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Nebraska Settlements: Status, Trends, and Policy Choices

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David R. DiMartino
with the assistance of
*Russell L. Smith**

This chapter looks at historical and contemporary trends in Nebraska's system of incorporated places. Particular attention is given to changes in the number and proportion of places in different population size categories, the movement of places between different size categories, and what Nebraska's settlement system is likely to look like in the future. A review of past and recent trends, together with forecasts about the future, indicates a likely increase in the number of very small places, major shifts for middle-sized places, and continued growth in the number of places over 5,000 population. Based upon these trends, three separate needs tied to each community type are identified. These include managing decline, strategic economic planning assistance, and growth center promotion. The chapter concludes with a discussion of criteria that might guide choices about which categories of places in Nebraska to assist and how to provide help to those places identified for assistance.

Introduction

More Nebraskans live in urban than rural places. In 1984, nearly three of every five Nebraskans lived in urban places (communities of 2,500 or more residents).¹

Although this statement is technically true, it fails to paint a complete picture of Nebraska's settlements. Such an assertion challenges us to re-examine our perceptions of the state and its communities.

*Following the untimely illness of Dr. DiMartino, Dr. Smith joined in completing this chapter, particularly the "Implications" and "Policy Choices" sections.

While the majority of the state's population lives in urban places, most of Nebraska's settlements have fewer than 2,500 residents. In fact, in 1980, 60 percent of the state's 535 incorporated places had populations of less than 500; over 90 percent of Nebraska settlements had less than 2,500 residents. This variation in the size of settlements is of particular interest because places of differing sizes have experienced different growth trends and may have different economic and community development needs.

The state's settlement system is analyzed to explain the potentially different needs of groups of settlements.² Attention is given to changes in the number and proportion of settlements in different population size categories over time, to movement of places between different population size categories in recent decades, and to projections of the makeup of Nebraska's settlement system in the future. The chapter concludes with a discussion of policy actions that the state might undertake, given recent and likely trends in Nebraska's settlement system.

Overview of Nebraska's Settlement System

Many of the state's settlements were established in the late 1800s in response to the development of transportation, such as overland trail routes, train routes, and water transportation, then agriculture, across the region. Thus, many of the state's settlements served first as transport centers and later as central places from which goods and services were provided to surrounding agricultural areas. Over time, interdependencies developed between places and a system of settlements evolved that encompassed many small villages and towns providing everyday necessities for convenience

and marketing and a few larger places that provided more specialized economic functions to a larger geographic territory, population, and trade area.

During the 1980s enormous economic changes have taken place in Nebraska. While the crisis confronting the state's agricultural sector has received much attention, the transportation and manufacturing sectors have been undergoing major change as well (Bare, Deichert, and Pursell, 1986). These significant economic changes have accelerated the long-term trends of a decrease in the number of farms, the population losses in many rural areas and small towns, and an increase in the number of business failures in many communities.

This collision of trends has raised new concern for the future of small places in Nebraska. Further decline in the population and resource base of these small settlements might translate into reductions in quality of life. Questions, such as: Will the state's small towns survive? and, Can anything be done to save small towns? are being raised, and not always quietly.

Central Place Theory

Central place theory is particularly relevant to, and can assist in an understanding of, the origin and evolution of Nebraska's communities.

Settlements are founded to bring people together to perform specific functions. These functions are most often associated with the production and exchange of goods, and may include manufacturing, marketing, and transportation. As a settlement grows, the functions performed in that place become more varied and complex.

Central place theory deals with one of the most basic functions performed in even the smallest of

settlements--marketing, or the transfer of goods and services from producer to consumer (Berry, 1967). The theory strives to explain the location, size, nature, and spacing of settlements within a proscribed area, using marketing principles.

Central place theory is particularly relevant to understanding the distribution and growth of settlements in areas of relatively less industrialization and more agriculture, such as Nebraska. These areas contain mature settlement systems that best express the principle of centrality.

Centrality is the quality of a settlement that makes it accessible, or central, to a population in an area surrounding the settlement. Access is essential for the distribution of goods and services by producers and for the acquisition of goods and services by consumers.

Using the consumer's perspective, buyers who travel to a settlement to purchase goods and services will select places that minimize their efforts as buying points. In other words, consumers will travel the shortest possible distance to acquire a given good or service. More frequently purchased goods will be acquired at nearby places and less frequently needed items at more distant locations.

Also, as the economic activity of a settlement increases, its ability to provide more services increases. That is why larger places provide greater number and variety of central functions than smaller settlements and why larger places command influence over larger market areas (trade areas or populations) than the smaller places. The more varied services available at larger centers attract greater numbers of consumers.

Consumers can, and do, split their loyalties. A buyer may travel to a nearby, very small place (hamlet) to purchase gasoline or daily foodstuffs. The buyer may

also travel to a slightly farther and larger place (village) to purchase hardware or get a haircut. A less-frequent trip may be made to an even farther and larger place (city) to buy clothing, visit a bank, or see a movie.

Central places come in all sizes and may function in their own capacities, while coexisting with other central places. Such a network of central places of various sizes interacting with one another is a central place hierarchy. The size and distribution of places within a settlement system may portray a central place hierarchy. Nebraska's settlement system is influenced strongly by central place principles and exemplifies central place patterns.

According to this theory, central place patterns are not static, they change. Some places grow with additional functions, and other places decline with the loss or change of functions.

Many of Nebraska's settlements were founded as central places and continue to perform primarily in this capacity. Others have lost part, or all, of this function, frequently as the result of improved transport technology which has caused consumers to bypass smaller market places in favor of larger ones. The following analysis of Nebraska's settlement system should be viewed in light of the dynamic changes that are occurring in the central place patterns.

Nebraska's Settlement System

A settlement system is the collection or set of places that exists in an area. A settlement system includes both incorporated and unincorporated places. However, analyses are usually limited to incorporated places because such places are defined legally and

delineated by the jurisdictions (counties) in which they are located. As such, data are more readily available for incorporated places than for the unincorporated. In this chapter, settlement system refers to all incorporated places in Nebraska.

Nebraska's settlement system included 535 incorporated places in 1980. The populations of incorporated places ranged from 2 in Gross, Nebraska, to 314,255 in the city of Omaha. The size distribution of places between these extremes was very uneven. Smaller places far outnumbered larger places, a condition typical of settlement systems throughout the United States.

In 1980, over half (60 percent) of Nebraska's incorporated places had a population base of less than 500 residents, nearly three-fourths (71.4 percent) had less than 800 residents, and over three-fourths (76.4 percent) had fewer than 1,000 residents (table 1).

Historically, the number of incorporated places in Nebraska's settlement system has grown. The number of incorporated places increased continuously during each decade from 1860 to 1970. Table 2 shows that during the 1970s there was a slight decrease in the number of places. At its maximum in 1970, Nebraska's settlement system included 539 incorporated places. The total population of those places numbered 1,134,307, or 72.3 percent of the state's population. In 1980, incorporated places were located in each of Nebraska's 93 counties, except Banner and McPherson Counties.

