

POPULATION TRENDS AND THE CHANGING FUNCTIONS OF  
SMALL WESTERN ILLINOIS CENTRAL PLACES  
1890 - 1960

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## ABSTRACT

Rural market depopulation and heightened connectivity in a central place network presage business and population decline for towns founded to serve an agricultural market. A three county study area in Western Illinois was selected on the basis of rural service orientation and distance from large urban centers. Town population trends were examined to determine concomitant urban population and rural market declines. Despite obvious losses in businesses in many small towns, most had experienced population trend reversals and had been able to retain populations equal to or above a 1930 population nadir.

Heightened network connectivity, offered by paved roads, was chronologically coincident with population trend reversals. The concept of a functional change from service to dormitory roles was investigated as a partial explanation of the anomalous situation where towns exhibited population levels above those indicated by their service roles alone.

Regression analysis (based on population and sales tax) was used to differentiate dormitory and service towns. Field investigations of the employment structure of small towns tended to confirm the statistical classifications.

The author concluded that small towns, located within a ten mile radius of much larger service towns, have begun to assume dormitory characteristics enabling them to retain populations greater than could be expected from the trade service function postulated by classic central place theory.