Rural Design & Rural Futures

Dewey Thorbeck, FAIA, FAAR
Director, Center for Rural Design
University of Minnesota

• Rural communities
• Rural design & design thinking
• What can design do?
• Rural and urban futures
Kentucky is bourbon and horse country

Minnesota is milk and corn country
• If I wasn’t an architect I would probably be a dairy farmer - I like cows

• Rural landscapes and buildings inspire me to visit and sketch

• I would love to tango

Cows in Minnesota

Montepulciana hill town in Italy

Tango dancers in Argentina
ONE HEALTHY PLANET

Designing for Human, Animal, and Environmental Wellness - Urban & Rural

Roman mosaic and basilica form

Liberii farm villa in Tunisia (2nd century)
Medieval monastic barn and basilica form

Coxwell barn in England (13th century)
Scale change in animal agriculture

Traditional dairy barn with 40 cows
Using the basilica form

Dairy barns today with 7,500 cows

Feeding aisle

Rotary milking parlor
Urban Design is the shaping of urban public space with buildings focusing on the pedestrian experience like this bank in Owatonna, MN designed by Louis Sullivan.

Rural Design is the shaping of the rural landscape with small towns and buildings in the open landscape like this grain elevator near Crookston, MN.
Rural communities worldwide

South Africa

Myanmar

Bardstown, Kentucky

Patagonia

China

Ada, Minnesota
Rural communities today are very diverse with multiple characteristics and integrated problems:

- Agriculture communities
- Political communities
- Economic communities
- Indigenous People communities
- Environmental communities
- Immigrant communities
- Social communities
What is Rural Design?

It is a methodology to bring design thinking and the problem-solving process of design to rural regions to nurture human ingenuity, entrepreneurship, creativity, and innovation.

It provides an opportunity to reflect upon and integrate human, animal, and environmental systems into a sustainable design process to improve quality of life – urban & rural.
• Evidence-based Rural Design – a two-way street

Bringing science to society through rural design
Rural design is a problem-solving process.
Rural design focuses on bringing design thinking and the design process to rural communities

- **Integrating change** at the urban/rural edge while preserving rural character and community values

- **Empowering rural citizens** to actively participate in the decision-making process affecting their land-use and community well-being

- **Making room** for new agricultural production systems and processing technologies helping to ensure the human, animal, environmental and economic health of a region

- **Filling an educational gap** by providing support and information on rural spatial issues using geospatial technology to define regional character based on ecosystems and relationships between larger and smaller communities
Rural design connects the dots

Using the assets of a region to cross borders and find innovative strategic partnerships
Why is Rural Design important?

- Public Land Survey System of 1785
- America’s rural landscape is an immigrant story
- Homesteading Acts of 1841 and 1862
- Rural landscapes changed slowly until the 1960s
- Over past 55 years there have been enormous changes in agricultural systems impacting rural quality of life, economy, and environment
- Climate change, food supply, renewable energy, water resources, and health – will further impact for years to come
- 2.5 billion more people on the planet by 2050 – 100 million more in the U.S. – 2 million in Minnesota
Rural design challenges & opportunities:

**Challenges over next 40 years**
- Population increases
- Demographic shifts
- Water & food security
- Climate changes
- Global cultural respect
- Global economic impacts
- Energy systems

**Opportunities for rural economic development**
- Cross borders to initiate regional economic opportunity
- Integrate human, animal, and environmental wellness
- Support diversity, creativity, and entrepreneurship
- Become a catalyst for high quality of rural life
- Clarify issues at the urban/rural edges
- Be bold in seeking, explaining, and shaping rural futures

Education is a key player
What can Rural Design do?

• Manage change by linking science and society
• Envision alternative scenarios for stakeholder selection of preferred option
• Systemic and holistic points of view to find connections between issues
• Use interactive media and 3D visualization to inform about possibilities
• Partner to create relationships and cooperation that cross jurisdictional boundaries
• Connect urban and rural issues through lens of spatial arrangement
• Encourage entrepreneurship and provide financial incentives
• Integrating human, animal, & environmental wellness

- Nomads in Mongolia
- Cows in Sweden
- Tilling in Thailand
- Girl with calf in Minnesota
- Glacier in Patagonia
• Design thinking and the problem solving process of design

*Today we have the opportunity….to unleash the power of design thinking as a means of exploring new possibilities, creating new choices, and bringing new solutions to the world. In the process we may find that we have made our societies healthier, our businesses more profitable, and our own lives richer, more impactful, and meaningful.*

Change by Design, Tim Brown, 2009

Architecture student’s drawing of SW MN

Detroit Lakes, MN and 7 small towns
• Public engagement – social awareness in design

City of Roseau, MN 2002 flood

Citizen involvement in creating vision plan was critical to successful rebuilding efforts

New Roseau Civic Center

Community design workshop
• Community Dialogue using Social Media
• Linking urban and rural futures
Rural Design & Rural Futures

- Find the assets that rural communities share for collaboration and economic development
- Define landscape character and determine values citizens place upon it to identify community priorities
- Connect social, artistic, cultural, technological, climate, and landscape character to enhance sense of place
- Link economic development, quality of life, and environmental issues together and nurture new technologies and foster entrepreneurship
- Integrate human, animal, and environmental wellness
- Manage change through design thinking and the rural design process
- Emphasize regional/cross-border collaboration to improve economic development and quality of life
• Embrace diversity – design to create excitement

*Places that succeed in attracting and retaining creative people are more likely to prosper.*

Richard Florida

Food as a catalyst for wellness and ethnic understanding - Saint Paul Farmers’ Market

Art as a community event and economic engine – ArtOrg steamroller printing event in a rural community
Partnering to bring economic development to rural communities – like bioenergy

Hometown Bioenergy Plant in Le Sueur, MN – Minnesota Municipal Power Association
A global and local perspective - simultaneously

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend’s or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

John Donne, 1624
Rural design provides rural communities:

- Information to rural policy makers
- A methodology to resolve critical issues
- A design process for community involvement
- Define opportunities for synergism, holistic thinking and entrepreneurship
- Create regional sense of place for economic competitiveness and improved quality of life
- Connect urban and rural futures

Thank you
thorb001@umn.edu
http://ruraldesign.cfans.umn.edu