A change in the number of places in Nebraska's settlement system results from incorporations, disincorporations, and annexations or mergers. Any settlement with 100 residents may petition its county for incorporation in Nebraska. Likewise, any place may petition for disincorporation. However, places that

Table 1 - Incorporated places in Nebraska, by size category, 1980

Size category	Incorporated places	
	Number	Percent
1-99	70	13.1
100-199	95	17.8
200-299	67	12.5
300-399	53	9.9
400-499	36	6.7
500-599	22	4.1
600-799	39	7.3
800-999	27	5.0
1,000-1,499	50	9.3
1,500-1,999	21	3.9
2,000-2,499	6	1.1
2,500-2,999	5	.9
3,000-3,999	8	1.5
4,000-4,999	5	.9
5,000-9,999	19	3.6
10,000-49,999	10	1.9
50,000 or more	2	.4
Total	535	99.9 ¹

¹Percentage totals to less than 100 percent due to rounding.

decrease in population to fewer than 100 residents are not required to disincorporate.

Two general types of annexations can take place. In one, a municipality annexes adjacent unincorporated land. In the second, another incorporated municipality annexes or merges with an incorporated place. Both types of annexations are governed by state law, and criteria vary somewhat by size of community. Since 1920, the cities of Grand Island, Lincoln, and Omaha have annexed other incorporated places.

A total of 554 settlements have been incorporated in Nebraska. Yet, the number of places in Nebraska's settlement system was fairly well established by 1930, with only 13 incorporations, 3 disincorporations, and 4

Table 2 - Incorporated places in Nebraska: Number, percent, and change by size categories, 1880-1980

Size category	Year										
	1980	1970	1960	1950	1940	1930	1920	1910	1900	1890	1880
	Number										
<2,500	486	491	494	494	495	494	479	427	346	231	62
2,500-49,999	47	46	41	38	34	33	28	26	20	14	7
50,000 or more	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	0
Total	535	539	537	534	531	529	509	454	267	247	69
	Percent										
<2,500	90.8	91.1	92.0	92.5	93.2	93.4	94.1	94.1	94.3	93.5	89.9
2,500-49,999	8.8	8.5	7.6	7.1	6.4	6.2	5.5	5.7	5.4	5.7	10.1
50,000 or more	.4	.4	.4	.4	.4	.4	.4	.2	.3	.8	0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Size category	Year										
	1970-1980	1960-1970	1950-1960	1940-1950	1930-1940	1920-1930	1910-1920	1900-1910	1890-1900	1880-1890	
	Number change										
<2,500	-5	-3	0	-1	1	15	52	81	115	169	
2,500-49,999	1	5	3	4	1	5	2	6	6	7	
50,000 or more	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-1	2	
	Percentage change										
<2,500	-1.0	-.6	0	-.2	.2	3.1	12.2	23.4	49.8	272.6	
2,500-49,999	2.2	12.2	7.9	11.8	3.0	17.9	7.7	30.0	42.9	100.0	
50,000 or more	0	0	0	0	0	0	100.0	0	-50.0	200.0	

annexations of other incorporated places occurring since 1930 (table 3).

Of the 554 settlements incorporated in Nebraska, 535 continued to exist as incorporated places in 1980, a survival rate of 96.6 percent. If the ten annexations since 1900 are included as survivors, as part of larger places, the survival rate increases to 98.4 percent. Whichever computation is used, most of Nebraska's settlements, once incorporated, continue to survive as incorporated places.

Metropolitan, Urban, and Rural Places. Frequently, settlements are categorized by size of population. Two of Nebraska's incorporated places have populations that are large enough to be categorized as metropolitan places (Lincoln and Omaha).³ In 1980, Lincoln had 176,932 residents and Omaha had 314,255. They have been the state's only metropolitan cities since 1920. The two

Table 3 - New incorporations, disincorporations, and annexations in Nebraska, by census decade and size category, 1890-1980

Size category 1890-1980	Year									
	1970-1980	1960-1970	1950-1960	1940-1950	1930-1940	1920-1930	1910-1920	1900-1910	1890-1900	1880-1890
	Number									
Incorporations:										
Under 100	0	0	0	1	1	1	4	5	2	14
100-499	1	1	3	2	2	17	58	76	99	259
500-999	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	16	18	26
1,000-2,499	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	5	7
2,500-4,999	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
5,000-29,999	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1	3	3	3	3	19	63	88	124	307
Disincorporations:										
Under 100	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3
100-499	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
500-999	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1,000-2,499	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2,500-4,999	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
5,000-29,999	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	4
Annexations:										
Under 100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
100-499	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
500-999	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
1,000-2,499	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	4
2,500-4,999	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	3
5,000-29,999	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Total	2	1	0	0	1	0	7	0	0	11

cities constitute only 0.4 percent of the state's incorporated places, but contain 31 percent of Nebraska's population.

In addition to Omaha and Lincoln, 47 incorporated places in Nebraska qualify as urban places--cities with 2,500 or more residents (table 2). While these 49 places constitute only 9.2 percent of the state's settlements, they include the majority (56.2 percent) of Nebraska's population. The number of urban places in Nebraska has increased consistently since statehood, and has increased as a proportion of all places since 1900.

Urban places are located in 42 of the state's 93 counties. However, the relatively larger urban places are located in a few counties throughout the state. For example, there were only 12 places with 10,000 or more

residents in 1980, and all but one were located in the eastern one-third of the state or the Platte Valley.

Most of Nebraska's incorporated places have fewer than 2,500 residents. This is true in most states, with 69.7 percent of all U.S. incorporated places having a population of less than 2,500. Places with a population of less than 2,500 in Nebraska totaled 486 in 1980, or 90.8 percent of all incorporated places in the state (table 2). These places include only 16 percent of the state's population, a decline in absolute numbers since 1940, and a decrease as a proportion of all places since 1900.

Detailed View of Settlement System Trends.

Trends in the number and proportion of three types of incorporated places (metropolitan, urban, and rural) were examined to provide an overview of Nebraska's settlement system. To provide additional detail, particularly for the numerous small places in the state, incorporated settlements were grouped into eight size categories (table 4).

Table 4 shows that at the turn of the century, the number of places was increasing in each of the eight size categories. Settlement was continuing in the state, and numerous places of various sizes were being incorporated. That trend continued into the 1920s. Beginning in 1930, size categories began to differ in the number of places gained or lost.

