



Rewriting the Rural Narrative

Speak softly and carry statistics

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People keep leaving rural America. According to U.S. Census figures from 2010, just 16% of the country's population lives in rural areas, down from 20% in 2000, and down dramatically from 72% about a hundred years ago. Behind the numbers are the stories, both of the people who left their rural homes and the small percentage of Americans who still live in rural America. There are stories, too, of people who've left for myriad reasons. We want to know those stories and tell.

Sociologists Patrick Carr and Maria Kefalas spent two years in a small town in Iowa trying to find out why so many young people are leaving rural America. What they found was that many small towns are playing a role in their own demise, by pushing the best and brightest to leave and under-investing in those who stay.

From Breadbasket to Basket Case

In the 1980s, rural Americans faced fewer teen births and lower divorce rates than their urban counterparts. Now, their positions have flipped entirely.

Rural Minnesota is in trouble. Young people are fleeing the farms and forests of the Gopher State, and the residents left there are aging. And they're dying. While population is growing in the Twin Cities area, especially the suburbs

We became kind of the poster child for the war on poverty, and any time somebody wanted to do a story about poor people, we were the first stop.



Fighting for an American Countryside

The Decline of Rural Minnesota

THU SEP 20, 2012 AT 09:04 PM PDT

The slow, agonizing death of the small
US town

HOLLOWING OUT THE MIDDLE

*The Rural Brain Drain and
What It Means for America*

When death comes to a small town, the school is usually the last thing to go. A place can lose its bank, its tavern, its grocery store, its shoe shop. But when the school closes, you might as well put a fork in it.

Survival of Rural America

VICTORIES AND BITTER HARVESTS



Richard E. Wood



THE NARRATIVE

- There's a brain drain
 - We live in the middle of nowhere
 - We are a sleepy town
 - Everyone knows one another
 - Nobody lock their doors
-
- What we had
 - What we don't have
 - What we wish we had
 - What we could have had...



Deficit Approach

Fixing things that can't or shouldn't be fixed



NO MORE ANECDATA!

anecdota (noun). *information which is presented as if it is based on serious research but is in fact based on what someone thinks is true*

1900-1950

- Mechanization of agriculture
- Roads and transportation
- Educational achievement and population loss
- Church closings (Delafield)



1950+

- Main street restructuring
- School consolidations
- Hospitals closings



The rural idyll



“Agriculture is no longer the mainstay of the rural economy.”

Iron Range town fighting for more than the mail

Calumet challenges the decision to close its post office, which is a social hub for its residents.

The Media Idyll Persists



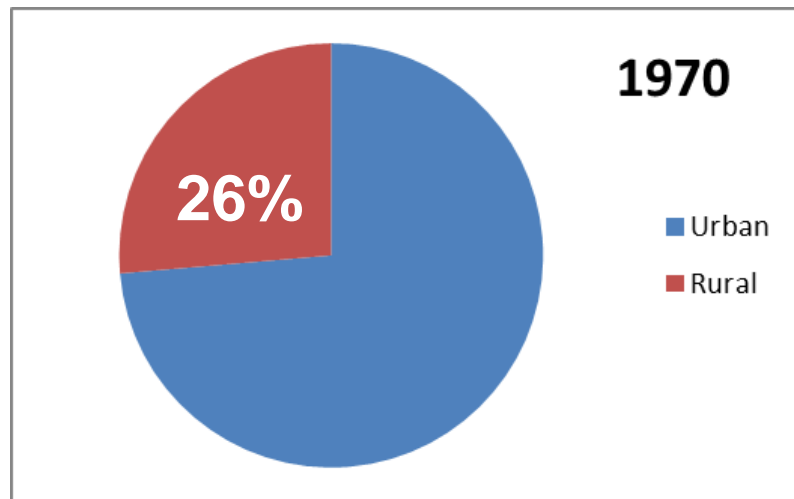
Who are you going to find in a small town when you travel to small towns in morning and afternoon?

RURAL IS CHANGING, NOT DYING

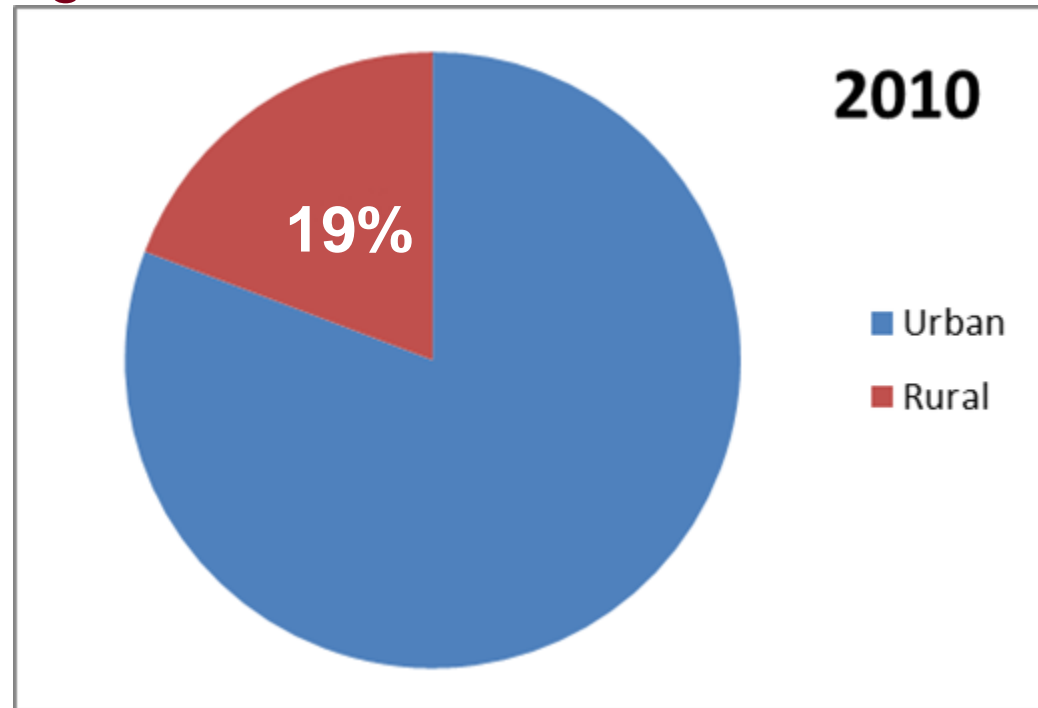
- Yes, things are changing
- Small towns are microcosms of globalization
 - Many of these changes impact rural and urban areas alike (not distinctly rural)
 - Yet more apparent in rural places
- Survived massive restructuring of social and economic life
- Research base does NOT support notion that if XXXX closes, the town dies
 - In Minnesota only 3 towns have dissolved in past 50 years

Rural Rebound

- Since 1970, rural population increased by 11%
 - Relative percentage living rural decreased



203,211,926
(53.6m rural)



308,745,538
(59.5m rural)



Rural Data

Rural Populations Continue to Shrink

[Is Rural America Struggling?](#) provides an excellent summary of the economic and population issues facing rural America. Key quote:

... rural America's job growth is stagnant and the population is in decline. In fact, it's the first time such a population decline has been recorded in the nation's rural counties.

