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Reinvention and Revisioning in an Appalachian Industry Cluster

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ABSTRACT

The theme Evolution/Revolution invites us to consider how historiographical frames are imposed on human events, and to reflect on the capacity of ethnography to both subvert and ratify dominant interpretations. We draw on ethnographic research conducted at a former mill town in the Appalachian foothills which was widely credited with surviving because it 'reinvented itself' after the textile era. The result was a homegrown 'industry cluster' where a manufacturing system for a certain product category "is organized around the region and its professional and technical networks rather than around the individual firm" (Saxenian, 1994; Porter, 1998). We found 'innovation' itself has an ideology that biases potential recipients leading them to expect epochal breaks with the past to be the only successful strategy and suggest how departing from 'the tyranny of the epochal' (du Gay, 2003) with its demands for bold programs of 'Renewal' or 'Modernization' can lead to visions of more achievable innovation.

REVOLUTION/EVOLUTION AS DOMINANT FRAMING

The theme Evolution/Revolution invites us to consider the way historiographical frames are imposed on human events, and to reflect on the capacity of ethnography to both subvert and ratify dominant interpretations. This paper draws on ethnographic research conducted at a former mill town in the Appalachian foothills which was widely credited with surviving because it 'reinvented itself' after the textile era by identifying a novel application for a new technology. The new commercial marketspace this created allowed local manufacturing to expand and move higher up the value chain.

Our paper shows the result was the creation of a homegrown 'industry cluster'. This is where a manufacturing system for a certain product category "is organized around the region and its professional and technical networks rather than around the individual firm" (Saxenian, 1994; Porter, 1998). While this kind of industrial landscape has grown prominent in recent times through technology hubs like Silicon Valley, understanding its essentials stems from an older tradition of researching 'localization economies' exemplified by British Economist Alfred Marshall. He emphasized rather than large firms perennially leading, there were whole industries characterized by small and medium-sized companies that co-evolved to engage in decentralized production (Marshall, 1925). Two key traits for such growth, evidenced in our field site, are the generation of subsidiary firms that act as suppliers for

portions of the manufacturing process and a spirit of co-operation where (what we today call) 'emerging best practices' are widely shared among firms - allowing general acceleration in productivity.

In our ethnographic research, we interviewed several generations of entrepreneurs who had contributed to the formation of this Appalachian 'industry cluster'. Many of our informants were from the elite: owners and managers of industrial firms, the heads of supplier and utility companies, and the civic authorities who supported the boom. They spoke of their efforts as having 'saved' the town and of the unprecedented 'new industry' they had created. Yet they also acknowledged high levels of cooperation and gave us enough clues to believe that in such a place 'the mysteries of the trade become no mystery, but are, as it were, in the air' (Marshall, 1925), suggesting that industry intuition existed as generalized entrepreneurial competence.

However at the time of research, dramatic shifts in consumer taste (within the product categories that had made this cluster prosperous), were resulting in falling sales. Many of our elite informants believed the city and its industry needed to be 're-invented' again and that importing more 'Design' and 'Creatives' was the means of achieving this (Florida, 2003).

We describe how this reflex toward revolutionary solutions demonstrates the power of our current 'episteme' based on an expectation for epochal change (Foucault, 1972) and the normalization of avant-garde values which is especially strong in business contexts (Frank, 1998).

Since we were engaged in ethnographic research to facilitate the 'participatory design' of 'community visioning', as a first step we established a baseline of how different community actors felt about change or believed it could come. While we had implicit theoretical models that change must grow over time from circumstances 'on the ground', we were surprised how our sponsors (including the elite) expected we could simply apply ready-made creative solutions to transform their situation.

Finally, this paper explores how we found 'innovation' itself has an ideology that biases potential recipients and leads them to expect epochal breaks with the past to be the only successful strategy. Consequently, we will examine how one role for ethnography (as a descriptive discipline) within change projects can be to aid persons and communities to re-connect with their own continuity beneath the revolutionary language of 'change management'. Furthermore, we will demonstrate for the EPIC community how departing from 'the tyranny of the epochal' (du Gay, 2003) with its demands for bold programs of 'Renewal' or 'Modernization' can lead to visions of more achievable innovation, especially if, as in our Appalachian cluster, the existing norms already embrace entrepreneurial practice.

