supplemental grants as another form of categorical funds, rendering Model Cities an inadequate version of already existing urban renewal, employment, or welfare programs.

CONCLUSION

Model Cities has reached the limits of the federal interventionist approach. It has shown that planning technique is no substitute for building local government capacity; that coordination of federal and state resources requires delving into and changing the entire federal-state-local transfer system; that citizens—while, perhaps they cannot run programs—are invaluable allies for change; and that technically innovative programs can be instituted, if not originated, on the local level if sufficient resources and technical assistance are made available. Most important, Model Cities has shown the paramount importance of a change-oriented strategic approach to community development which must accompany the provision of resources to deal with urban problems.

Only through such a non-dogmatic approach can the complex reality of social institutions be apprehended and changed. Future federal community development efforts will have to be shaped to meet the fundamental needs and the institutional change approach which Model Cities has brought into focus.

STATUTORY COMMENTS

