

A woman in a blue top and red skirt stands in a field of tall grass, looking out over a vast mountain range at sunset. The sky is a mix of orange, yellow, and blue, with the sun low on the horizon. The mountains in the distance are hazy and layered, creating a sense of depth. The foreground is filled with tall, dark grasses and some green plants.

# How to Radically Revitalize America A Micropolitan Manifesto

...or, how to discover purpose and prosperity  
in unexpected geography



"A business that makes nothing  
but money is a poor business."

- Henry Ford

# This manifesto can literally reshape America—

by the people, for the people. Yes, **you**. Yes, **us**..... Residents—by birth or by choice—of America’s small cities, tiny towns, and pioneering rural outposts. Depending on whom you ask, we’re a whopping 41% of the U.S. population.<sup>1</sup>

## Who Should Read This Report

This is a manifesto about cities and business, but certainly not business-as-usual. It’s a belief in building community, resurrecting place, and making a difference in the world. Most of all, it’s about **ambition**, **creativity**, and **people**.

It’s about revitalizing who we think we are, and what we think we’re capable of achieving.

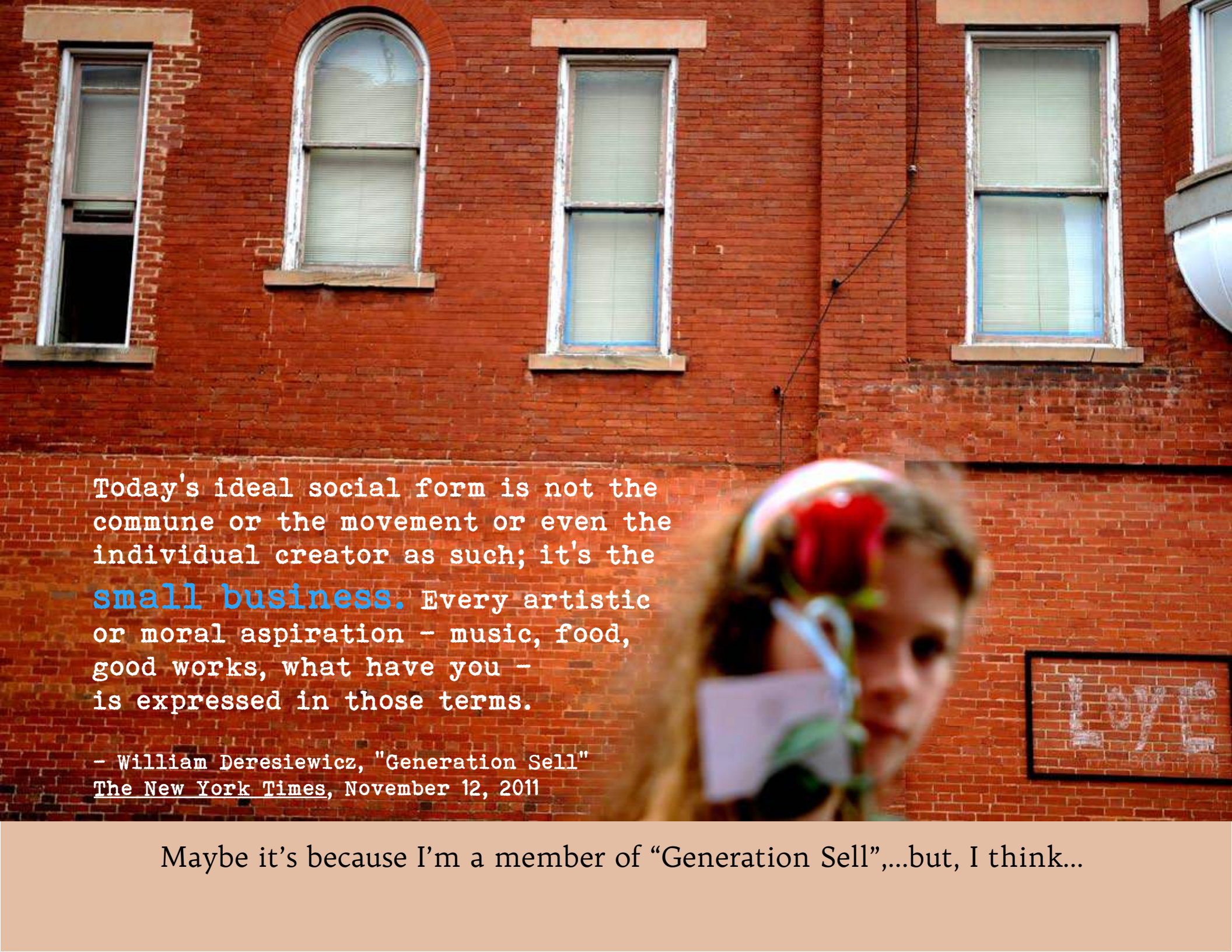
## Who am I?