A MILL TOWN IN THE APPALACHIAN FOOTHILLS

Mountain View's emergence as a southern mill town has been documented by several labor and industrial historians. Considering its size this is somewhat surprising until consideration is given to

its position as a major industry hub and manufacturing center, and its consequent role in Southern labor history. From this perspective Mountain View is seen in a different light, for while many mill towns emerged throughout America's Southern states and into Appalachia Mountain View stands out from the others in that it was able to adapt to changing conditions by 'reinventing' itself through exploiting the unexpected potential of new technology.

Mountain View's story begins much like that of other towns in the region. One historian of southern industrial noted that, 'Before Mountain View ever graced the map, there was the land, and few elements would have a greater impact on the city than the countryside surrounding it.' In the 1830's a small group of white families formed a village in the Cherokee Nation. By 1839 the Cherokee people were driven from the area and the land was opened up to white settlement. Until 1845 the village continued as a very small community of about ten families. Most settlers were interested in homesteading tracts of land so they tended to live in small farming communities rather than in villages or towns. These largely self-sufficient individuals, known locally as the 'plain folk', would play an important role in the early industrialization of the region.

As unlikely as this setting might suggest, Mountain View and the area surrounding it were destined to become a central stage on which the industrial revolution would be staged in the South.

INNOVATION AND REINVENTION IN MOUNTAIN VIEW

Innovation is defined in many ways by various authors, depending largely on their disciplinary perspective and the context in question, typically the context in which research is being conducted. We assume that innovation is a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing social, cultural, technical, and economic dimensions and that innovation occurs in the realm of daily routines of practice (Giddens, 1984; Wenger, 1998) as well as on the level of large-scale societal change. In this sense innovation is removed from the pedestal on which it is typically place when it is discussed in a business context in which positivism prevails. Innovation in the business context tends to equate with progress and, at least rhetorically, is a good thing, *always*.

Innovation in the Regional Economy

A number of factors aligned to allow Mountain View to play an important role in Southern industrialization and labor history. Based on the outcome of previous ventures, local history played a strong part in setting an expectation of success in the realm of business, which in turn served to attract newcomers who sensed the opportunity to launch new enterprises. Our informants spoke of the town as a place where entrepreneurs were welcomed into social and business networks. This spirit of openness and opportunity are characteristic of 'local industrial systems' described by Saxenian as regional and network-based, dominated by start-ups and centered on an industry rather than any single

firm. This environment tends to promote collective learning even while firms are competitors in the marketplace. There is evidence of a wide range of innovations in the homegrown industry cluster that developed around Mountain View. Our mill town is not exceptional in this respect. However, what is remarkable is that conditions favored an environment that nurtured an extraordinary capacity for valuing entrepreneurship in the early stages of what would become the global capital of the industry.

Early Industrialization

For the purpose of documenting the creation of the homegrown industry cluster that emerged in this area we begin with the events in the period following the Civil War that gave the community its identity as a mill town. The small group of local entrepreneurs who came together in 1884 to finance and build Southern Mill Cotton Company, Mountain View's first textile mill, were not industrialists. Rather they were local merchants and business men who had managed to profit by the reconstruction that followed after the Civil War. The rolling foothills around Mountain View were not suitable for large-scale agriculture. However, what Mountain View did have was the railroad, which made its location strategic and, consequently, a battle ground during the war. Prior to the Civil War Mountain View had became a place where raw cotton was processed and prepared for transport by train to mills in the northeast. With an existing merchant class and already established as an agricultural depot, post-Civil War Mountain View was well positioned to take advantage of the trend in the economically devastated South to introduce manufacturing in the form of textile mills. Soon these mills would compete with established mills in the Northeast.

