

From the Planners' Bookshelf...

What I Found in a Thousand Towns, A Traveling Musician's Guide to Rebuilding America's Communities – One Coffee Shop, Dog Run, and Open-Mike at a Time

Dar Williams, Basic Books, NY, 272 pages, 2017.

Summary.

The title tells the method, the book tells the whys and wherefores. "Positive proximity" is a big concept..."a state of being where living side by side with other people is experienced as beneficial." [p xi]. As a musician who hangs with a lot of people who understand cities and city planning, she has overcome the jargon and gone straight to the values that create strong communities. She discusses spaces, buildings and "translations".

Spaces and building are appreciated for their basic function and values. Specific examples in real towns punctuate the message.

"Translation" is a new twist, for me, on an important idea [p 177].

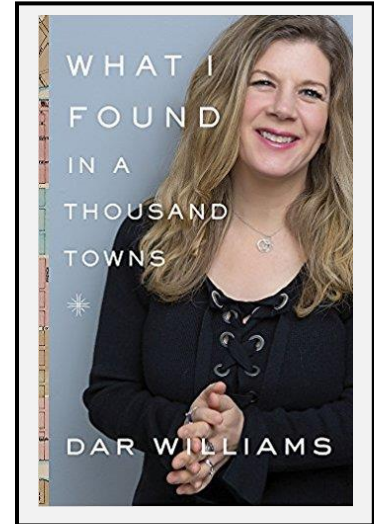
Ms. Williams identifies:

- Structural transitions - the way communities are assembled and wired.
- Mutual translation – partnerships of all types.
- Individual translation - people who are "conscious bridgers", people motivated by making connections that strengthen the community.

Her take on "Tourists and Towns" [p41] is particularly pointed for a central Florida audience. The V:R ratio and analysis makes a lot of sense with the basic idea that some parts of town are for both tourists and residents, but some areas are strictly for residents and some for tourists only.

The fascination with this story is getting a view of small cities and towns from the perspective of a person who visits many towns, a person smart enough to discern good attributes from bad and a person interested in the success of smaller communities. An insightful and interesting read with many real people and their programs that are working to rebuild America's communities.

Check out: <https://www.amazon.com/What-Found-Thousand-Towns-Communities/dp/0465098967>



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YouTube: In addition to the reviews cited below, check out:

Dar Williams, "What I Found In A Thousand Cities"

[Politics and Prose](#)

Published on Dec 16, 2017

“Williams has recorded nine albums, most recently *Emerald*, and her tours have taken her to small towns across the country. Deliberately avoiding stadiums, Williams plays in smaller venues and cultivates a direct, personal rapport with audiences. Williams’s deep affection for the communities she’s visited comes through in her book, which spotlights the decline of small-town America in the post-industrial, corporate age. Williams is as well known for her activism on environmental and social justice issues as she is for her music, and her book is a heartfelt and hopeful call to action on behalf of an imperiled way-of-life.”

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=dx1ntAjxmyg>

Published Reviews.

Goodreads

“A beloved folk singer presents an impassioned account of the fall and rise of the small American towns she cherishes

“Dubbed by the *New Yorker* as "one of America's very best singer-songwriters," Dar Williams has made her career not in stadiums, but touring America's small towns. She has played their venues, composed in their coffee shops, and drunk in their bars. She has seen these communities struggle, but also seen them thrive in the face of postindustrial identity crises.

“Here, Williams muses on why some towns flourish while others fail, examining elements from the significance of history and nature to the uniting power of public spaces and food. Drawing on her own travels and the work of urban theorists, Williams offers real solutions to rebuild declining communities.

“*What I Found in a Thousand Towns* is more than a love letter to America's small towns, it's a deeply personal and hopeful message about the potential of America's lively and resilient communities.”

Link: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/34221068-what-i-found-in-a-thousand-towns>

CNBC

"Some towns seem to be having more fun, seem to have their act together," singer-songwriter Dar Williams told CNBC's "On the Money" in an interview. "They have more dog walkers, more signs that say 'free coffee' instead of 'no bathroom'."

Link: <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/10/13/what-playing-music-in-small-towns-has-taught-dar-williams-about-america.html>