The number of places in each of the urban size categories has increased or remained essentially unchanged since 1930 (table 4). The number of metropolitan places has remained unchanged since 1920. The number of places just below metropolitan size (10,000 to 49,999 residents) has increased slightly, and consistently, throughout each decade since 1930. The number of places with a population of 5,000 to 9,999 has

Table 4 - Incorporated places in Nebraska, by size category, 1880-1980

Size category	Year											
	1980	1970	1960	1950	1940	1930	1920	1910	1900	1890	1880	
	Number											
<100	70	76	67	50	21	16	8	5	3	1	3	
100-499	251	262	272	279	304	296	290	260	213	132	27	
500-999	88	80	86	91	101	109	105	99	86	59	20	
1,000-2,499	77	73	69	74	69	73	76	63	44	39	12	
2,500-4,999	18	18	19	21	19	18	16	14	11	6	5	
5,000-9,999	19	18	13	9	8	9	9	9	7	5	0	
10,000-49,999	10	10	9	8	7	6	3	3	2	3	2	
50,000 or more	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	0	
Total	535	539	537	534	531	529	509	454	367	247	69	
	Percent											
<100	13.1	14.1	12.5	9.4	4.0	3.0	1.6	1.1	0.8	0.4	4.3	
100-499	46.9	48.6	50.7	52.2	57.3	56.0	57.0	57.3	58.0	53.4	39.1	
500-999	16.4	14.8	16.0	17.0	19.0	20.6	20.6	21.8	23.4	23.9	29.0	
1,000-2,499	14.4	13.5	12.9	13.9	13.0	13.8	14.9	13.9	12.0	15.8	17.4	
2,500-4,999	3.4	3.3	3.5	3.8	3.6	3.4	3.2	3.0	3.0	2.4	7.2	
5,000-9,999	3.6	3.3	2.4	1.7	1.5	1.7	1.8	2.0	1.9	2.0	0	
10,000-49,999	1.9	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.3	1.1	.6	.7	.5	1.2	2.9	
50,000 or more	.4	.4	.4	.4	.4	.4	.4	.2	.3	.8	0	
Total ¹	100.1	99.9	100.1	99.9	100.1	100.0	100.1	100.0	99.9	99.9	99.9	

¹ Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

increased markedly since 1950, but remained essentially unchanged from 1910 to 1950. By contrast, the number of places in the smallest urban size category (places of 2,500 to 4,999 residents) has changed minimally since 1930. However, the number of places increased from 1930 to 1950, and then decreased from 1950 to 1970.

These figures demonstrate that, while individual urban places may have decreased or increased in population, the number of urban places has increased in Nebraska throughout this century.

The pattern of change among the rural settlement categories is much more varied than that among the urban size categories. As noted earlier, the number of rural places has decreased since 1940. The number of places with 1,000 to 2,499 residents, which is just under urban size, was nearly unchanged from 1920 to 1980, although the numbers varied irregularly during this period. The number of places decreased from 1920 to

1940, increased, then decreased from 1940 to 1960, and increased from 1960 to 1980 (table 4).

The number of places in the two intermediate rural size categories (places with 100 to 499 and 500 to 999 residents) has declined since about midcentury. The number of places with 500 to 999 residents decreased from 1930 to 1970, but increased after 1970 to the level attained in the 1950s. Places with populations of 100 to 499 have decreased in number since 1940. Significantly, the proportion of all places with populations of 100 to 499 fell to below 50 percent of all settlements in 1970 for the first time since 1890 (table 4).

The smallest category of rural places, population of less than 100 persons, is too small for incorporation. Places that have lost residents since incorporation are not required to disincorporate because of their lesser populations.

The number and proportion of incorporated places with fewer than 100 residents have increased throughout most of this century. The increases were constant from 1890 to 1970 (table 4). The number and proportion of places with less than 100 residents decreased from 1970 to 1980, the first time in this century. While several places disincorporated from 1970 to 1980, most of the decrease in the number of places in this category came from a resurgence in population, thus, shifting these places to the category for 100 to 499 residents.

Among the 70 places with fewer than 100 residents in 1980, most (57.1 percent) fell below 100 between 1940 and 1960, and nearly three-fourths (71.4 percent) fell below that level between 1940 and 1970. Table 5 shows that the proportion of places with a population of less than 100 fell below that level at an increasing rate from 1910 to 1950, then with decreasing frequency through 1980.

Table 5 - Incorporated places in Nebraska with a population of less than 100 in 1980, by decade of decline

Decade	Incorporated places	
	Number	Percent
1970-80	5	7.1
1960-70	10	14.3
1950-60	16	22.9
1940-50	24	34.3
1930-40	6	8.6
1920-30	3	4.3
1910-20	1	1.4
Prior to 1910	5	7.1
Total	70	100.0

The populations of many of Nebraska's settlements have decreased below the 100 required for incorporation. If the 70 places with populations below 100 in 1980 were required to disincorporate because of their small size, the remaining 465 incorporated places would constitute an 83.9 percent survival rate for all places ever incorporated in Nebraska. This rate is significantly lower than the 96.6 percent survival rate cited earlier.

Table 4 indicates that the number of settlements in the smallest and largest size categories have increased generally, with rural places--communities with a population of 100 to 2,500--decreasing in number, particularly since 1930.

Movement Between Size Categories. The information available on the number of incorporated places in Nebraska by size category and time period indicates the following trends:

- The number of incorporated places in Nebraska's settlement system increased up to the 1930s and has remained fairly constant since then.
- The number and proportion of urban places within the settlement system have increased, while places below urban size have declined as a proportion of all incorporated places.
- The proportion of all places in the smallest size category (population of less than 100) and in the largest categories (populations of 5,000 to 9,999 and 10,000 to 49,999) increased from 1930 to 1980. The proportion of incorporated places in the intermediate rural categories (populations of 100 to 499 and 500 to 999) declined, while the proportion of places in the larger rural category (population of 1,000 to 2,499) and the first urban category (population of 2,500 to 4,999) remained fairly constant.

Displaying Trends. Tables 6, 7, and 8 compare the distribution of places by size category at various times for 10 year periods from 1950 to 1980. This information can be used to portray the movement of places between settlement size categories.

The main diagonal of the matrix contained in each of the three tables extends from upper-left to lower-right (boldface numbers) and identifies the number of places that remained in the same size category during the decade. Figures to the left and right of the data cells along the diagonal identify the number of places shifting to the next larger (right) or smaller (left) size category from beginning to end of the decade. Figures lying outside the three diagonals in the matrix indicate the

number of places that grew, or declined by two or more size categories, during the decade. This is referred to as leapfrogging.

The inner matrix includes all places that were present in both years. The top row and left-hand column enumerate the newly incorporated, disincorporated, and annexed places, respectively. These places were present in only one of the years. The two metropolitan places were not included in the matrix, because of their vastly different sizes and their unchanging size category.

Table 6 shows places by size category for the most recent full decade, 1970 to 1980. The number of places totaled 533 in 1980, and 537 in 1970, not including the two metropolitan places present in each year. A total of 532 places were present in both years, and 538 places were represented in one of the years. Thus, many of the places existed in both years, and 91.6 percent remained in the same size category from 1970 to 1980 (boldface numbers). Among the places that changed size categories during the decade, more (82.2 percent) shifted to larger categories, or grew, than shifted to smaller categories (17.8 percent).