Population figures reduced by formerly rural places now designated as urban (since 1974)

- Iowa 473,312
- Minnesota 352,224 rural residents now classified urban
- **Missouri 699,129 (19 counties or ~12%)**
- Nebraska 170,855
- North Dakota 181,639
- South Dakota 207,790

Urban areas have grown WIDER, not TALLER



Mobility



Households Moving Every 5 Years:

44% Iowa

45% Missouri

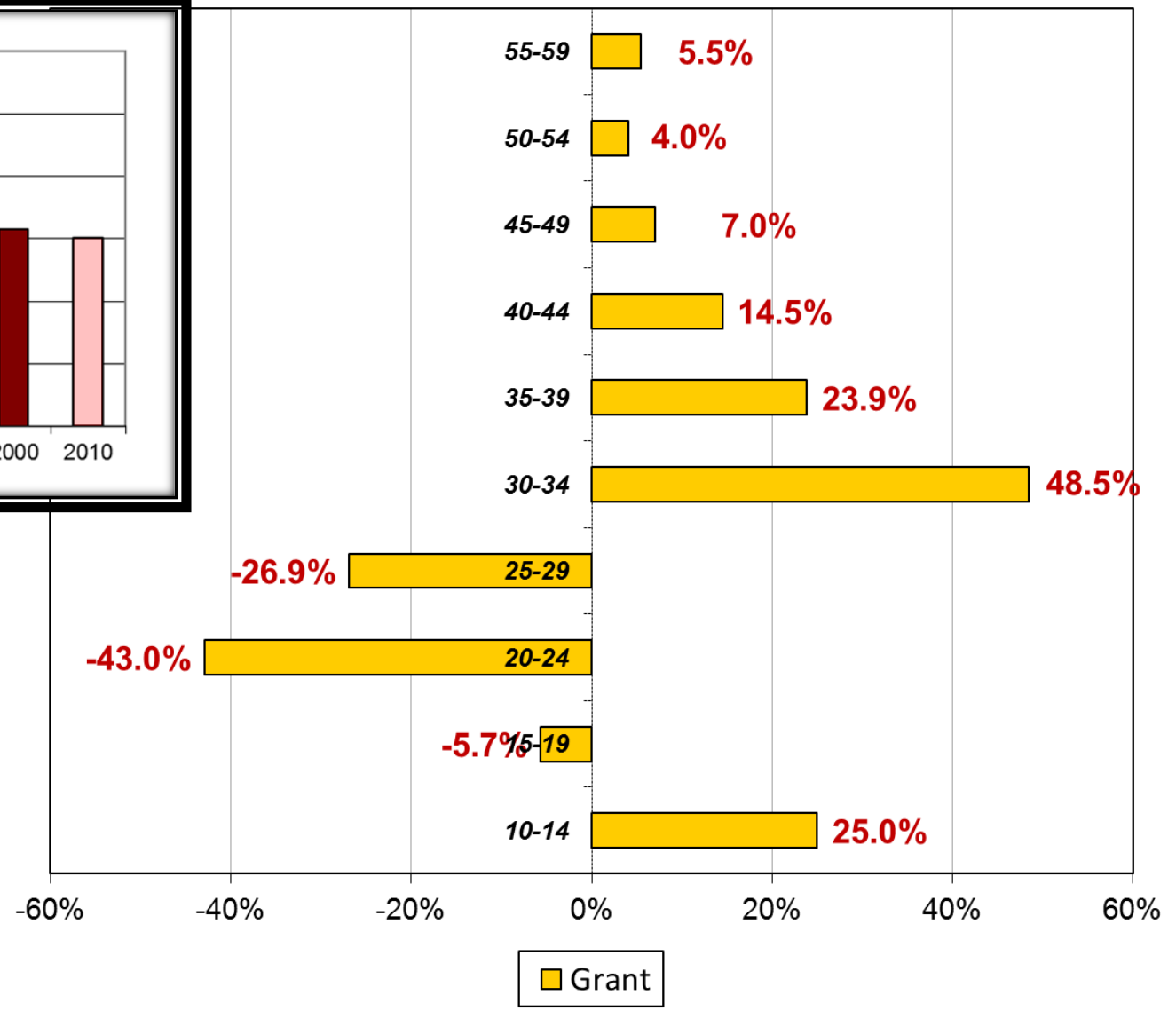
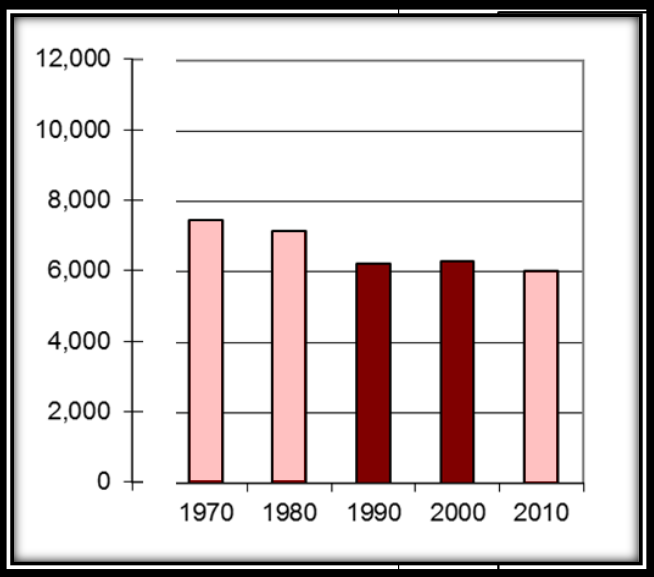
46% Minnesota

