

The Process of "Urbanization" in the Countryside: A Study of Huron and Bruce Counties, 1891-1981

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Abstract



A broad interpretation of urban history as "process" is proposed to include the temporal study of small settlements within the context of their agricultural hinterlands and urban systems. The illustrative case study of eight places in Huron and Bruce Counties, Ontario, between 1891 and 1981 documents the process of increasing functional specialization and "urbanization" of settlements having populations under 1,100 in 1981. Field surveys in 1981 and census data since 1961 contradict the popular perception of "dying villages" based primarily upon directory tabulations and earlier population trends. Most of the eight places surveyed have experienced recent population growth and much less functional decline than suggested by either directories or central place literature. Local specialized economic functions and environmental attractions have contributed substantially to their continuing and increasing viability.

Résumé

L'auteur de cet article nous présente l'histoire urbaine dans le cadre de « processus » pour ainsi faire ressortir dans le temps les petits établissements ruraux et les situer dans leur contexte d'arrière-pays agricoles et de réseaux urbains. Cette étude individuelle de huit localités dans les comtés ontariens de Huron et Bruce, de 1891 à 1981, illustre le mécanisme qui apporta la spécialisation fonctionnelle et l'« urbanisation » croissantes des villages ayant moins de 1,100 habitants en 1981. Les enquêtes sur le terrain de 1981 et les données sur les recensements effectués après 1961 vont à l'encontre de la notion courante du « village en déclin » qui trouve son point d'appui dans les compilations des annuaires et les tendances démographiques antérieures. Contrairement à ce que semblaient indiquer les annuaires et les écrits relatifs aux localités centrales, la plupart des huit régions ont connu une récente croissance démographique et n'ont pas subi de grande baisse de l'activité économique. La spécialisation économique locale et l'attrait du milieu ont été grandement contributifs à leur essor continu.

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