Table 6 - Distribution of incorporated places in Nebraska among size categories in consecutive census years, 1970-80¹

Size category	Annexed and disincorporated 1970-80	1980 Population					Sub-total	Total
		<100	100-499	500-999	1,000-2,499	2,500-4,999		
1970:								
New 70-80			1				1	1
100								
100-499	3	65	8				73	76
500-999		5	241	16			262	262
1,000-2,499	1		1	71	8		80	80
2,500-4,999				1	69	2	72	73
5,000-49,999	1				0	15	18	18
						1	27	28
Subtotal	5	70	250	88	77	18	532	537
Total	5	70	251	88	77	18	533	538

¹Totals do not include the two metropolitan centers, Lincoln and Omaha.

Table 7 - Distribution of incorporated places in Nebraska among size categories in consecutive census years, 1960-70¹

Size category	Annexed and disincorporated 1960-70	-1970- Population						Sub-total	Total
		<100	100-499	500-999	1,000-2,499	2,500-4,999	5,000-49,999		
1960: New 60-70			1		1	1		3	3
<100		64	3					67	67
100-499		12	252	8				272	272
500-999	1		6	70	9			85	86
1,000-2,499				2	63	2	2	69	69
2,500-4,999					0	15	4	19	19
5,000-49,999						0	22	22	22
Subtotal	1	76	261	80	72	17	28	534	535
Total	1	76	262	80	73	18	28	537	538

¹Totals do not include the two metropolitan centers, Lincoln and Omaha.

Table 8 - Distribution of incorporated places in Nebraska among size categories in consecutive census years, 1950-60¹

Size category	Annexed and disincorporated 1950-60	-1960- Population						Sub-total	Total
		<100	100-499	500-999	1,000-2,499	2,500-4,999	5,000-49,999		
1950: New 50-60				3				3	3
<100		47	3					50	50
100-499		20	248	10	1			278	279
500-999			18	69	4			91	91
1,000-2,499				7	64	3		74	74
2,500-4,999					0	16	5	21	21
5,000-49,999						0	17	17	17
Subtotal	0	67	269	86	69	19	22	532	532
Total	0	67	272	86	69	19	22	535	535

¹Totals do not include the two metropolitan centers, Lincoln and Omaha.

Table 9 summarizes these trends by decade for the period 1950-80. The net balance of shifts between categories resulted in the smallest two categories--populations of 100 to 499 and less than 100--experiencing a net loss in number of places. The remaining categories experienced a net gain or no net change.

Overall, during the 1970-80 decade more places moved to larger categories than to smaller categories. This must be viewed, however, from the perspective that

Table 9 - Shift of incorporated places in Nebraska to larger or smaller size categories, during consecutive census years, 1950-80

Time period and size category	Shift with larger			Shift with smaller		
	To larger	From larger	Net exchange with larger	To smaller	From smaller	Net exchange with smaller
	Number			Number		
1970-1980:						
<100	8	5	-3	0	0	0
100-499	16	1	-15	5	8	3
500-999	8	1	-7	1	16	15
1,000-2,499	2	0	-2	1	8	7
2,500-4,999	3	1	-2	0	2	2
5,000-49,999	0	0	0	1	3	2
Total	37	8	-29	8	37	29
1960-1970:						
<100	3	12	9	0	0	0
100-499	8	6	-2	12	3	-9
500-999	9	2	-7	6	8	2
1,000-2,499	4	0	-4	2	9	7
2,500-4,999	4	0	-4	0	2	2
5,000-49,999	0	0	0	0	6	6
Total	28	20	-8	20	28	8
1950-1960:						
<100	3	20	17	0	0	0
100-499	11	18	7	20	3	-17
500-999	4	7	3	18	10	-8
1,000-2,499	3	0	-3	7	5	-2
2,500-4,999	5	0	-5	0	3	3
5,000-49,999	0	0	0	0	5	5
Total	26	45	19	45	26	-19

most cities (91.5 percent) remained in the same population category during this period.

The question arises of whether the pattern of change evident for the most recent period (1970-80) is typical of recent decades. A comparison of tables 6, 7, and 8 demonstrates differences over the three most recent decades, and, therefore, the significance of the most recent period. Other places shifted between size categories during the three decades. The questions are, in which direction did they shift, and did they shift to larger categories (growth) or smaller categories (decline)?

Table 9 summarizes these trends by decade from 1950 to 1980. The number of places shifting from smaller to larger categories increased during the three decades by 26 (4.9 percent) in 1950-60, by 28 (5.2 percent) in 1960-70, and by 37 (7.0 percent) in 1970-80. Conversely, and more dramatically, the number of places shifting from larger to smaller categories decreased by 45 (8.5 percent) in 1950-60, by 20 (3.7 percent) in 1960-70, and by 8 (or 1.5 percent) during 1970-80.

While all size categories lost or gained (or lost and gained) places during the three decades, a significant change in the net exchange of places with smaller and larger categories occurred during each decade. During the 1950-60 decade, the smallest and largest size categories (populations of less than 100 and 5,000 to 49,999) experienced a greater gain than loss of places, while the intervening size categories experienced a greater loss than gain (table 9). While the three smallest size categories experienced a net gain from larger categories and a net loss to smaller size categories, the two largest size categories experienced net losses to larger categories and net gains from smaller categories. However, more places went up to the next larger size category, than down to the next smaller category. The split occurred within the size category for a population of 1,000 to 2,499, which lost places to both larger and smaller categories. At that time, there appeared to be a tendency for larger places to grow and smaller places to decline in population.

The pattern had changed by the 1970-80 decade. The two smallest size categories (populations of less than 100 and 100 to 499) were experiencing a greater loss than gain of places, while all other size categories experienced a greater, or equal, gain than loss (table 9). All size categories were experiencing a net loss to

larger categories and a net gain from smaller categories. Thus, by 1970-80, places tended to be moving up the settlement system hierarchy.

Nebraska's Settlement System in the Future

Policy options for addressing the community and economic development needs of Nebraska's communities must be developed. A base of information regarding past trends and an understanding of how the settlement system is likely to evolve should be formulated. For example, will the number of communities with a population of less than 100 increase or decrease in the coming decades?

Three Models of Change

Despite the need to plan for the future, making projections is hazardous. The future distribution of places among the various size categories of Nebraska's settlement system depends on many factors. Still, methods are available for speculating about the future distribution of Nebraska communities among size categories.

One projection tool is Markov analysis, which is based on the concept that populations move through various categories of existence over time (Howard, 1960). In simplest terms, a Markov model estimates the future distribution of a population, that is, settlements, among several various states, or size categories, at a future time. The future distribution is a function of (1) previous movements of the population among various states from which we can estimate probabilities of transition, and (2) the beginning distribution of the population among the categories.

Table 10 reports the results of three Markov models developed to forecast the proportion of Nebraska's settlements in each of six size categories. Model A estimates what Nebraska's settlement system might look like in 1990 and 2000, if the growth pattern of the 1970s had not occurred. The estimates for Model A, then, project future distributions using 1960-70 probabilities of transition and the 1970 distribution of places among the size categories.

