



A *Virginia Main Street* discussion series for community & neighborhood revitalization teams

Dar Williams'
What I Found in a Thousand Towns
Basic Books (2017)

Think in bridges.

CHAPTER 5: The Power of Culture:

POSITIVE PROXIMITY *summary:* A community can use proximity to its advantage to integrate the talents and skills of residents. Successful revitalization programs use physical **spaces** to foster positive interaction. They take on **projects** that shape the community identity. Critically, they **engage** the spectrum of the community in making these a reality. (Williams calls this *translation*, the act of a town opening up to itself.)

“...There are PROJECTS that build a town’s **IDENTITY**—socially, culturally, and /or historically—helping them become...themselves. These projects bring out the advantages of proximity by attracting the passions and skill sets of people who are like-minded in some ways but very different in others, cross-pollinating abilities and personalities. Citizens tend to see past their partisanship and biases when they’re trying to accomplish something they can’t do alone...”

CULTURE: Questions for Discussion

1. Williams focuses primarily on the role of the ArtsCenter in Carrboro, NC. She says, “The cultural environment influences the way the people of Carrboro live their lives.” (p. 121).
 - a. How does that seem so for Carrboro?
 - b. How is it true of your community?
2. Williams’ writes “When there’s a show to be put on, there really isn’t an opportunity to dig into political differences or harbor strong resentments.” (p. 126)
 - c. Does this ring true for your community?
 - d. Does that spirit carry over into other aspects of civic life?
 - e. How might you grow that spirit of mission-comes-first collaboration?
 - f. What’s the next project that might have that capacity in your community?
3. How does the ArtsCenter emphasize an **inclusive and community-focused approach** to how it operates? What impressed you most?
4. Watch **Finding Main Street Video #5** featuring Berryville, Virginia.
 - a. What seems to be the key to the community’s approach?
 - b. How would you, from the outside, describe the identity of this community?
 - c. How are they “applying creativity to the town”?
5. Of Carrboro, Williams writes, “The townspeople believe they own the town.”
 - a. Who owns your town?
 - b. What’s one thing you can do to further improve community ownership?