Wisconsin

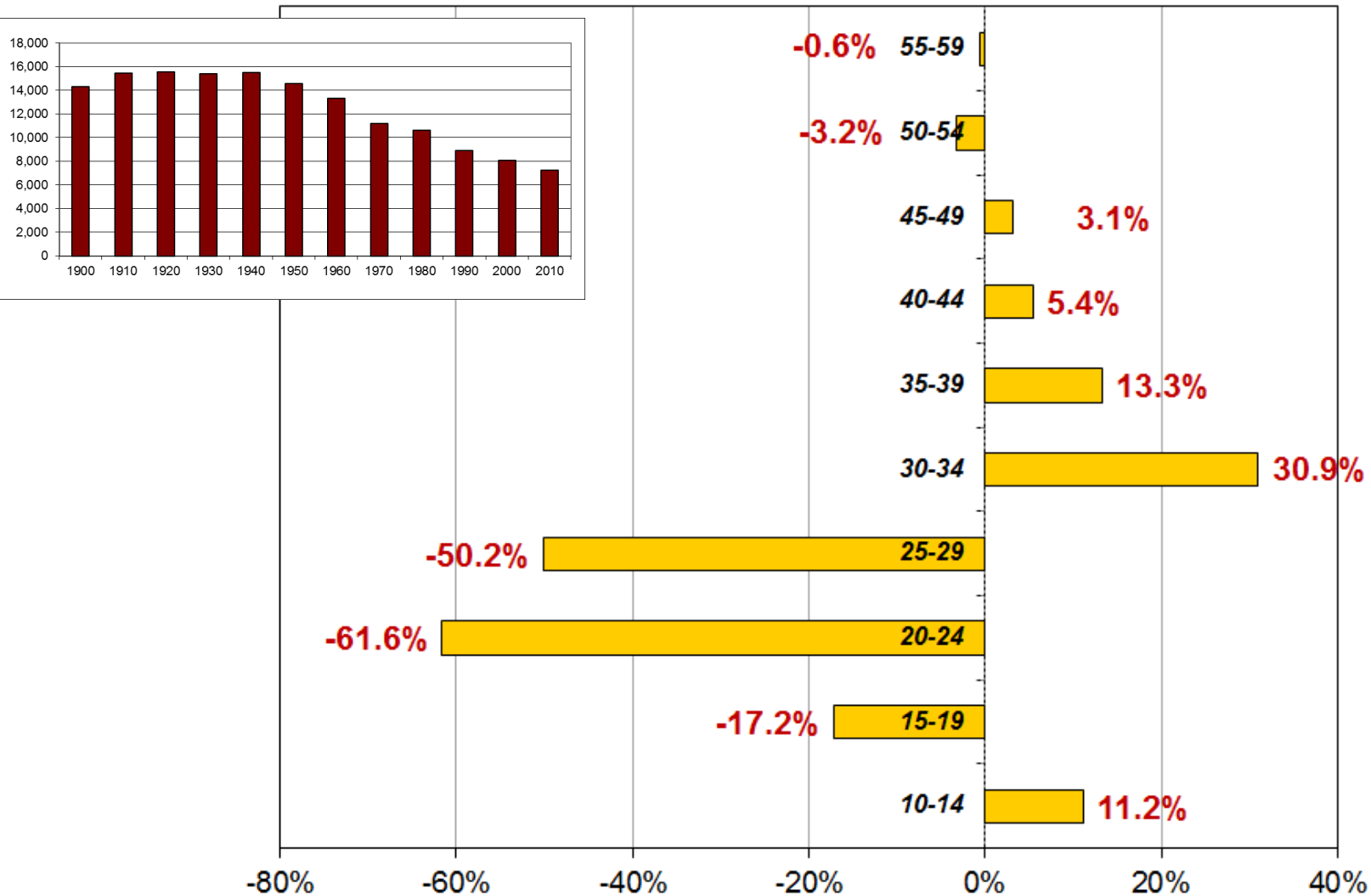
47% Nebraska

49% United States

1990-2000, Percent Cohort Change



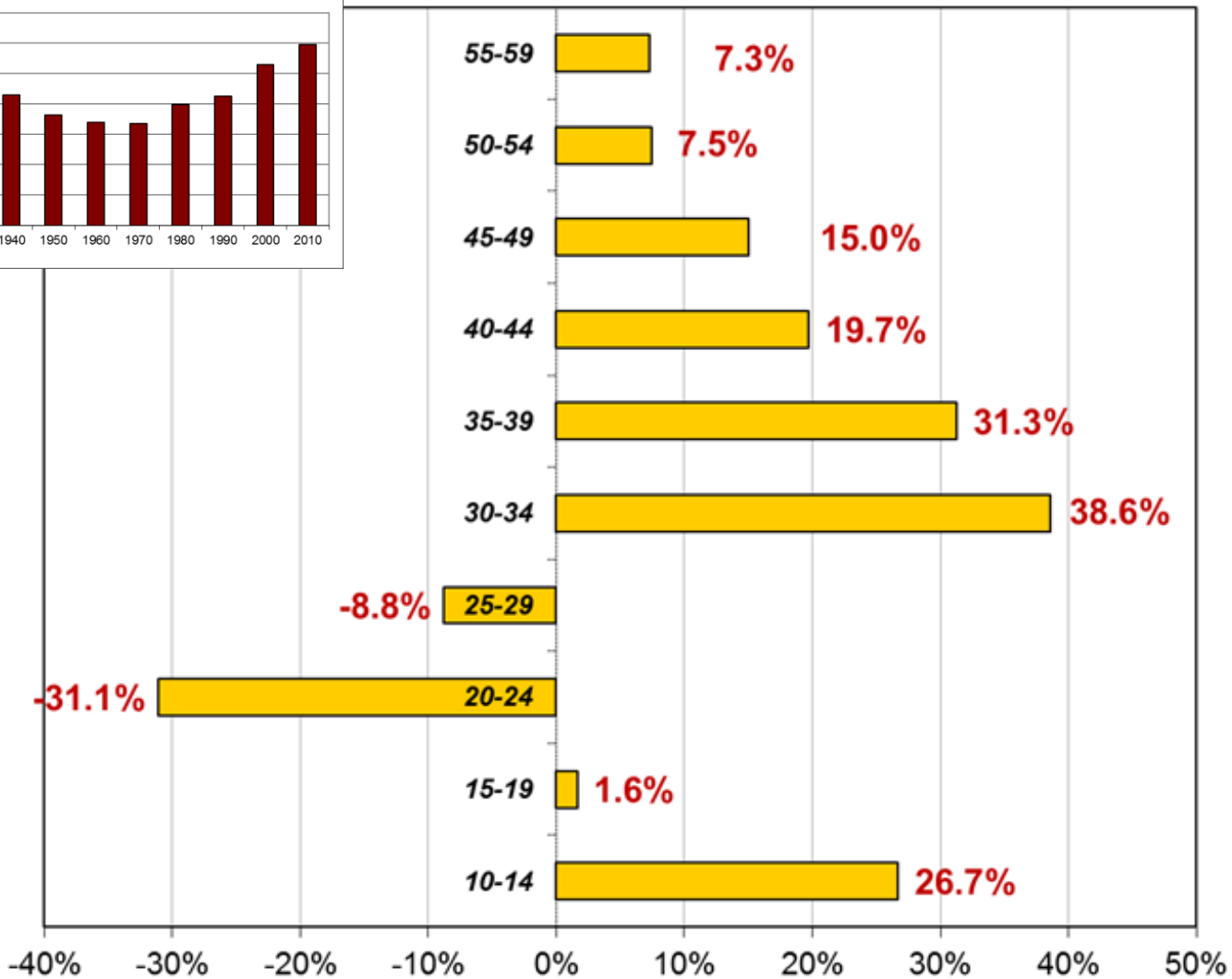
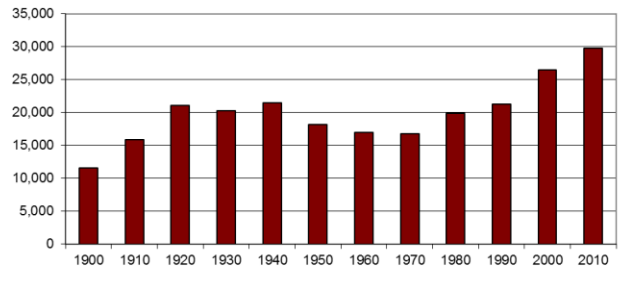
2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