Model A forecasts an increase in the proportion of settlements in the smallest size category (population of less than 100) for both 1990 and 2000. Had the growth

Table 10 - Markov projection of the distribution of places in Nebraska among population size categories, 1970-2000¹

Model	Year				Trend summary
	1970	1980	1990	2000	
	Percent				
A. Projection based on initial state in 1970 and probability of change 1960-70:					
<100	14.2	-	16.8	17.8	increase
100-499	48.9	-	45.6	44.1	decrease
500-999	15.0	-	13.4	12.8	decrease
1,000-2,499	13.5	-	14.3	14.5	increase
2,500-4,999	3.2	-	2.7	2.5	decrease
5,000-49,999	5.2	-	7.3	8.3	increase
B. Projection based on initial state in 1980 and probability of change 1970-80:					
<100	-	13.2	12.5	12.0	decrease
100-499	-	47.0	44.8	42.8	decrease
500-999	-	16.5	17.6	18.6	increase
1,000-2,499	-	14.5	15.6	16.8	increase
2,500-4,999	-	3.4	3.1	3.4	no change
5,000-49,999	-	5.4	6.3	6.5	increase
C. Projection based on initial state in 1980 and probability of change 1960-70:					
<100	-	13.2	14.6	15.8	increase
100-499	-	47.0	45.4	43.9	decrease
500-999	-	16.5	15.3	14.4	decrease
1,000-2,499	-	14.5	15.0	15.4	increase
2,500-4,999	-	3.4	3.1	2.9	decrease
5,000-49,999	-	5.4	6.5	7.7	increase

¹ - not applicable.

Initial states are actual proportions in each size category.

of the 1970s not taken place, then 17.8 percent of Nebraska's incorporated places would have a population of less than 100 by 2000.

A look at table 7 indicates that the increase in the number of places in the smallest category (population of less than 100) would be primarily a function of population declines in places in the size category for a population of 100-499. This model indicates that size categories for populations of 1,000 to 2,499 and 5,000 to 49,999 would also increase. The former size category would increase primarily as a result of growth in the number of places in the size category for a population of 500 to 999.

Model B provides a forecast of the distribution of Nebraska's places based on the growth and transition patterns of the 1970-80 decade. Thus, the model projects the proportion of cities in each of the size categories, given the distribution in 1980, and given the movement among categories during the 1970s.

The results of this model indicate that the proportion of Nebraska's places in the two smallest size categories (populations of less than 100 and 100 to 499) will decrease. All other size categories, except for the category for a population of 2,500 to 4,999 will increase. It is interesting that the proportion of places forecast by Model B to be in the smallest size category is about 50 percent less than that forecast by Model A for 2000. Overall, this forecast indicates fairly strong movement up the urban hierarchy.

Model C is based on the distribution of places in 1980, but uses transitional probabilities from the 1960-70 decade. This model estimates what Nebraska's system of settlements might look like in 1990 and 2000 if the pre-1970s pattern of growth continues for the remainder of this decade.

Model C forecasts a trend much like that of Model A. The dynamics of change outlined for Model A apply to Model C. The proportion of places with a population of less than 100 will increase as a result of the downward movement of settlements in the size category for a population of 100 to 499, while growth in the size category for a population of 1,000 to 2,499 will occur as places in the size category for a population of 500 to 999 move up the hierarchy. At the same time, places in the size category for a population for 2,500 to 4,999 will move up, thus, increasing the proportion of settlements in the size category for a population of 5,000 to 49,999.

Alternative Scenarios

If the trend characteristic of the 1970s were to continue in the 1980s, the distribution forecast by Model B would indicate likely declines in the number of places in the smaller size categories and increases in the number of settlements in the larger size categories. Using the 1970s forecast (Model B), then, most places would grow and move up the settlement system hierarchy. As a result, the smallest category would decline and the larger categories would increase in their proportion of all Nebraska incorporated places.

If, on the other hand, the growth and transition pattern of the 1960s (and earlier) were reestablished, the smallest size categories would increase. At the same time, many of the remaining size categories would increase in number as the larger towns became larger and assumed new functions in response to shifts in the settlement system. The smallest places would lose population and move down the settlement system hierarchy in this scenario.

Which alternative scenario is most likely to occur? Recent estimates indicate that the growth pattern of the 1970s may have ended and that the period may have been an aberration. Table 11 provides summary information about changes in population trends during 1980-84. While complete data are not provided, information from this period indicate a reversal of the population turnaround that took place in most size categories during the 1970s in Nebraska.

More than half of the places in four size categories (populations of 100 to 499, 500 to 999, 1,000 to 2,499, and 2,500 to 4,999) lost population between 1980 and 1984. In the other three categories (populations of less than 100, 5,000 to 49,999, and 50,000 and more), the proportions growing and declining in population were fairly similar to the previous decades' trend. Overall, from 1980 to 1984 about 60 percent of Nebraska's incorporated places lost population, while from 1970 to 1980 the proportion losing population was slightly less than 31 percent. Given this information, projections using probabilities of transition drawn from the pre-1970s (table 10 and Model C) may provide the most realistic picture of the future of Nebraska's settlement system.

Table 11 - Population trend for Nebraska's incorporated places, by size category, 1980-84

Size category	Population trend						
	Growth		Decline		Unchanged		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
<100	33	47.1	33	47.1	4	5.7	70
100-499	119	47.4	127	50.6	5	2.0	251
500-999	30	34.1	58	65.9	0	0	88
1,000-2,499	20	26.0	57	74.0	0	0	77
2,500-4,999	5	29.4	12	70.6	0	0	17
5,000-49,999	21	72.4	8	27.6	0	0	29
50,000+	2	100.0	0	0	0	0	2

Implications of Changes in the Settlement System

In Nebraska, and in many of the agriculturally dependent states of the West North Central Region, an increasing proportion of states' settlement systems will be comprised of small towns in the future. The empirical information presented in this chapter indicates that the proportion of small places, particularly those with a population of less than 100, has been, and likely will continue, to increase in the future. At the same time, the proportion of places with a population of more than 5,000 has been, and also will continue, to increase. These patterns result from shifts of settlements among size categories and represent an adjustment to changing economies, transportation networks, and technological forces.

The 1970s were a period of fairly strong growth in Nebraska's incorporated places, resulting in a number of places moving up from the smallest size categories. However, in the future, the more general long-term trend will reassert itself. A review of historical data on trends in Nebraska's settlement system, as well as projections of future trends, indicates the following:

- During the rest of this century, the state's smallest towns (less than 100 residents) will increase as a proportion of all incorporated places, unless disincorporations begin. This increase in the number of very small towns will be a result of places in the size category for a population of 100 to 499 losing population and moving down the settlement system hierarchy. At the same time, most of the places with a population of less than 100 will probably continue to lose population or be stagnant. About half of

the smallest communities have been losing population since the 1950s (table 5).

