

Town Building and Town Persistence in Virginia's Blue Ridge: Lessons from the Past and for the Future

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This paper looks at eight towns in the southern Blue Ridge section of Virginia, USA, during their formative stage, circa 1880-1920. It asks why they were built and why some persisted while others faded. Three major factors seem to predict their creation and longevity: 1] the availability of an appropriate transportation system, 2] their level of economic complexity, and 3] the proximity (or distance) to their source of investment capital. Towns based on single resource extraction, financed by distant capital fared the worst, while locally developed, economically diverse communities did well. The results tend to re-enforce Helen Lewis's Internal Colonial Model. This story of creation and collapse in southern Appalachian America offers a cautionary tale for post-Soviet Eastern Europe.

Keywords: *development, exploitation, Appalachia, towns, railroads*

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