Rural Prairie County



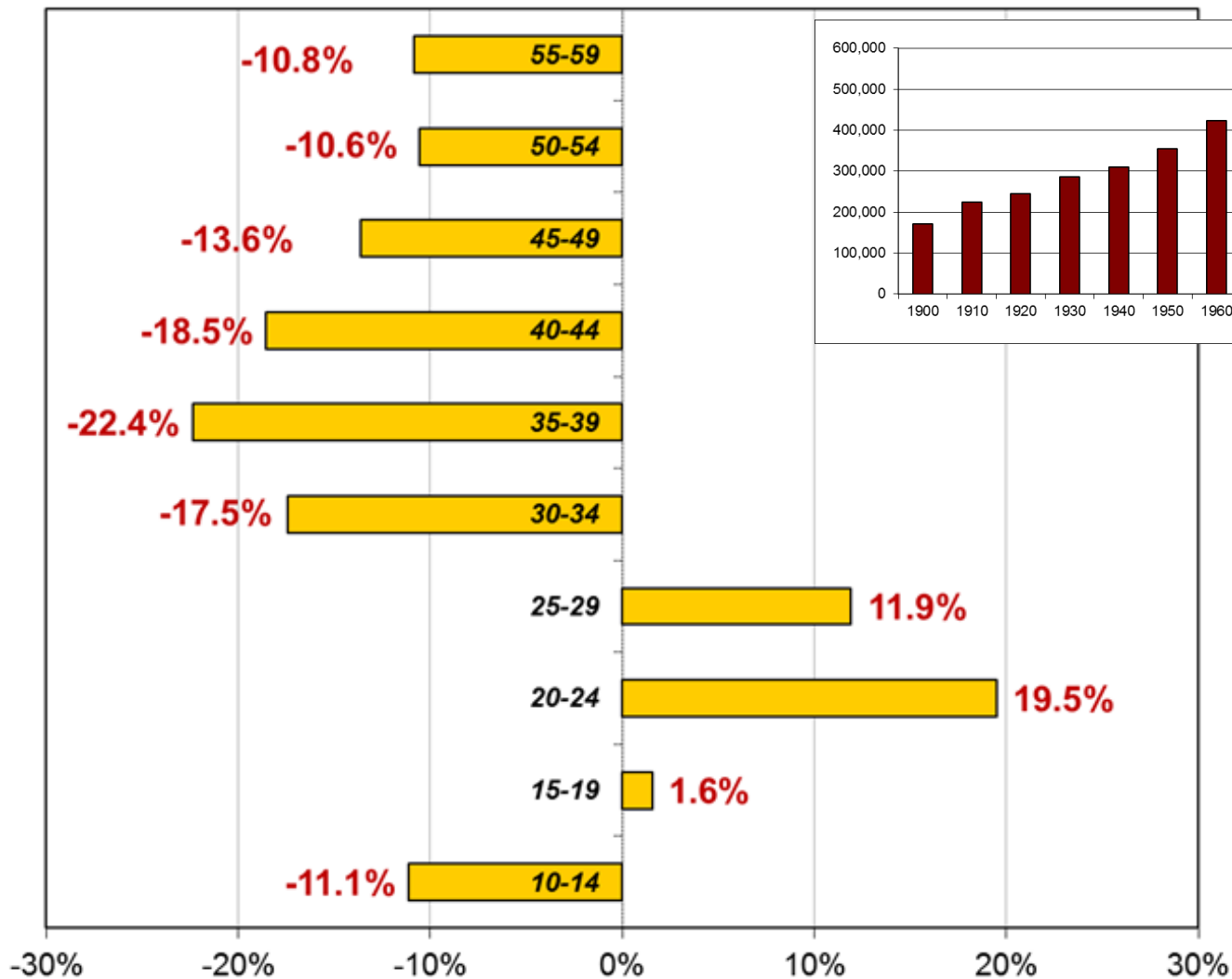
2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



Rural Recreational County



2000-2010, Percent Cohort Change



Core Metropolitan County



Buffalo Commons Research

Dr. Randy Cantrell and Cheryl
Burkhart-Kriesel
University of Nebraska



Newcomers: Why?

Simpler pace of life



Safety and Security



Low Housing Cost





Newcomers: Who?

- 36% lived there previously
- 68% attain bachelors degree
- 67% household incomes over \$50k
- 51% have children in household

May be leaving their career or underemployed

Yet, Quality of Life is the trump card



MIDDLE OF EVERYWHERE

How can we make local decisions while at the same time respect the reality of lives?

The REGION is the primary unit of interest

Mayor, how do you market your town if you don't know what's going on around you?