- A few settlements in the size category for a population of 500 to 999 will probably grow in the coming years, and most of these places will move up to the next larger size category. As a result, the proportion of Nebraska's incorporated places in the size category for a population of 1,000 to 2,499 will probably increase by 2000. Most places currently in the 1,000 to 2,499 population range will experience little growth, however. Since 1940, about 90 percent of the places in this category at the beginning of a decade have remained in the category throughout of the decade.
- Settlements in the size category for a population of 2,500 to 4,999 will constitute an increasingly smaller proportion of Nebraska's incorporated places by 2000. Most of the places in this size category will move up the settlement system hierarchy to the size category for a population of 5,000 or more.

Three sets of needs are distinguishable from the broad settlement system trends, and each need corresponds to one or more of the size categories.

Small Rural Settlements

As indicated earlier, an increasing proportion of Nebraska's settlement system will be comprised of very small rural settlements. Generally, these places will have less than 500 residents. The distinguishing features

of these places are stagnation or population decline and movement down the settlement system hierarchy.

For example, over half of the places with fewer than 100 residents in 1980 declined to a population of less than 100 before 1950. Over three-fourths declined to a population of less than 100 before 1960. The record in Nebraska, then, is that the very smallest places tend to stay small once population decline has begun.

Places in the size category for a population of 100 to 499 generally constitute one of the least mobile groups of settlements in Nebraska's settlement system. Since 1940, an average of 90 percent of these places stayed in this size category from the beginning to the end of a decade. One of the factors that underlies this long-term trend has been, and is likely to be, downward movement to the size category for a population of less than 100.

While these characterizations may seem harsh and deterministic, they are supported by recent evidence and projections. The primary exceptions to these patterns are likely to be very small rural settlements that are in metropolitan areas or near growth centers.

Important needs of very small rural settlements are managing decline and maintaining an acceptable quality of life. Population decline or stagnation in these places is an adjustment response to a changing rural and agricultural economy. These communities have already lost, and are at risk of losing, additional retail and service establishments and community services. Maintaining public infrastructure, particularly that related to basic needs, such as, drinking water supply, distribution and treatment systems, and wastewater treatment systems, will be a real challenge as these systems age and as the support base of the settlement declines. At the same time, people want to live in these settlements and will continue to do so. In fact, a large

proportion of the residents of these very small rural settlements are over age 65, a group that is less mobile and in need of more specialized services than the rest of the population.

Middle-Sized Settlements

A second set of settlements can be identified as middle-sized places. These places have between 500 and 5,000 residents. The overriding characteristic of these places is transition. Places in the size category for a population of 500 to 999 have traditionally had one of the highest rates of transition to other size categories since 1940. Furthermore, these places are almost as likely to move down as they are to move up the settlement system hierarchy. Enough of the communities in this size category will move up so that the proportion of all Nebraska settlements in the size category for a population of 1,000 to 2,499 will likely increase. The increase in this size group will only partially be a function of movement into the group, however. Much of the growth will result from the very low transition, either into or out of, this size category.

The only urban category in this group is the size category for a population of 2,500 to 4,999. This category has declined as a proportion of all Nebraska settlements over the past 30 years. This decline is a function of these settlements moving up to the larger size categories, with no replacements coming up from the smaller categories. This category, then, is dominated by upward movement with no replacement from below. While it is not clear at this time, the number of places in this size category could decline more rapidly than in the past. During 1980-84, for example, 70.6 percent of the places in this category lost population. If this

continues, we may see some shifting downward from this category.

These trends indicate a set of places that previously played various roles as central places in Nebraska. Some have served as minor trading centers of various sizes. Some are evolving, often in different directions, in response to changes in traditions and roles, population bases, and other factors, such as, stronger competition from other central places. Others are too close to larger central places to develop much of a base, and they are being buffeted hard by a declining support base and population. The basic theme, however, is transition.

While some of the places in this category need assistance in managing decline and maintaining quality of life, the fundamental issue might be the need for assistance in strategic planning to identify the primary external and internal trends which affect these places, what the settlement wants to be in the future, and appropriate actions for dealing with both negative and positive forces to achieve local goals. Some of the smaller places, for example, were once agricultural service and shopping centers, but now they are becoming convenience and bedroom communities as the job base shifts to regional or area employment centers where shopping also takes place.

Other settlements have served as trading centers for small but rather densely populated areas that have suffered population decline. Still other places have received increased competition from nearby and larger trading centers, and are trying to find a new niche. In each case, the major needs are to define the present reality, what the future holds, and what the community can be realistically.

Larger Settlements

A third set of settlements have between 5,000 and 49,999 residents (this does not include Lincoln and Omaha). This size category has grown steadily over the long-term, and is likely to increase in the future, although slowly. Growth in this category is a function of the upward movement of communities in the size category for a population of 2,500 to 4,999. This pattern may diminish, however. While this would reduce growth in this category, places would continue to grow.

The distinguishing characteristic of this category is growth. At least three-fourths of the places in this category have experienced population growth during each of the last three decades. During 1980-84, for example, 72.4 percent of the places in this category posted population gains, while the average for the other size categories was only 36.8 percent.

While places in this category appear to be doing well, and may not appear to need assistance, these places might also be viewed as growth centers that could be the recipients of additional economic development assistance. If these places received assistance, smaller places in the surrounding region would receive benefits such as new jobs and income opportunities, the so-called ripple effect. This might, in turn, stabilize smaller rural places, thus, enhancing their appeal as places to live and raise families. At the very least, enhancing growth in these centers would provide employment and income opportunities for migrants.

Making Policy Choices

Several broad types of policy choices could be made in response to the types of needs and settlements

identified earlier. One set of policy choices relates to resource allocation, that is, which set of problems and settlement categories are in greatest need of attention? If resources were unlimited, there would be no problem with addressing all options simultaneously. However, resources are generally scarce and choices among alternatives must be made. A second set of policy choices relates to the specific questions, actions, and tasks that need to be addressed to assist settlements with their development needs.

Allocating Scarce Resources

This section highlights some broad approaches to making policy choices in the face of resource scarcity. While a number of different criteria might serve as resource allocation guides, several stand out. One standard to guide decisions is the efficiency concept; the primary concern of this concept is accomplishing the greatest good with a given level of input. A second criterion is redistribution. The emphasis of this plan results in diverting resources from the haves to the have nots, or from those settlements with a given resource, for example, population, to those without it. A third standard for allocating resources is represented by equality, equal shares for all.

Table 12 provides information about the population of Nebraska's incorporated places. The data contained in the table can be used to illustrate the different outcomes that might flow from different distribution rules. The table shows all incorporated places in the state in 1980 divided into quintiles (fifths). The first quintile, containing the smallest settlements of the state, contains just 0.75 percent of the population of incorporated places, if Lincoln and Omaha are included in the base. If

Table 12 - Percentage share of incorporated place population by each fifth and top five percent of Nebraska places, 1980

Population quintiles (fifths)	Percentage share of incorporated place population	Number of places
Lincoln and Omaha included:		
Lowest fifth	0.75	107
Second fifth	1.85	107
Middle fifth	3.47	107
Fourth fifth	7.32	107
Highest fifth	86.61	107
Top 5 percent	71.14	27
Total	100.00	535
Lincoln and Omaha excluded:		
Lowest fifth	1.29	107
Second fifth	3.18	107
Middle fifth	6.00	107
Fourth fifth	12.61	106
Highest fifth	76.91	106
Top 5 percent	51.18	27
Total	100.00	533

Nebraska's two largest cities are excluded, the first quintile contains 1.29 percent of the population of incorporated places. The population share of the largest 5 percent of Nebraska's places is also shown in table 12.