Historians argue that the introduction of the textile mills resulted in more than a shift in the economy of the South. The new mills also marked a fundamental transformation of social life and restructuring of social relations in what had previously been an "overwhelmingly rural and agricultural world." Many types and instances of innovation rapidly followed the formation of the Southern Mill Cotton Company and the construction of Mountain View's Southern Mill. Unlike industrialist located in the Northeastern U.S. where there was a well-established history of large-scale manufacturing, the Mountain View entrepreneurs were unfamiliar with manufacturing technology and practices, especially in what was for its time and place a sizable operation. In this area of the South cottage industry was the norm. Consequently, homegrown invention and innovation was needed as it was neither feasible nor desirable to import all manufacturing technology and organizational know-how from the North.

Innovation in Labor Relations

It can be argued that this venture in industrialization was successful. After several difficult years Southern Mill grew by the 1920s to exceed production in the traditional textile region of the Northeast. The emergence of industrial manufacturing engendered innovations in the industrial as well as the social realm as plant owners, managers, and a new population of wage-earning employees,

formerly the self-sufficient 'plain folk' of the surrounding region, worked through establishing labor relations in the mill. Most of the human actors were largely unfamiliar with the operations and daily routines of manufacturing, so much needed to be 'figured out.' This included a basic understanding about the wage-earning way of life, such as established work days and work hours, task orientation and training, and other fundamental expectations and agreements between employees and management. The wage-earning lifestyle was already well established in the North, aided in great part by the influx of immigrants from industrialized Europe. By comparison the rural South was decades behind in this area. Forging management-labor relations took on a distinctive flavor in the Mountain View mills. By 1920 a form of corporate paternalism emerged that included "an assortment of nonwage economic benefits as well as a variety of programs intended to create a thriving corporate culture, such as mill-sponsored athletic teams and a company band."

The dynamic exchange between labor and management in working out labor relations was not always so harmonious. The factors that were responsible for the era of corporate paternalism did not remain constant. Changes in economic conditions, labor legislation, market conditions, technological advances and world events were reflected in changes in relations between management and millworkers. Times of growth came to an end with Great Depression, which subsequently strained the system of corporate paternalism. In response to cuts by Management, millworkers organized a union in the 1930s. Conditions in the mill remained difficult throughout the 1940s. The post-war years brought new opportunities for economic growth, but also new challenges for the domestic textile industry in the form of foreign competition and synthetic fabrics that displaced demand for cotton. Despite setbacks in the textile sector, the economy of the South continued to grow. However, by the end of the 1960s the era of the cotton mill and a chapter in Southern industrialization was drawing to a close. Mountain View's aging Southern Mill was one of the last to shut its doors. While this marked the end of one era, it hailed the dawn of another. This theme is central to Mountain View's story as one after another chapter opened, closed, and took its place in the community's industrial history. Traces of previous eras are still visible today in Mountain View. The original Southern Mill was recently refurbished and transformed into trendy condominiums. Other vestiges of Mountain View's history have been preserved, including a Civil War battle site, historic homes, and, of course, the railroad that runs through the historic albeit ailing downtown.

THE MILL ERA ENDS: THE TOWN REINVENTS

The closing of the Southern Mill was not the end of Southern Mill Cotton Company, which was quickly restructured to enter a new industry that was rapidly replacing cotton milling and opening a new chapter in the South's industrial history. Unlike the founders of the original mill, the entrepreneurs who would oversee the reemergence of the company were not new comers to industrialization. They had been raised in the era of the big corporation and were far more familiar with large-scale

manufacturing than their predecessors. The new industry that Southern Company joined moved it and other mostly small local start-up higher up the value chain. They were now producers of finished product rather than suppliers of component materials to other industries. The new industry would need suppliers of component materials. And finally, this new industry would soon expand beyond the local community as entrepreneurs and established firms began to move south to take advantage of fewer regulatory restrictions and an increasingly anti-union atmosphere.

