



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 7: Partnerships

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.)

“...**TRANSLATION** is all of the acts of communication that open up a town to itself and the world...the ability of a place to incorporate every willing citizen’s contributions, and in so doing, find ways to make life more interesting, welcome the outside world, and provide stability for those who need support.”

PARTNERSHIPS: Questions for Discussion

1. The campus of Wesleyan University in Middletown is described as a bubble. Governments and large corporations can sometimes have their own bubbles. What bubbles do you have in your community? (p. 185 - 189)
2. What are some strategies to help bridge between institutions and the community, either from the book, the video clip, or that you are undertaking in your community?
3. Watch **Finding Main Street Video #7** featuring Fredericksburg’s revitalization, entrepreneurship and business development strategies. What partners are organized toward a collective goal in your community?
4. On “the perpetual exodus...” Mark Massilli said he had to “make Middletown harder to leave.” Then he and Jen Alexander started organizing around their interests. What do you want to see in your community that you could put your energy behind?
5. Professor Rob Rosenthal “knew the importance of committing oneself to living in a community. (p. 192) Have you ever lived in a community in which you hadn’t fully committed yourself?
6. Governments are institutions. How does your government work as a partner to welcome creative ideas and collaborations from neighborhoods, individuals, organizations, and sectors?
7. Robert Putnam described **Bonding social capital** ties us to those like us, for instance, members helping other members of the same church. **Bridging social capital** helps groups work across differences, and connect to those not like them. (p. 211).
 - a. Which could you use more of in your community?
 - b. How might you go about building it?