If the efficiency rule were used to make allocations, the population indicator would dictate that resources for developing and assisting the settlement system should go to the fewest places with the largest proportion of population. The top quintile, or the top 5 percent of Nebraska's incorporated places, might satisfy this

requirement. For example, the largest 5 percent of the state's incorporated places (N=27) contains 71.1 percent of the municipal population, if Omaha and Lincoln are included in the base and 51.2 percent if they are excluded. Stressing the efficiency criterion, then, would result in a growth center strategy.

Redistribution, on the other hand, would dictate the allocation of resources to the have nots, those communities with the fewest residents. As table 12 illustrates, the bottom quintile of Nebraska's settlements best meets this standard, and assistance would be provided to 107 places (0.75 to 1.29 percent of the population of incorporated places). Allocating resources according to the redistribution criterion would primarily mean managing decline, because the beneficiaries would be the state's smallest places.

Many other factors could guide resource allocation. The significance of using population as an indicator of need is not to suggest that it is more meaningful than other indicators, it merely provides an illustration of how policy choices might be made. Development potential, condition of infrastructure, employment change, and income change are all potential indicators of need.

Strategies for Assisting Places

A second set of policy choices revolve around issues of task, action, and strategy. What are the options for each of the areas of need?

Small Rural Settlements. Places in this category need assistance in managing decline and maintaining quality of life. Managing decline would require assistance in developing new leadership, local government management, and decisionmaking tools and approaches.

Maintaining quality of life would require assistance in assessing community and resident well-being, identifying action strategies, and implementing assistance.

Assistance in managing decline should emphasize assessing community service needs, alternative service delivery strategies, fiscal and resource base issues, leadership, and related issues. The League of Nebraska Municipalities, Nebraska Department of Economic Development, regional councils of government, and the higher education system all represent potential sources of assistance. At present, none of these organizations has a concerted program of research and outreach to help more than a few small rural settlements each year.

Maintaining quality of life will require developing community needs assessment methodologies and delivering strategic planning assistance for sorting through community well-being issues. This strategy seems particularly important in the more isolated, small rural places with sizable elderly populations. The Nebraska Department of Social Services, community action agencies, area agencies on aging, UNL's Cooperative Extension Service and College of Home Economics, UNO's Gerontology Program and School of Social Work, and UNMC's Gerontological Nursing Program all represent resources for addressing quality of life issues. The primary need is probably not additional resources but identifying existing resources to meet crucial community needs, as determined by the community.

At the same time, there will be significant needs for assistance in the environmental and health areas as new federal and state regulations, as well as aging infrastructure systems, confront small places. State agencies, such as the Department of Environmental Control, Department of Health, and Department of Roads, would be important in providing assistance to deal with

the unique needs that often result from population decline in very small rural settlements.

Particularly problematic questions will include: What are the basic services that very small rural settlements can, and need, to offer? How do we define and measure quality of life? Who should be responsible for this? For example, is a community water system a basic community service? What should be done if the water supply source or distribution system in a settlement with 45 residents becomes obsolete or contaminated?

Beyond these specific strategies and issues for assisting small rural places in Nebraska, state government might consider developing an advocacy office for small towns. This could take the form of a small town ombudsman, a unit within the governor's office or the Department of Economic Development, or a new stand-alone community affairs agency. Not only could such an entity act as a catalyst for efforts to assist and better understand small places in Nebraska, but it could act to coordinate and assess the impact of state and federal programs and policies upon small settlements in Nebraska.

Middle-Sized Settlements. The primary need for places in this category is for strategic economic and community development planning assistance. As indicated earlier, many of these settlements have played a role as trading centers, and that role is changing in response to the variety of forces that are currently at work in Nebraska. While some middle-sized places will need to do some work on basic community facilities and services, their fundamental need will be to develop a community vision of what the economic future holds and how local residents can shape that economic future.

In simplest terms, expert assistance that is sensitive to local traditions, preferences, and needs is essential (Reed, Reed, and Luke, 1987). Strategic economic development planning should focus on identifying: Major external and internal trends affecting the community, the issues that seem most important to local residents, aspects of these issues that the community can affect, and concrete and achievable action steps.

Currently, UNO's Department of Public Administration and Center for Applied Urban Research provide such services and have worked with the Nebraska Department of Economic Development to develop self-help resource materials for community use. UNO's College of Business has also provided strategic business planning for rural communities through a summer program relying on faculty and students. UNL's Cooperative Extension Service offers a mainstreet business assistance program, and UNL's College of Architecture offers a community design service that encompasses some strategic planning concepts.

Therefore, a base of services that can address the needs of middle-sized places exists in Nebraska. The most glaring missing ingredient is an effort to coordinate and focus such services on selected types of settlements. Because much of the public resource base in Nebraska exists in the higher education system, a partnership among state government, higher education, local and regional government, and community organizations might be a workable first step in addressing the strategic planning needs of middle-sized places in Nebraska.

Large Urban Places. Some places in Nebraska have been able to post regular gains in population and this is, in part, a function of their ability to increase jobs and retail and wholesale trade. These settlements (relative to

most other Nebraska communities) can be labeled growth centers.

One policy option for assisting Nebraska settlements is to provide help to these growth centers to further enhance their growth. Typically, when implementing a growth center strategy, state resources are focused on a growing incorporated place with a regional influence. Some growth center strategies also emphasize area or regional development (Moseley, 1974). Regardless of the particular geographic area of focus, the basic approach is to coordinate and direct development assistance to growth centers whether it is deregulatory, financial, or programmatic. The rationale is that focused assistance will be more likely to stimulate growth and result in greater payoffs for a given monetary expenditure. Growth center strategies also attempt to build on the concept of settlement systems, and assume that growth impulses will spread throughout the adjacent region. As a result, both the growth center (if it is a single community) and surrounding smaller places benefit (Hansen, 1971).

While the particular features of state growth center programs differ, they generally specify goals, processes, and mechanisms to guide the designation of growth centers, subsequent state and local government actions needed to foster the development of growth centers, and tools to achieve growth (Warren, 1980). While the federal government took the lead in exploring the potential of the growth center concept for regional development in the 1960s, states have the most detailed experiences. Among some prominent uses of growth center strategies are those of Massachusetts and North Carolina. Iowa considered a growth center strategy comprised of multicounty regions (Schwartz Associates, 1985).