Innovation and the Formation of an Industry Cluster

The mostly southern entrepreneurs that launched the complex of small firms around Mountain View in the 1950s were responding to multiple stimuli, particularly advances in technology and the diffusion of synthetic fibers such as nylon following WW II. Synthetic fiber coupled with new technology redefined the meaning of the artifact that they produced and the ways in which it was manufactured, marketed, and sold. Innovation in the form of new materials and technology required that engineering and technical expertise would be either homegrown or attracted to the area. Both in fact occurred. A shift in the industry center from the Northeast to the South took place as old line manufacturers who made traditional varieties of the product could no longer compete. By 1958 nearly 60 percent of production had moved to the South, much of it to the region surrounding Mountain View.

The introduction of synthetic materials and new production methods spurred many technical innovations. The industry association that represented most manufacturers advanced new marketing strategies aimed at capturing the domestic market and lobbied effectively for tariffs that secured their hold on market share. During this period Mountain View reaped the benefits as the center of a rapidly growing cluster of firms engaged in an emerging industry.

The Rise of the Industry Cluster

With so many mill towns in the region, why did Mountain View become the center of this industry cluster? What was it about the community and the individuals that inhabited it that allowed a new industry to emerge on the ashes of the previous era? Evidence of many, but not all, the shared characteristics of the Silicon Valley companies described by Annalee Saxenian can be found among the entrepreneurs that located around Mountain View. Cooperation among the firms is a prime example. Similar to Saxenian's Silicon Valley firms (1994) cooperation led to many positive advances in the sharing of information on technological developments and markets. Previous studies, however, suggest that the single issue that galvanized cooperation among Mountain View mill owners had a darker side, primarily a negative sentiment toward and resistance to unions. It might be that this attitude gained traction in response to regional labor history where workers at the original cotton mill organized a union in the 1930s. Speculation aside, most firms in the industry developed strong demarcation

between management and office workers (mostly white) and factory workers (mainly Latinos). Efforts by industry firms to eliminate the possibility of unions included an active campaign to recruit immigrant labor from south of the border. The success of this campaign which reached its peak in the 1970s would have a profound impact on the demographics within the community, few of which were desirable from the perspective of town elites.

Rise to international Prominence: A City of Millionaires

At the height of the industry's national and global dominance Mountain View was home to an extraordinary number of millionaires, many more than would be expected in a town of similar size. The town was at the center of an industry cluster that provided 90% of domestic demand and 60% of global demand for its products. Success brought benefits to the town that allowed for significant investments in infrastructure and education. An influx of entrepreneurs from the North and from Europe brought a taste for the arts and culture.

While Mountain View experienced many of the benefits of a prosperous industry it retained its unique character, including the fiercely independent nature of its early founders. The industry grew rapidly and the number of firms grew as well. High demand for the product and relatively low barriers to entry made success in the short run probable for many small firms. The paternalism of the earlier mill owners gradually gave way to a decidedly anti-union stance. Efforts to unionize eventually failed due to a number of factors, including employees' lack of experience with labor organizing and chronic labor shortages that for a period of time allowed workers who were dissatisfied with conditions at one plant to simply move on to another. As long as demand was high the industry and the town boomed.

THE WINDS OF MARKET CHANGE

Today Mountain View faces a problem: its past success. Known as a 'world capitol' of its industry, the community has enjoyed phenomenal growth that has brought decades of prosperity. Unlike thousands of southern mill towns founded in the 19th Century, our research site reinvented itself as a manufacturing hub and dominant source for the world's demand for their products. Changing consumer tastes and the end of the long housing boom and consequent impact on industry firms that have been the mainstay of the community's economy marked the end of an era for the town and signaled the need for change. In the wake of the downturn the community has been left with a series of interrelated problems: decreased revenues from downsized firms, a large population of unemployed low-skill workers, an exodus of midlevel professionals, and urban blight in the form of unused commercial and industrial properties.

