



## Every Town has Something to Offer

Becky McCray | 3/7/13

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Richard Florida is one of the most widely-read urban theorists, author of several books related to the Creative Class. He's long been an advocate for urban areas, urbanization, and urban life. His writings have popularized a move towards focusing on the amenities needed to attract the Creative Class and thereby assure the future of your city. It always sounds to me like the smaller your town, the bigger your disadvantage trying to attract those creatives.

It's all so urban-oriented that I've viewed it rather skeptically. Or at least, I've been skeptical about the applicability to rural areas and small towns. Every town can work to improve, focus on quality of life, and become a better place to live. However, that's only a surface application of Florida's thinking.

But I read a quote from Florida recently that caught my complete attention.

"I certainly don't think smaller cities should be decertified. I am not a big fan of what people call "the shrinking cities" movement. *Every city, every place, every neighborhood has something to offer.*"

—Richard Florida, writing in *Atlantic Cities*, emphasis added.

OK, I'll admit Florida probably wasn't thinking about small towns under 10,000 population when he said that. (Especially since he goes on to mention "smaller college towns like Austin" — the 13th most populous city in the US.)

But I'm willing to stretch Florida's point down to truly small towns. He drew a parallel between the loss of functioning neighborhoods in "urban renewal" and the loss we'd face in decertifying existing cities. The idea of functioning neighborhoods applies just as much to a town of 2,000 or 200 people.

Florida went on, "Every city, every neighborhood, every place has people and assets to build from."

I love that sentence so much I'm thinking of having T-shirts made. Small towns have assets, we have people, and we have plenty to build on. There is no reason to simply throw that away and declare defeat.

Now, it's all well and good to say every place has value, but how do we prove it? How do we start building on those people and assets? Florida said, " The key here is that each city and community in a region develop its niche."

If you hadn't thought about your town's niche, it's time to. It's a big question, especially if you feel like a "nothing special" community. But the answer is key to your town's future. The narrower the niche, the wider the opportunity.

"The key for cities and communities is to figure out what they do best as part of the bigger system of metros and mega-regions in their part of the world," he said.

So, what does your town do best, as part of the bigger system of the world? I'd love to hear about it.