Cohort Lifecycle



*Avg. American moves 11.7 times in lifetime
(6 times at age 30)*

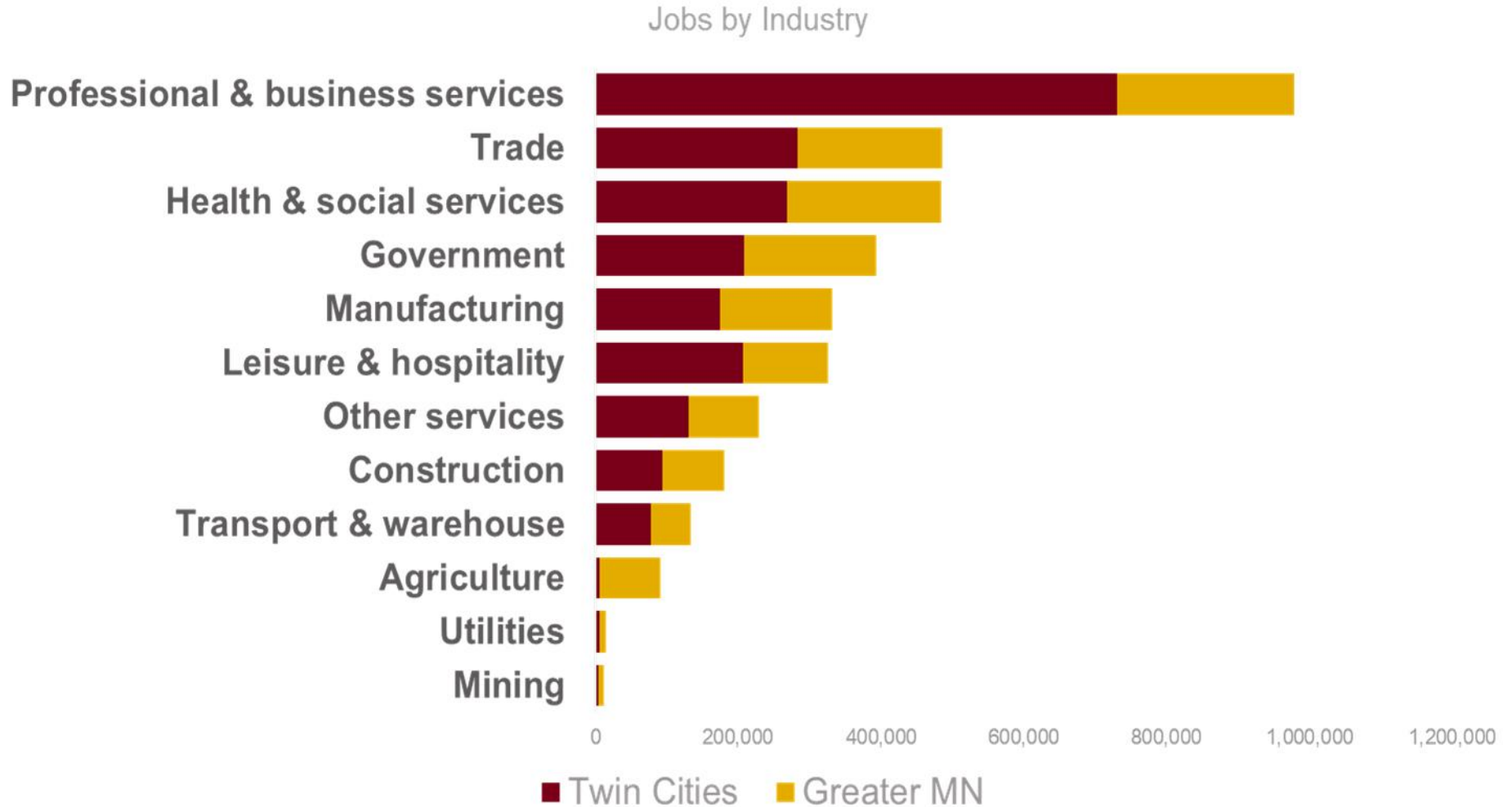


CHOOSING RURAL

- Brain Gain: migration to rural age 30-49
 - Also 50-64 but not as widespread
 - Brain drain is the rule, not the exception
 - Happening since the 1970s
- Newcomers look at 3-5 communities
 - Topical reasoning (local foods regions)
 - Assets vary by demographic
- **Employee recruitment must get past “warm body” syndrome**



Diversifying the rural economy

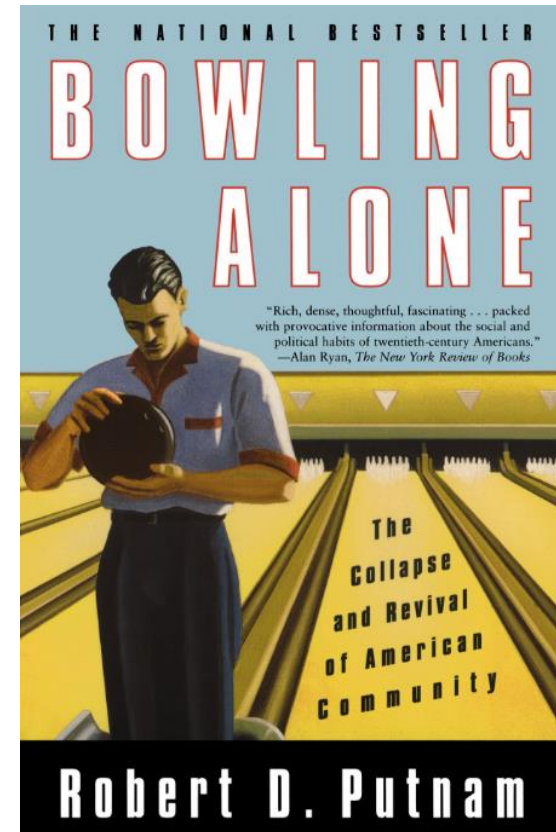


Rewriting the Rural Narrative: The Demand for Leadership in Rural America



SOCIAL LIFE IS DYING!

- First question: How many people do we need to run our town?
- We have numerous leadership programs currently training **leader supply**, but are we keeping up with the **organization demand**?