Insights from Saxenian's comparison between Silicon Valley and Route 128 offer clues to understanding the factors behind the current decline of the industry cluster. What she describes as a

'regional decentralized, network-based system' characteristic of Silicon Valley applies to the region around Mountain View in the early formation of its industry cluster. There was not one large firm around which suppliers and service providers could cluster. We were informed by our interviewees that there was instead a myriad of start-ups and small firms. However, following a period of consolidation, by 2000 only six large firms remained. This is similar to what Saxenian describes as an 'important departure' for Silicon Valley firms in which 'Local semiconductor firms abandoned the social structure and institutions they had pioneered and embraced the learning curves and scale economies of contemporary management models.' (1994: 83-84) As in Silicon Valley, for Mountain View this shift to scaling up marked the maturation of the industry and the move to commoditization, and what Saxenian describes as 'A predictable trajectory of incremental refinements in technology, design, and production [that] replaced the turbulence of continuous product and process innovation.' (1994: 84)

THE DESIRE FOR CHANGE

Our study was conducted at the request of a consortium of representatives from industry, local government, and community leaders who were moved to action by a desire to respond proactively to challenges facing their community and the industry that had delivered many decades of prosperity. It was initially conceived as one component in a collaborative multi-phased project between the city, industry, and an art and design institution. Interestingly, when this partnership was formed the consortium was already engaged in a multi-year project with a state university to conduct an extensive survey of the community. The two projects remained separate; we were, however, able to access the community wide survey that was conducted by the state university team.

The motivation for partnering with the art and design institution came from an interest to enlist the perspective of Design and Designers in energizing the community and proposing ways in which Creatives, or Cultural Creatives (Ray and Anderson, 2000; Rentel and Zellnik, 2007) – members of the so called 'Creative Class' (Florida 2002) who derive their livelihood from creative work in a range of fields including the sciences, education, business, technology, design and the arts - might be attracted to Mountain View. A proposal was developed to establish an interdisciplinary team comprised of urban design, architecture, and design management. The design management team agreed to conduct an ethnographic study to uncover and document local narratives that would provide some understanding of ground level 'truth.' We were able to interview over fifty individuals, many of whom had played a significant role in the formation of the industry cluster centered in Mountain View. These individuals were an invaluable source of historic information which we were able to corroborate and supplement with readings by labor and business historians. They also provided key information regarding relationships of power, 'insiders' and 'outsiders', and network structure, as well as insights regarding prevailing values and attitudes. Having a base-line perspective would help us in facilitating the 'participatory design' of 'community visioning.' As a first step we conducted ethnographic

interviews to establish how different community actors felt about their town, about the need for change, and about how they imagined that change might come.

LOSING CONFIDENCE

Presentations by the mayor of Mountain View, city officials, and industry executives were delivered on a number of occasions as the terms of cooperation were negotiated. A major event was staged in which company executives from several of the largest firms invited students to apply for paid internships. The candid tone of these presentations was striking, especially when the mayor outlined the realities that the community was facing and challenged students to take advantage not only of the extraordinary career opportunities and outdoor lifestyle that Mountain View had to offer, but also the opportunity to 'make a difference' in shaping the town's future direction.

In contrast to public talk that was always given a positive 'we can do it' spin, our informants revealed deep concerns about trends that they perceived were increasingly evident in the community. These had to do with the downturn in the major industry supporting the town, but also concerns about the future of the town itself. The confidence that had characterized the town for many decades was weakening. The demographics of the community were changing. We learned from one of our key informants that a long-standing attitude that rejected any form of government assistance, for example, in the form of grants for community improvement, had softened over the past decade to the extent that federal funding had been sought to subsidize the development of a large-scale community recreational area in hopes of making the town more appealing to young people and families.

Interviewees repeatedly praised Mountain View as a wonderful place to raise a family. It was safe, had good schools, and a family-centric atmosphere. However, those who were single found it severely lacking in the kinds of social spaces that they wanted to frequent. Outside of a few local pubs and a large community church, there were few opportunities for socializing outside of work. Regardless of age, most interviewees agreed that the choice of cafes and restaurants was extremely limited; shopping for anything beyond 'the basics' was 'nonexistent.' In fact, most people that we interviewed reported that they traveled anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour for dining, shopping, and entertainment.

