A New Narrative: Rural Renaissance

Erik Richardson—Richardson Ideaworks
The Crusades cracked the long-standing narrative written by the Catholic Church with its rigid hierarchy and its elaborate plan for every person and every role in a vast machinery of the Middle Ages.
Key Ingredients of the Renaissance

02

The Recovery of Aristotle and the Greeks

The recovery of classics and engagement with Islamic and Byzantine scholars who had translated and built on them provided the ideas and values of an alternative narrative—once which had shown great value in the past.
Key Ingredients of the Renaissance

03

The Black Death

With the widespread death that swept through the West from a series of plagues, the decline of aristocratic power and the increased leverage of a labor force now in short supply gave rise to new power balance and allowed for the rise of a middle class with more autonomy.
Key Ingredients of the Renaissance

04

Increased Cultural Interchange

With increased trade to far away countries and the influx of non-European scholars after the fall of Constantinople, there was a heightened exposure to new ideas, and art and literature from other cultures.
Key Ingredients of the Renaissance

05

New Art Being Created & New Stories Being Written

Writers, sculptors, painters, and inventors were all picking up on the Humanism of the recovered Greek tradition and helping to celebrate and magnify the new values and virtues of what it meant to be an “excellent” human being.
Key Ingredients of the Renaissance

06

The Printing Press

The other major ingredient that helped lay the groundwork for the emergence of an amazing new era and an epic new narrative, was the invention of the printing press, which allowed all the new stories and ideas to be accessible to a wider audience than ever before.
### The Emerging Trends

So, out of these 6 major ingredients, there emerged a blend of 8 trends.

| Set of new virtues / values for living the best life and being the bringing out the fullness of human ability | Decline in the sheer size and scope of church and aristocratic hierarchies |
| Increased engagement and interaction between artists, writers, scientists, etc. from other cultures | Sponsorship and celebration of artistic creativity, inventiveness, and public festivals to showcase them |
| Exposure through printing to new fiction & non-fiction that hastened the decline of old paradigm and built on new one | New model of the ideal city-state where individual freedom was celebrated and citizens could more easily participate in government |
| Because of increased value, workers used leverage to be treated less like cogs in a large machine | Rising levels of civic pride |
The Emerging Trends

There are three things in particular that bear highlighting:

01 Many of the writers and thinkers of the Renaissance integrated their new theological work and the Humanist ideals with their Christianity, which created an authentic narrative.

02 Both participating in government and the sponsoring of public art, parades, festivals, and so on were expressions of central virtues of the Classical Humanist tradition that had been recovered and was now unfolding.

03 The Renaissance emerged more slowly in some places than others—Florence, for example, gave more rights and opportunities to citizens than the Duchy of Milan (which was ruled by a series of Dukes) and it spread to northern Europe more slowly because the old aristocracy held on longer there.
Can This Narrative Account for the Success (so far) of Mexico, MO?

| Clear sense of shared ideals/attitudes/values of members of the community? | ideals |
| Easy to engage with ideas and people from different cultural backgrounds? | diversity |
| Easy access to information and resources through “printing press” | internet |
| Sponsor and celebrate festivals, arts, creativity, and inventiveness? | arts & festivals |
| Flatter government hierarchy? | government |
| Systems and roles see people as more than cogs in a machine? | humans vs cogs |
Can This Narrative Account for the Success (so far) of Mexico, MO?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ideals</td>
<td>Not particularly well articulated yet; still tends to be old, white, men rooted in old narratives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diversity</td>
<td>Some, with recent tenure of first black, woman mayor, and with a potential for growing voices among Latino community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>internet</td>
<td>Access to fiber-optic cable is almost 100% within the city limits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>arts &amp; festivals</td>
<td>A few festivals, but the largest are rooted in old narratives, like our Soybean Festival. Bonus points for renovated performing arts center.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government</td>
<td>Currently in transition – see point above about black woman as previous mayor.</td>
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<tr>
<td>humans vs cogs</td>
<td>Great initiative as first town in MO to launch workplace specialist to connect and collaborate to engage employees with community.</td>
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Does it set the stage for solving the larger questions?

Why revive any or all small towns?

What makes them more than a quaint memento we should let go of?
Hypothesis: They Provide Unique Value for Which Demand > Supply

Scale of Govt
Flatter by the very nature of small towns

They are Ready
Their old metanarrative has already fallen and opened the need/opportunity

Rationale 1
Because of their smaller size, rural communities are inherently more suited to unleashing human potential.

Interaction with Talent
Proximity and overlapping roles leads to greater cross-pollination of ideas

Aptitude for Authenticity
The model itself creates dynamic for each town’s individual story to emerge
Hypothesis: They Provide Unique Value for Which Demand > Supply

Rationale 2
Because every time I talk with someone about the paradigm, or try to capture it in a slide deck, new pieces unfold.

Simulation of Sponsorship
One of the things that was a catalyst for the explosion of art and ideas in Renaissance cities was that start up costs were lowered.

In their case because of support from patrons like the Medicis and others.

In our case (rural communities) because land, space, and cost of living are so much cheaper. It’s like having a significant sponsor from day one.
1. If our hypothesis is right, and small towns are the ideal setting for unleashing the best, most creative, and most civic-minded versions of ourselves, then we need all of them we can get.

So?
2. The example of Mexico, MO, along with others, shows that the Renaissance narrative also provides a framework for how we go about reviving and restoring those rural towns—for areas of next steps.
3. Hearkening back to the plenary session, it also provides a story we can tell the audience when we are on stage that has the power to draw them in—to give them a sense of purpose and meaning.

So?