I am one reflection of our country’s smallest places. In this context, my life, encapsulated in the next sentence, reflects our shared history and possible future:

I grew up in a small town, “escaped” to big cities for education and work, returned “home” when the market crashed...and started a business.

This journey has changed my perception about everything...





Today's ideal social form is not the commune or the movement or even the individual creator as such; it's the **small business**. Every artistic or moral aspiration - music, food, good works, what have you - is expressed in those terms.

- William Deresiewicz, "Generation Sell"  
The New York Times, November 12, 2011

Maybe it's because I'm a member of "Generation Sell",...but, I think...



It's time to free ourselves from ordinary expectations.

## It's time to start a business.

Not just any business. A business that reshapes what we value and how we'd like to live.

“Indie Capitalism”—or growth in independently-owned businesses— is a response to an entrenched economic system that puts **people** and **planet after profits**.

I believe the future of our economy is **homegrown, small scale, and independent.**<sup>2</sup>

Sound familiar? It should because “homegrown, small scale, and independent” are the embedded creative talents and values found in—



# America's micropolitans

At present the word "micropolitan" is a dry, statistical word for suburban and exurb populations. I reject this definition. Let's redefine "micropolitan" and use it to describe dense, city living on a small scale.

## Where Are Micropolitans?

"Rural" has multiple definitions depending on **who** is classifying us and **why**. The definition is so loose that it can include everyone who lives in small cities with populations of 100,000 or less.<sup>1</sup> That's a lot of place diversity. So, to simplify, let's define a "micropolitan" as a place anchored with a human-scaled, walkable downtown. In other words, micropolitans are the smallest cities possible—and each have the potential to be simultaneously "micro" and "cosmopolitan". Or, "Mountain meets Metropolitan" as urban Appalachia is described in the blog *The Hillville*.

>> Of Americans surveyed in 2009, 51% indicated that they would prefer to live in either a small town (30%) or rural area (21%).<sup>4</sup>

## Rural Urbanism?

Historically rural America enjoyed human-scale urbanism; it's time to reclaim and revitalize it. Invest in it. Why? Micropolitan renewal is our best chance for economic growth and environmental repair. Renewal of our smallest cities guards against suburban sprawl and the continued destruction of farmland, habitat, and open space.

>> "Rural has always been innovative. The pioneer settlers had to be innovative to survive." - Odessa Sherbaniuk (@sherbani), curator of #reasonsruralrocks


"Hillbilly urbanism  
is the expression  
of a paradox,  
the rural city."<sup>3</sup>

- Jim Russell,  
[SustainableCitiesCollective.com](http://SustainableCitiesCollective.com)

A person with curly hair, seen from the side, stands on a hillside looking out over a vast, hazy rural landscape at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, casting a warm glow over the rolling hills and valleys. The sky is filled with soft, wispy clouds. In the foreground, the back of another person's head and shoulder, wearing a green and yellow striped shirt, is visible on the right side of the frame.

"It's one of Rural America's great secrets and assets. The most interesting and pioneering people choose to live here."

- Diane Smith, [TheNewRural.com](http://TheNewRural.com)



Those of us who live in the smallest cities share two ambitions:

1. **Grow our local economies**, because that's how we survive and thrive;
2. **Protect our environment**, because we love it and understand the urgency

For too long we've viewed ourselves as residents of places that need to be fixed; yet, in reality we're living in very places that have tremendous advantage in the new economy.

"The most meaningful engine of change, powerful enough to confront corporate power, may be not so much environmental quality, as the economic development and growth associated with the effort to improve it."<sup>5</sup>

"Sustainability advocates could be missing the large, strategic, regional and economic advantages smaller cities can offer a national policy over the long term."<sup>6</sup>

- Barry Commoner,  
Biologist and  
Environmentalist

- Catherine Tumber, Small, Gritty, and Green: The Promise of America's Smaller Industrial Cities in a Low-Carbon World

# How?

By creating businesses in our immediate communities that serve our neighbors.

Revitalization is only possible with investment at the grassroots level. It needs to come directly from us—as neighbors, consumers, and friends. We need to start thinking strategically, creating partnerships between small cities in our regions. It's time for a renewed analysis of micropolitan opportunity.

"Today, we are buying local and eating local but we still aren't investing local. There just hasn't been an easy way for individuals to put money into worthy small businesses in need of capital."<sup>7</sup>

—Amy Cortese,  
Locavesting: The Revolution  
in Local Investing and  
How to Profit From It





## Why not?

We've got the infrastructure. We've got the capacity. We've got the need.

Moreover, the future requires the same strengths which residents of small cities, tiny towns, and rural outposts already proudly possess.

The questions become...

Are we leaders?

Are we ready to re-urbanize our smallest cities by building businesses in our dense, walkable downtowns?

Who will step up and do it?

"You are becoming the heart & soul of a new engine of economic growth. You are influencing giant corporations through your words & actions. You are forming microbusinesses and taking earning into your own hands. You are less dependent on "the system" and more dependent on your community."<sup>8</sup> - Tara Gentile, craftsperson & blogger

Let's restore our neglected downtowns and Main Streets everywhere. Let's do it by starting independent businesses. Let's do it by using our existing infrastructure.