Group interviews conducted at two local high schools confirmed that young people felt they had few options for socializing in places where they felt welcomed. They tended to congregate at friends' homes. Ironically, the community invested far more than most towns do in high school education. Mountain View High is among the top ranked schools in the country. For several decades it was a beneficiary of the prosperity that industry brought to the community and a desire by town elites to secure the best possible education for their children. However, most graduates left Mountain View to attend college and few of them returned to take up jobs and careers in the their home town. The

exceptions were Latino students, children and grandchildren of immigrants who had been recruited to work in the plants in the 1970s and 80s, who tended to remain close to the family unit.

Many members of the community that we interviewed expressed deep concern about these trends and the future of their town. The traditional white base of the city was decreasing. While jobs were still available in the dominant industry, they were not the types of jobs that attract young people, especially those just starting their careers. Mountain View was in the throes of what has become a global battle for Creatives: well-educated and talented young people who could bring new ideas and make them happen. Coupled with the lack of social opportunities for young single adults Mountain View was headed for trouble unless the community took action, and quickly.

DESIGN AND CREATIVES AS SAVIORS?

We were able to document local narratives that provided some understanding of ground level 'truth' through over 50 face-to-face interviews and group interviews with students from two local high schools that were conducted during the summer and fall of 2010. Analyses and additional studies were conducted during 2011. The initial selection of interviewees was done by the sponsors of this study and through snowball sampling. Many of the individuals we interviewed were entrepreneurs who had contributed to the formation of this Appalachian 'industry cluster'. Many of our informants were from the elite: owners and managers of industrial firms, the heads of supplier and utility companies, and the civic authorities who supported the boom. They spoke of their efforts as having 'saved' the town and of the unprecedented 'new industry' they had created. They also acknowledged high levels of cooperation and gave us enough clues to believe that in such a place 'the mysteries of the trade become no mystery, but are, as it were, in the air' (Marshall, 1925). This sense of cooperation seemed evident in the consortium of business, industry, local government and community leaders that proposed the project. There was also a genuine sense that what was needed in order to avoid becoming just another bedroom community was creativity, innovation, and youthful energy of the type that 'Creatives' seemed to possess. When asked if they could name 'Creatives' who were already living in their community, most interviewees hesitated, but eventually named people who they considered to be talented in activities ranging from the arts to business.

While the sponsors of the project seemed willing to bet that bringing Design and 'Creatives' to Mountain View would save the town, they did not see a home grown solution as an option. We wondered why they did not seek to enlist members of their own community, many of whom were 'Creatives' in their own right, in transforming or 're-inventing' the town, or to lead the next wave of entrepreneurial growth. The more we talked with people the more evident it became that something like a cargo cult mentality was in play. By this we mean that innovation had become an ideology – a worldview that gives primacy and value to particular ideas, goals and actions - rather than a reality of everyday life and social practice. Perceived as such, and not recognizing a creative core within their

community, innovation was a specialization that would need to be *imported*. Who better to recruit than young 'Creatives' who would bring an entirely different culture, look and feel to the community? Things needed to be shaken up. These were the people and this was the way to do it.

It was this finding that led us to connect the discourse among Mountain View elites to the current discourse at the broader level around the concept of Design and 'Creatives.' The value of the Design perspective, and specifically, the concept of 'design thinking', has filtered into the main stream through the work of authors such as Daniel Pink (2006), Roger Martin (2009) and others. Design thinking is described as a process of problem identification and solution finding that can be applied to solve complex or "wicked problems" (Buchanan 1992; Margolin and Buchanan 1995) outside the field of design. This insight demonstrates the power of our current 'episteme' based on an expectation for epochal change (Foucault, 1972) and the normalization of avant-garde values which is especially strong in business contexts (Frank, 1998). We were also able to see how the theory of mimetic isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Fligstein 1999) was being played out in Mountain View as elites in the community embraced what they perceived other communities and industries were doing to solve the problem of decline.