DEMAND TRENDS

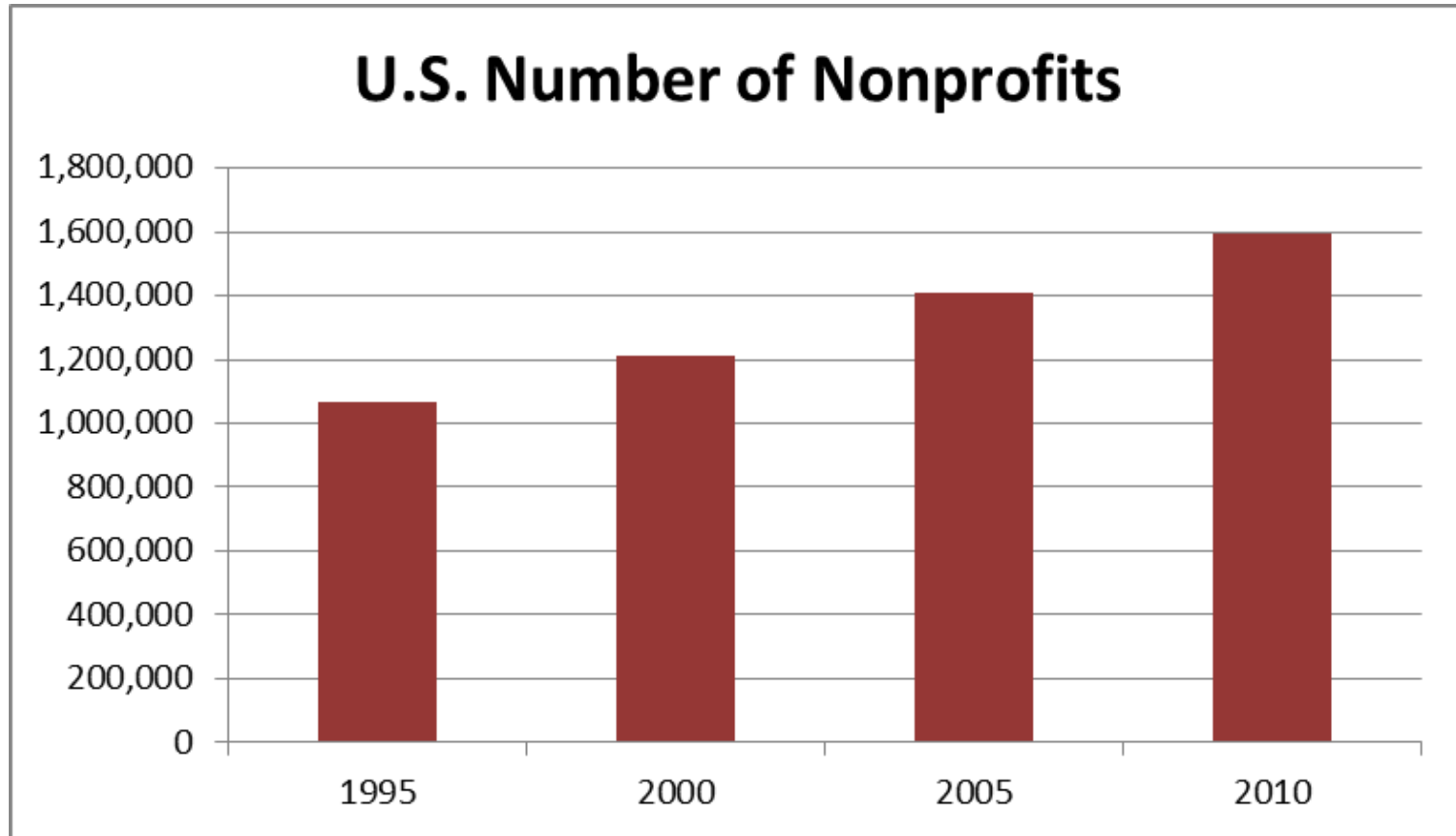
LEADERSHIP DEMAND

- How do we measure the demand that organizations make upon the resident population?
- In the US, there are 90,052 governmental units
 - These government units include counties, cities, townships, school districts, and “special districts” such as those providing oversight for cemeteries, highways, water/sewer systems, and soil/water conservation areas.
- We also have a vibrant nonprofit sector...

U.S. Census Bureau, 2007 Government Integrated Directory.

Social Life is Not Dying

Nonprofit Growth: 1995-2010



1995-2000	13.6%
2000-2005	16.3%
2005-2010	13.1%

National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau



Social Life is **Not Dying**

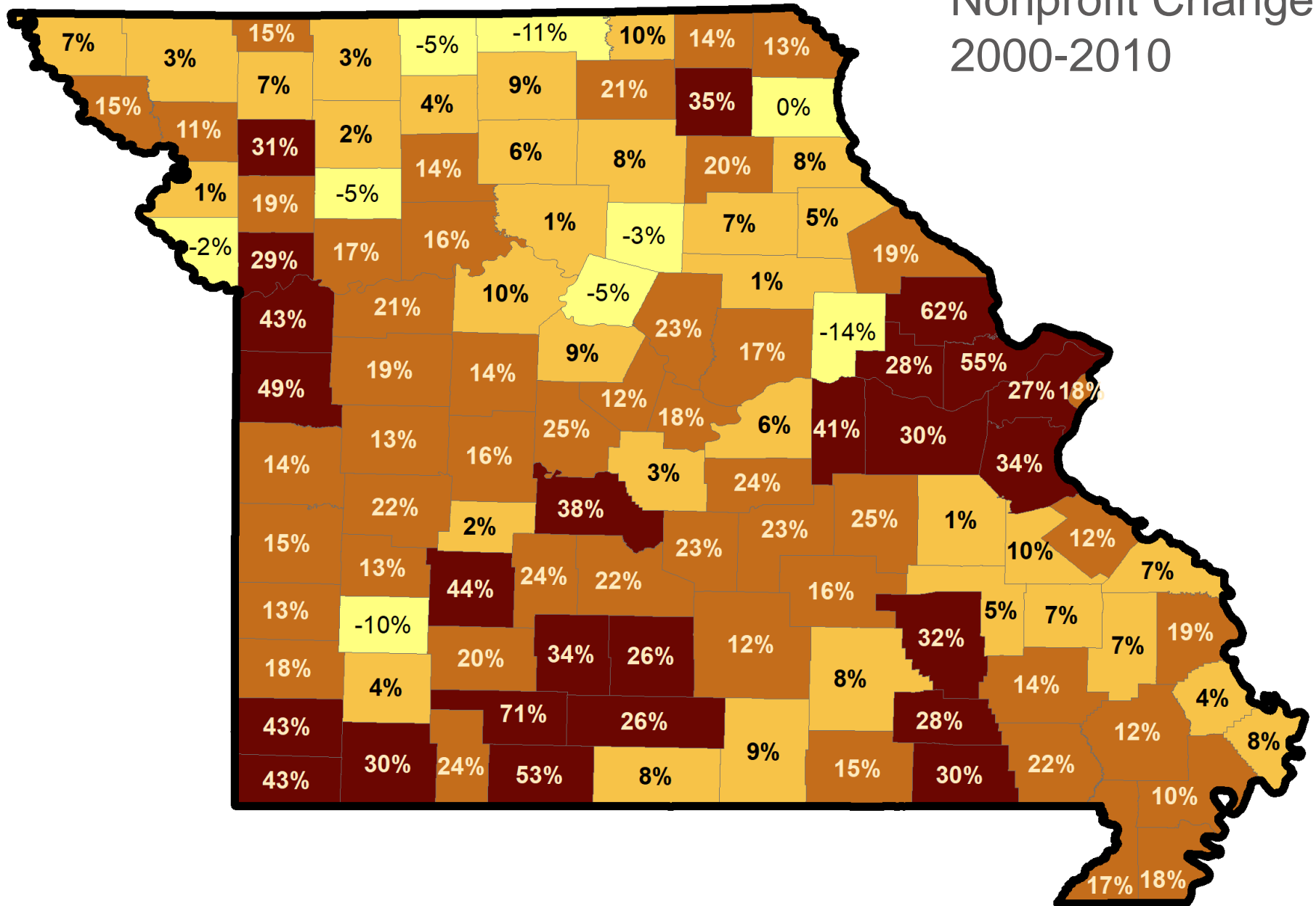
Nonprofit Growth: 2000-2010

Missouri:	Population	+ 7%
	# Nonprofits	+24%

This growth can be both good and bad news for rural places.