Let's do it so we renew our local communities and grow our economies for a greener future.



"A necessity of the New Economy is not seeking that one business that will bring in fifty jobs, but instead working with fifty local businesses to grow one job each. Not only that a more sustainable and resilient approach, but one where **every community has the capacity to be successful.**"<sup>9</sup>

- StrongTownns.org

The strongest attributes of small places is our shared ability to "make do and make happen." What better way to reshape our economy and our futures than through community-supported entrepreneurship?

We are tired of being dominated by careless corporate interests! We are sick of jobs that don't matter. We are disgusted by profits made at the expense of people and planet. Let's start anew by renewing our small cities, stopping sprawl, and asserting our independence.

It starts in our micropolitans.

It starts with **your business.**

"All restoration is improvement, but not all improvement is restoration."<sup>10</sup>

- Storm Cunningham, [The Restoration Economy](#)





It's not about urban-planning. It's about **possibility-planning** and **future-creating**. It's about people in our smallest cities who choose to be **changemakers**.  
**These are the business builders and community leaders of the New Economy.**



A group of people are gathered in a dimly lit room, possibly a bar or a small venue, playing music. In the center, a man with a beard and a white t-shirt is playing an acoustic guitar. To his left, another man is playing a bass guitar. In the background, a man is playing a guitar. On the right, a man is playing a guitar. The atmosphere is warm and intimate. The text is overlaid on the image.

## What I Discovered

I started this journey as an “urban escapee” because I thought there was a better way to live. Turns out, there is... but it wasn’t “city life” I rejected. Actually, I was rejecting the long-held notion of working for someone else. Building my own business is satisfying because it makes a difference in one very important place: **my community.**

This made me realize cities—in fact, our smallest micropolitans—are the best format for building independent business, re-localizing our economy, and creating a more sustainable future. Better yet, most micropolitans offer a ready canvas for dedicated artists, changemakers, and entrepreneurs.

**Which makes me wonder...**

# What About You?

Filled with ambition, commitment, and drive? Why not start a business? Why not do it in the micropolitan of your choosing?

We can revitalize our human-scale, walkable communities back into vibrant and healthy places to live. We can strengthen our local economy. We can literally remake our country.

## Do you accept the challenge?



Join the **entrepreneur-lead,**  
micropolitan revolution.



# WHAT NEXT?

We're ready to reclaim, remake, and restore the economy of America's smallest cities.

Some of us will choose to become entrepreneurs; others will start out of necessity. Be advised, it can be a challenging path. (**I know.**) Our shared purpose: to rebuild our economies and communities into happier and healthier places for all.

Let's redefine ourselves. Let's revitalize our economy, environment, and our micropolitans.

Katie McCaskey  
George Bowers Grocery  
Staunton, Virginia  
January 2012



Thanks for reading. Please share this manifesto with anyone you think should read it.

Most importantly, I hope you build your own business in whatever form makes sense to you.

[Click here](#) to be notified of the release of

**Urban Escapee:**  
**How to Ditch the Commute,**  
**Build a Business, and**  
**Revitalize Main Street**



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1 Diane Smith, [TheNewRural.com](http://TheNewRural.com), 2011 - pg. 21 Smith's book is a concise summary of current trends remaking rural America.

2 4 Reasons Why The Future of Capitalism is Homegrown, Small Scale, and Independent, [Fast Company](http://FastCompany.com), Dec. 6, 2011, article here: <http://www.fastcodesign.com/1665567/4-reasons-why-the-future-of-capitalism-is-homegrown-small-scale-and-independent>

3 Rural urbanism discussed in this post: <http://sustainablecitiescollective.com/jim-russell/32692/hillbilly-urbanism>

Don't get me started on the "H" word. I'm not a fan. ;-)

4 Smith, [TheNewRural.com](http://TheNewRural.com), pg. 27

5 This quote is reprinted from an interview with Alan Hall of Scientific American, June 23, 1997, found here: <http://www.mindfully.org/Reform/Barry-Commoner23jun97.htm>

6 This quote is not from her excellent book but this article but from a preceding article in [Boston Review](http://BostonReview.com), May 2009, here: <http://bostonreview.net/BR34.2/tumber.php>

7 Amy Cortese, [Locavesting: The Revolution in Local Investing and How to Profit from It](http://Locavesting.com), pag. viii Cortese presents local investing alternatives, including investing in local businesses.

8 Tara Gentile writes about the role of handmade and artisanal in the New Economy. This quote is from this post: <http://www.taragentile.com/indie-economics/>

9 StrongTowns.org's "Curbside Chat" companion booklet is a must-read. <http://www.strongtowns.org/companion-booklet/>, pg. 36

10 Storm Cunningham identifies the scope and scale of the "Restoration Economy" in a series of books. This quote from the first book of the same name, pg. 49.