A WILL WITHOUT A WAY

Donald Sull (2001) addressed the question of why some industrial clusters evolve from a community of innovation to a community of inertia. His focus was the Akron cluster that developed around the tire industry. Citing studies by Porter (1990) and others, Sull exposed a down side of industry clusters: despite the advantages derived from close geographic proximity there is also a tendency for cluster members to more prone to inertia as the cluster matures and "settles on a dominant design and converges on the optimal production process." An implicit understanding of success as stemming from a set of tried and true best practices leads to the loss of flexibility. Established ways of doing things become embedded in the culture as biases, taken for granted assumptions, and normative behaviors. Characteristics of devolution or decline include a pervasive mentality of "not invented here" and protection of the cluster. Sull notes that historical evidence supporting this tendency can be found in the devolution of Pittsburg's steel cluster (Hall 1997), the automotive industry in Detroit (Helper 1990), and the microcomputer firms located along Route 128 (Saxenian 1994), to name only a few.

We found evidence of the shift to inertia in talking with our informants that Mountain View had for some time been trending in the direction of inertia, not only in the industry cluster, but also in the wider community. Sull notes this phenomenon in documenting the shift from innovation to inertia in the Akron tire cluster, where the benefits of the 'community of practice' (Wenger 1998) became a liability not only in terms of organizational and technical innovation, but also in the ingrown social and cultural environment that ultimately dominated the Akron community.

AN ANGEL AT MY TABLE

Many of our Mountain View informants perceived the implications of the trend to inertia as a threat to the sustainability of a way of life they wanted to preserve. At the same time they shared the conviction that outside intervention would be needed to energize the community. This became a call to action. Rather than securing a future that, in fact, looked very much like the past, the strategy that they developed was drawn in part from members of the community who had firsthand experience with the field of design through the education of their children as well as a increasing strong current in mainstream thinking that promoted the benefits of 'design thinking.'

COMMUNITY VISIONING VERSUS 'CHANGE MANAGEMENT'

Our findings suggest that the individuals we interviewed tended to share a positivist perspective on innovation, a logic that tends to equate innovation with positive change and progress. We also found that many of them, notably our elite informants, looked outside the community for the next wave of innovators that would reinvent and save the town. Furthermore, there was a conviction that the new wave would be led by Design and 'Creatives' who would be recruited to the community. This view led us to see that the meaning of innovation had changed: innovation – the daily churn and diffusion of new ideas, things, and ways of doing things - had become 'Innovation', an ideology shared among the town's elites. As an ideology, Innovation becomes a belief system in which Progress (Bury 1920/2010), an idea that gained currency in the mid-19th century with the diffusion of Enlightenment thinking, is highly valued. The notion of Progress sets goals and expectations and directs strategies and tactics. Innovation in this sense is widely accepted in the current environment, and especially in the context of business and industry. The roots of the present run deep.

Our informants expressed concerns that old ideas and ways of doing things were not going to solve the problems that the community and its industrial base faced. The old guard, the movers and shakers that were in large part responsible for the town's prosperity, was standing down. However, they did not see sufficient evidence that there were enough individuals locally who possessed fresh ideas and energy that would lead the community though a transformation to secure its future prosperity. They were uncomfortable and unwilling to leave the future of their community to chance; something had to be done while the town still had the resources to be proactive.

The unique contribution of ethnographic research in this project was the ability of the research team to position the current situation that the community was facing within the town's own history to show explicitly, rather than through theoretical models, how change in past had emerged from circumstances 'on the ground' as they developed over time. An openness and willingness to unpack concepts such as "innovation" allowed for a finer grained understanding of conditions and concerns.