National Center for Charitable Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau

Nonprofit Change 2000-2010



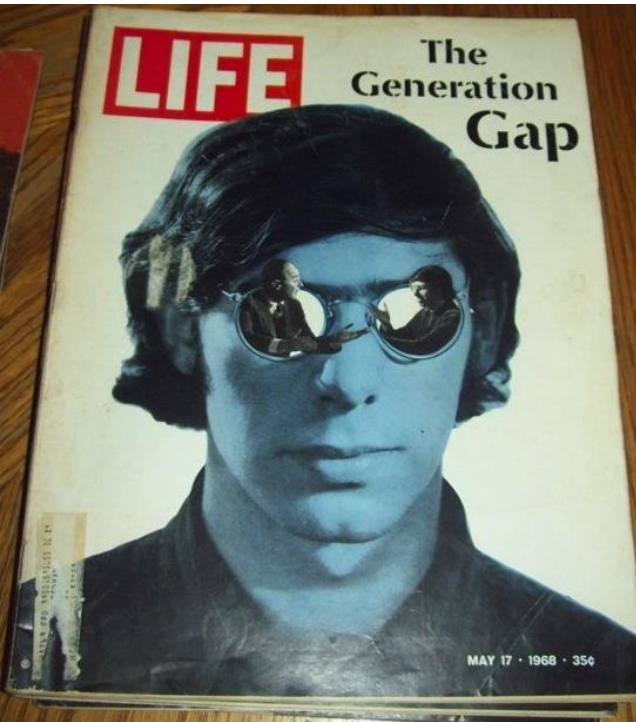
SUPPLY TRENDS

Social Organizations

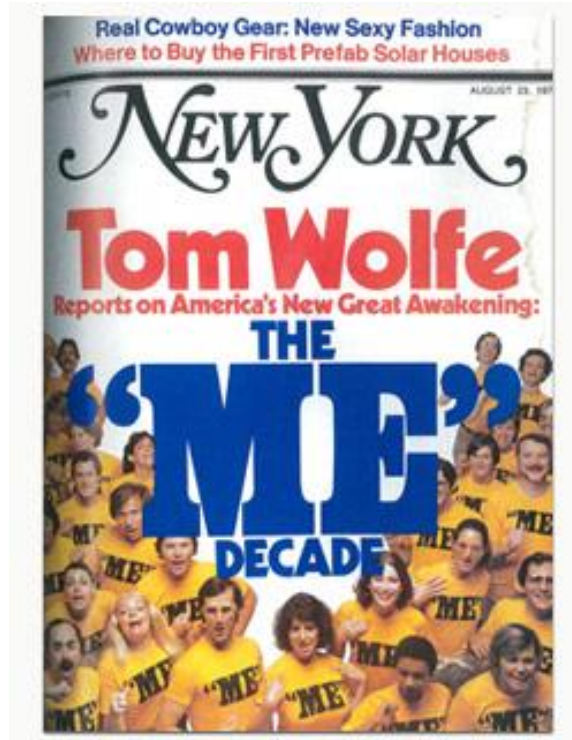
- Diversification of rural life socially, too
- Reflect the social interests at any given time
- Today is not 25 (or 50, or 100) years ago!
- The people today seem unable to “connect” with the existing social infrastructure



All of this has happened before...



1968



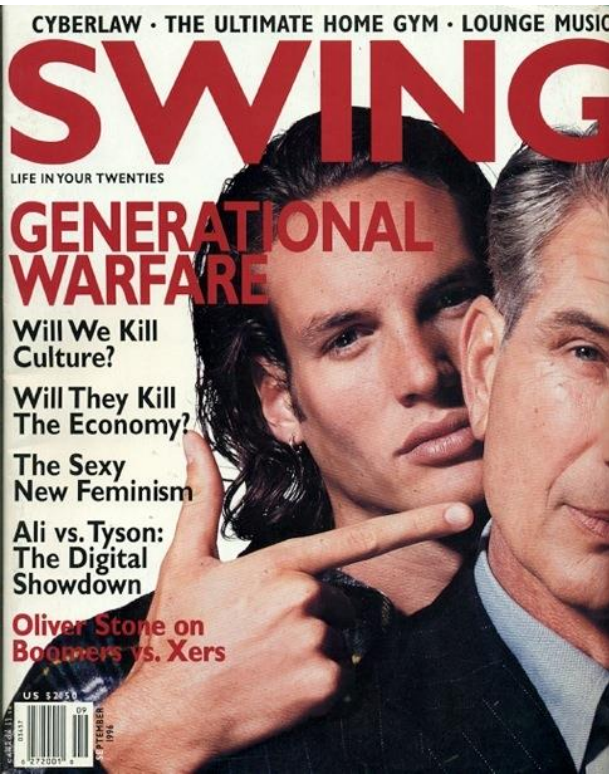
1976



1990



and it will happen again...



1996



2007



2013



Changing Types of Involvement - The Social Organization (historical)

- Place-based
- Broadly focused
- Word of mouth



Green & Haines. 2007. *Asset Building and Community Development*

Changing Types of Involvement - The Social Organization (present)

- Cover wide geographic area
- Narrowly focused goals/ self-interest
- Diverse social interests
- Technological – social media



The people today are challenged in “connecting” with the existing social infrastructure.

Green & Haines. 2007. *Asset Building and Community Development*

IMPLICATIONS

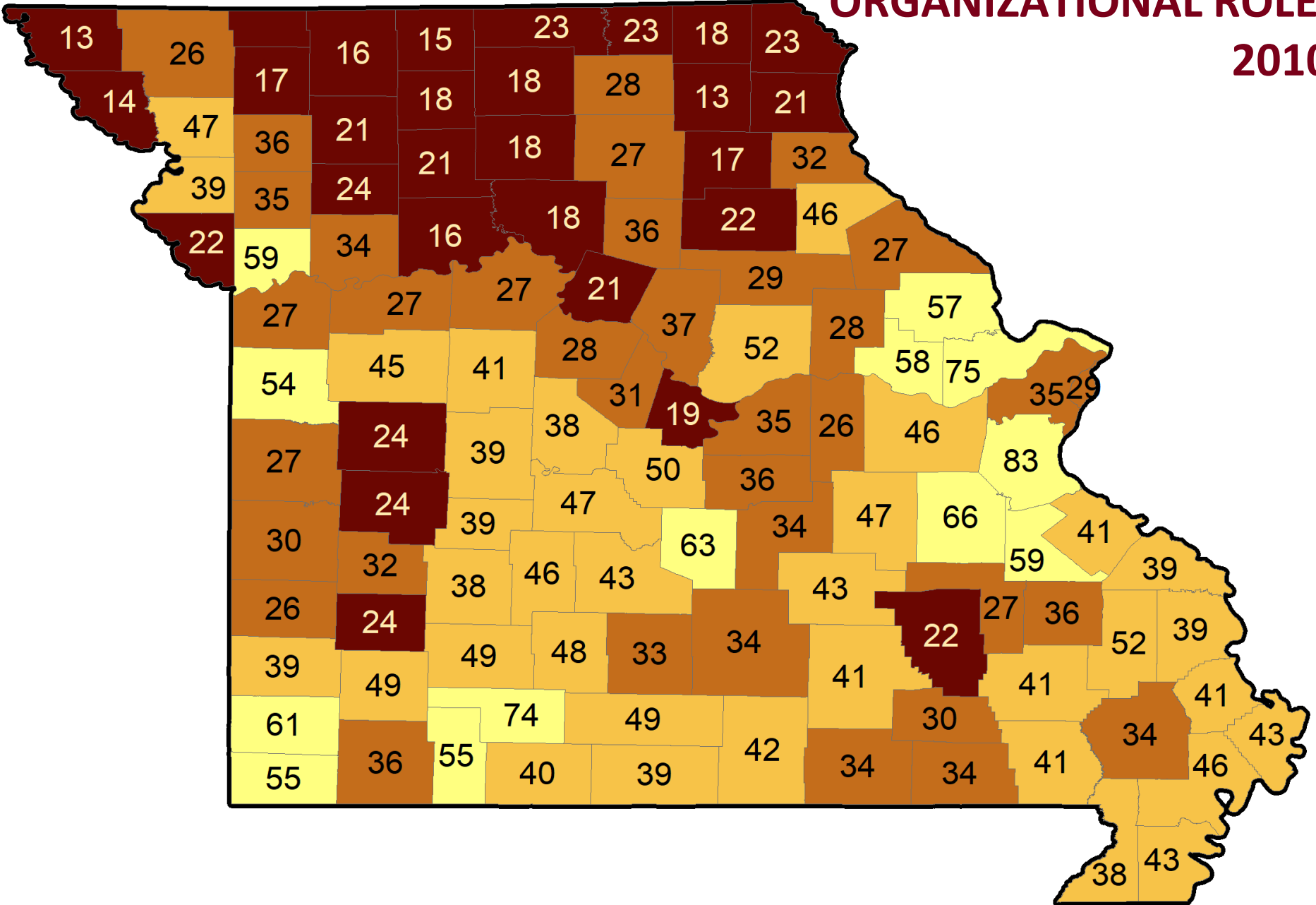
POPULATION PER ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE

Definition: Number of people each organization has available to them to locate a positional leader.

- Yes, people serve on multiple boards.
- Assumption of 3 per board is conservative.
- Age 18+ includes many age groups that are less active.



POPULATION PER ORGANIZATIONAL ROLE, 2010



SUMMARY STATISTICS, MISSOURI

Continuum Code	% Change Nonprofits 2000-2010	% Change Assets 2000-2010	Pop Per Org Role, 2010
1 (urban)	30%	86%	43
2	28%	81%	52
3	17%	105%	40
4	20%	46%	45
5	19%	105%	43
6	12%	98%	35
7	14%	66%	33
8	12%	40%	27
9 (rural)	12%	54%	25

VEHICLES OF SOCIAL INVESTMENT!

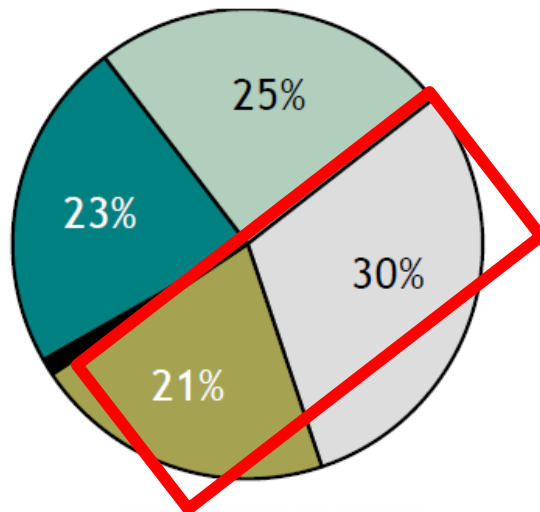
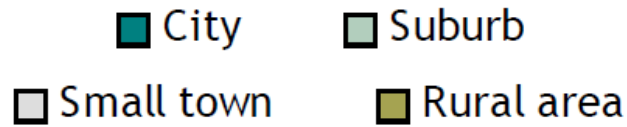
OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

- New residents are more than warm bodies
- Younger people (Millennials age 18-34)
 - Decentralized approaches to leadership
 - Simplified methods of communication
- Generational interests change yet organizations do not
- Start with a small request
- Engagement before leadership



Where We Live and Where We'd Like to Live

by community type



PewResearchCenter

20% live rural/small town

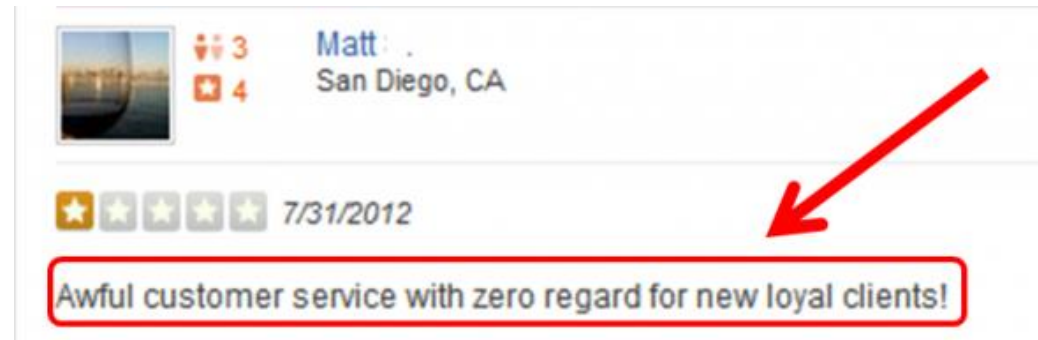
51% would PREFER to

MOVING IN : Demand for rural and small town living!

Source: "For Nearly Half of America, Grass is Greener Somewhere Else". Pew Research Center, 2009.

NEGATIVE NARRATIVES

- Would we allow this negative language to permeate a product or service we were selling?
- Why do we do it?
- Cannot continue to portray rural success as the exception



VANISHING POINT; Amid Dying Towns of Rural Plains, One Makes a Stand

*Prepare for one of the **largest demographic changes to rural America since 1930***



75% of rural homeowners are

Baby Boomers and older.

30% over 70 today!



Defining Communities through Investments

- Creating a positive narrative or reinforcing the negative?
- Are we investing in the future?
- Helping heal after fractures?
- Are we reaching new residents?
- Promoting cross-jurisdictional activity

ROLE OF PHILANTHROPY



We can lead action vs.
responding to change

- Building partnerships that may not have existed before.
- Engagement: Leading a conversation about the future.

Narrative Matters



You're not really from here....



The Rural Choice

These newcomers are:

- Creating groups, building their community
- Diversifying the economy
- Buying/starting businesses, working from home
- Living in a region (no longer a 1-stop-shop)
- More than warm bodies (employee recruitment)



The Rural Choice: Opening New Doors and Welcoming New Neighbors

The bottom line is people WANT
to live and move here for
what you are today and will be tomorrow,
not what may have been!

Rural Revitalization is Upon Us!



Rural Issues and Trends Webinars

<http://z.umn.edu/ruralwebinar/>

