



Civic Society, Civic Communities, and  
Rural Development  
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## Rural Communities and Local Economies

- Are being woven into global circuits of mass production and consumption
- Rural communities are forced to build businesses as incentives in hope of attracting jobs.
- Despite disruptions in local economies, resilient rural communities that bind people to place do exist.
- These civic communities can be safe islands in the sea change of rural global economic transformation.
- For most of the twentieth century, economic development in rural America was guided by the precepts of free-market capitalism.
- Land Grant Universities and the USDA developed agricultural technologies that were designed to make food production more productive and efficient.
- In local areas in which agricultural was not thriving economically, rural development strategies put in place modern transportation and communication infrastructures.
- By the beginning of the twenty-first century, rural America had become part of the global economy.



## Rural Communities and Local Economies Cont'd

- Many rural communities, especially in the South, were forced to compete with third world countries for low-wage jobs.
- In a system tending toward global accumulation and regulation, the nation-state's role in redirecting economic development and in protecting the welfare of rural workers and communities has been weakened.
- Since the 1980's, the task of sheltering works and communities from the disruptions of the marketplace has increasingly devolved from the nation-state to local communities.

## Civic Community and Balanced Socioeconomic Development

- Walter Goldschmidt (1978) and C. Wright Mills and Melville Ulmer (1946) showed that local areas in which the economic base consisted of many small, locally owned firms showed higher levels of social, economic, and political welfare than places where the economic base was dominated by a few large absentee-owned firms.
- Goldschmidt studied agricultural communities in the Central Valley of California.
- Mills and Wright focused on manufacturing communities.
- The civil society perspective is that small to medium-sized economic enterprises can serve as the foundation of modern industrial economies.
- At the local level, the civic community is one in which residents are bound to place by a range of local institutions and organizations.
- Recent research suggests that there may be many positive benefits to localities that embrace a community capitalism model of economic development (Lyson and Tolbert 1996; Tolbert et. al. 1998); Tolbert et. Al. (2002).

# A Turn Toward Civil Society and Civic Communities

Theories of civil society and civic community as it relates to rural development is now being constructed.

- Modernization versus Sustainable Development
- Production versus Development
- Corporations versus Communities
- Corporate Middle Class versus Independent Middle Class
- Human and Social Capitals versus Civic Community
- Political Processes
- Motors for Development
- Regrettable Imperfections versus Surmountable Inequities

## Conclusion

- Communities dominated by large national and multinational firms are more vulnerable to greater inequality, lower levels of welfare, and increased rates of social disruption than localities where the economy is more diversified.