We created opportunities for participatory design where the results of our study were presented in open forums. Individuals could join in conversation together, respond and contribute to shaping the meaning of what had been discovered. The results of these events were folded into proposed solution spaces in which the community could co-create. Consequently, rather than looking to our design research team for ready-made 'solutions', the community was encouraged to engage in the process of generating ideas that took innovation from the realm of ideology and put it back into their collective hands. Where the dominant mindset was formerly what du Gay (2003) describes as the 'tyranny of the epochal', with its demands for bold programs of 'Renewal' and 'Modernization' - in this case, plans for skate and water parks - we began to see the recognition that the process of change and 'reinvention' was going to be long term and would, if successful, involve the entire community, not only elected officials and town elites. 'Reinvention' would require a multi-cultural, multi-generational effort undertaken by individuals to whom the town mattered.

BACK IN THE GAME: CREATIVE RENEWAL THROUGH TAPPING THE WELLSPRINGS

In this paper we described how we found 'innovation' itself has an ideology that biases potential recipients and leads them to expect epochal breaks with the past to be the only successful strategy. We suggest that one role for ethnography (as a descriptive discipline) within change projects can be to aid persons and communities to re-connect with their own continuity beneath the revolutionary language of 'change management'. We found how departing from 'the tyranny of the epochal' (du Gay, 2003) with its demands for bold programs of 'Renewal' or 'Modernization' allowed community members to consider visions of more achievable innovation based on existing wellsprings of creative energy and grounded in the town's historic norm of embrace entrepreneurial practice.

The roots of the present

In our study we found a regional *longue durée* ('longer term' pattern) (Braudel, 1958) from its 100-year-old mill history, during which entrepreneurial competence and cooperation between firms was widespread. Over time, however, as both the industry and town grew, the patterns that characterize what Saxenian refers to as "a complex mix of social solidarity and individualistic competition" (p. 31) gave way to a period of consolidation as smaller firms were either absorbed or eliminated. The fierce independence and can-do attitude became a liability rather than an asset. Shifting conditions at the global level and changing consumer tastes presented a new set of challenges for Mountain View and for the now mature industry that it had fostered and supported in its early development.

We found that ethnography with its plurality of voices was an ideal source for creating community strategies that balance revolutionary with evolutionary perspectives. Our research team was

able to use the area's ethnographic narratives to locate a more evolutionary frame that established a sense of continuity bridging the town's past and present in a way that helped raise morale for the community to approach change in the present.

To involve industry and community members in the process of revisioning open invitations to participate in interactive sessions were placed in local news media. One of these sessions was held midway through the project during which researchers worked with community members to present and validate findings and consider scenarios that would move the revisioning process forward. For the final session the research team created a video to tell Mountain View's story using historical information and direct quotes from many of the projects informants. The video was presented along with experiments in social innovation that had been successfully tried in other communities to regenerate a creative urban core. In addition, six concrete proposals for reconfiguring areas within the town that were identified by city planners as future redevelopment sites. Community members were encouraged to add their comments and raise questions and concerns in with the research team. There was general agreement that the fresh perspectives brought by the research team inspired possibilities for reenergizing the community's local creative core. However, further progress would depend on the willing of the community to engage in next steps.

CONCLUSION

Through the example of reinvention and revisioning in a former Appalachian mill town, this paper demonstrates how researchers can often use an area's ethnographic narratives to locate a more evolutionary frame that establishes continuity and helps raise morale for a community to approach change in the present. We suggest that this approach not only requires a updating of the built environment, but also, and more importantly, the reinvention and revisioning process that Richard Normann (2001: 4) calls the "mental, symbolizing processes of the collective mind." Central to our findings in this case is how ethnography with its plurality of voices is an ideal source for creating community strategies that balance revolutionary with evolutionary perspectives, linking past with present to enable a framework to support community visioning.

Beyond the particulars of this case, many communities are facing challenges similar to those that confront Mountain View. Those communities that are successfully meeting these challenges are finding that decentralized networks of smaller firms and start-ups such as those described by Saxenian and others are more likely to bring innovation than large-scale firms that tend to struggle with being able to deliver on the innovation promise. Creating the conditions to facilitate the emergence of networks that support creativity and innovation at the local level has become a primary concern. We have attempted to show through this case that the work of identifying local creative individuals and networks and facilitating the conditions that support them can be significantly enhanced by introducing the use of ethnography.

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