A Regional Strategy. Emotions bind most of us to our home towns and communities. All communities strive for growth and prosperity, but not all places can expect to grow forever. Some places (usually small ones) can expect little growth or decline in population and economic activity. Much of the reason for decline in these places is the changing function of places in Nebraska and the Great Plains.

Many places that formerly performed primarily central place (marketing) functions have lost some, or all, of that function, often to other nearby markets. Improved transportation has allowed local consumers to bypass smaller centers to patronize larger centers. So, the central place (market) function has become increasingly concentrated in fewer centers.

Other places have maintained their market function in conjunction with other functions, such as industry, transport, recreation, and tourism. Still other places have taken on completely new functions to replace or supplement the declining central place role. For example, some places have become the bedroom communities of nearby larger settlements.

Few communities ever ask whether they should expect to grow. Rather, most places insist on growth, even when expected growth would be almost impossible.

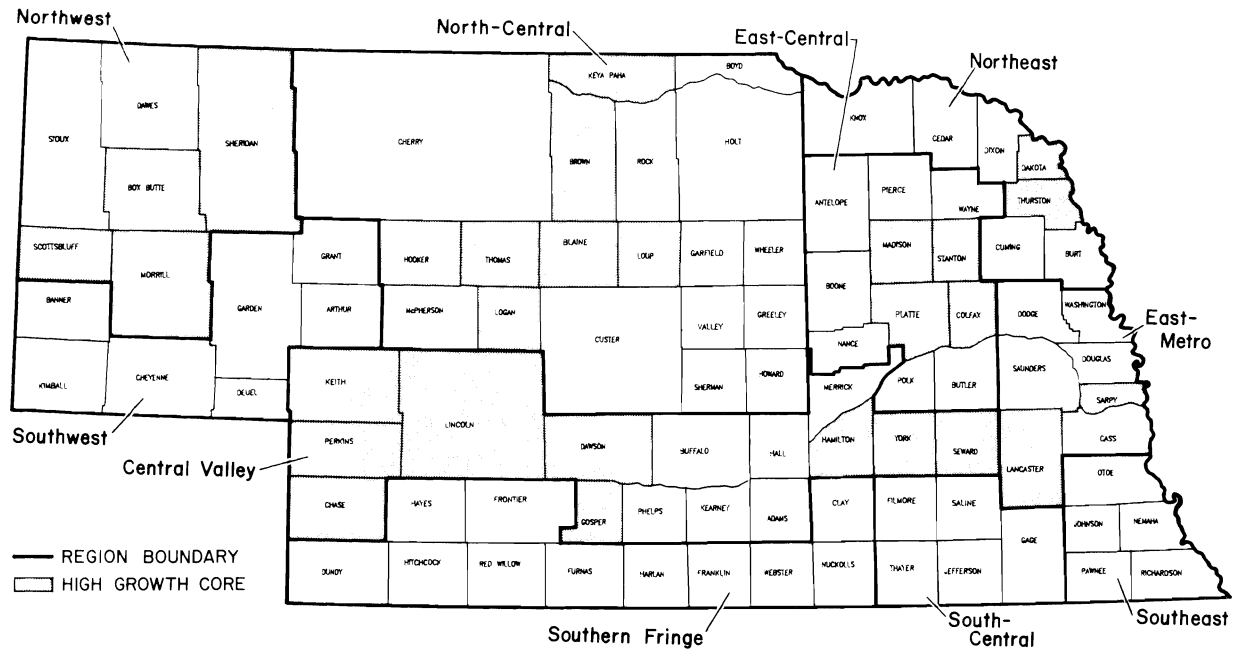
Inevitably, communities will compete among themselves for revenue-generating activity (jobs) and for financial assistance from sources outside the local area, especially state aid. Such competition is understandable and should be expected. However, interests beyond the local level, for example, state government, probably should no longer reward local competition, but should foster cooperation among places. In other words, the state should consider fostering and rewarding regional approaches to economic development.

Each of the three strategies outlined earlier-- managing decline in small rural places, strategic planning for middle-sized places, and assisting growth centers-- would involve providing assistance and resources to individual places. A fourth alternative would be to focus on regional groupings of places that cut across size categories and that are linked in a functional manner.

A regional approach is advantageous for several reasons. First, there are not enough resources to assist each settlement in the state to attain its desired level of development. In fact, there are not enough resources in all of Nebraska to build and maintain the infrastructure needed in all places in the state. Second, individual places may vary in their growth potential and need for assistance over time, therefore, assistance at one time may be unwarranted at another. Providing assistance programs regionally would tend to smooth out the variations in level of need over time. A regional approach might also return the focus of local development to cooperation and collaboration of earlier years. Fourth, real savings could be realized through economies of scale if communities, and counties, would actively share expenses, services, and facilities.

Figure 1 shows regions of the state based on the change in populations of settlements from 1970 to 1980 and based on the commuting patterns between counties in 1980. The result is a portrayal of a minimum number of regions in Nebraska with what might be termed demographic integrity, that is, where the counties have growth trends and other characteristics in common. Table 13 ranks these regions by population size and the number of settlements. The regions portrayed are but one concept of development areas that transcend the individual settlement scale and divide the Nebraska settlement system into meaningful subareas. These

FIGURE 1
NEBRASKA REGIONS



subareas, or other versions, might function well as development regions for focusing future state actions.

Table 13 - Population and number of settlements in Nebraska's regions, based on incorporated place growth, 1970-80

Region	Incorporated places					
	Population			Settlements		
	No.	%	Rank	No.	%	Rank
Eastern Metro	602,562	53.1	(1)	71	13.3	(3)
Central Valley	186,973	16.5	(2)	91	17.0	(1)
East Central	82,532	7.3	(3)	65	12.1	(4)
Northwest	53,754	4.7	(4)	24	4.5	(9)
South Central	43,711	3.9	(5)	49	9.2	(7)
Northeast	42,789	3.8	(6)	50	9.3	(6)
North Central	39,715	3.5	(7)	73	13.6	(2)
Southern Fringe	38,524	3.4	(8)	60	11.2	(5)
Southeast	29,331	2.6	(9)	38	7.1	(8)
Southwest	14,416	1.3	(10)	14	2.6	(10)
Total ¹	1,134,307	100.1	-	535	99.9	-

¹ = Not applicable.

Percentages may not total 100.0 percent due to rounding.

Endnotes

1. The U.S. Bureau of the Census defines the urban population as consisting of all persons living in urbanized areas and in places of 2,500 inhabitants or more outside urbanized areas. The population not classified as urban constitutes the rural population.

2. Unless otherwise indicated, data presented in this chapter are drawn from various censuses of population conducted by the U.S. Bureau of the Census.

3. Metropolitan places, or Metropolitan Statistical Areas, as the U.S. Bureau of the Census classifies them, are geographic areas consisting of a large population nucleus (at least 50,000 people) and adjacent communities that have a high degree of economic and social intergration with the nucleus. A metropolitan area may contain more than one city with a population of 50,000, more than one county, and may cross state boundaries.

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