

JOINT URBAN STUDIES CENTER

WHY AREN'T WE AVERAGE?

*A Project of Research on Northeastern Pennsylvania's Past, Present, and Future:
Reasons, Consequences, and Goals*



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The Joint Urban Studies Center

The Joint Urban Studies Center was established to provide essential research, analysis, and consultation to small and mid-size cities aiming for full participation in the new economy of the 21st century. The Center mobilizes the resources of regional institutions of higher education to engage communities in planning that is informed by research, energized by broad participation from stakeholders in the community, and validated by successful implementation. As the managing partner in the Center, Wilkes University is joined by King's College, College Misericordia, Luzerne County Community College, Penn State/Wilkes-Barre, and the University of Scranton.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the Joint Urban Studies Center Advisory Board for its time, effort and commitment to this region:

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Eugene Roth	<i>Rosenn, Jenkins, and Greenwald</i>
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Imagine an additional \$700 million in wages being paid out in Luzerne County. This increase in revenue would dramatically improve the standard of living in the region. More money would flow through local government, increasing their ability to provide local services and public safety. To reap this windfall, all Luzerne County would have to do is move up to the statewide average on key census indicators, such as per capita income, population increases, and employed population.

The purpose of the report is to assess why the city of Wilkes-Barre has not met statewide or national average benchmarks in several critical census categories during the past 50 years. All of the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) data reflects similar challenges. Here we explain how and why Wilkes-Barre has found itself in a continuous decline over the past five decades and how trends in Luzerne County influenced the MSA as a whole. By analyzing and comparing specific key indicators (such as population, education, housing, and income), the causes for Wilkes-Barre's below-average status will become clearer. The data primarily represents Luzerne County; however, upon analysis, the city of Wilkes-Barre and the remaining portions of the MSA show similar trends.

The most significant single event appears to be the recession in the 1980s. This recession hit the region hard because of the large number of people employed in manufacturing jobs at that time. The recession initiated the decline in manufacturing through consolidation and closing of firms. The region did not have another large existing employment cluster that could have lessened the impact of the loss. From that point, the area has not recovered significantly because it hasn't been able to create more jobs in a variety of industries or different types of jobs to balance out and rebuild its economy.

There are many reasons why this area has not been able to create more jobs and grow. Weak investment practices, continued emphasis on a low wage economy, and local government fragmentation severely affect this area's capacity to successfully grow its economy.

Throughout this study, the economic and demographic statistics provided will serve to highlight the declining condition of Luzerne County: The lower the indicators, the greater the turnaround challenge. Once the challenge is presented (which underlines the below-average status of the area), specific goals and policies will be listed in order to help Luzerne County remove itself from its current negative condition.

What if Luzerne County were just average? As you will see, Luzerne County has been falling behind in several major economic and social categories from 1950 to 2000. The next section raises the question: "What if Luzerne County were average?"

Population

From 1990 to 2000, population increased an average of 13.2% in the United States. Pennsylvania was ranked 48th in the country with a 3.4% increase during that time. From 1990 to 2000, Luzerne County suffered a 2.6% decrease in population. What would Luzerne County's population be in 2000, if it had increased by the state average from 1990 to 2000? The population would be 339,307 compared to the current 319,250, creating a difference of 20,057 people or a 6.3% increase.

More Workers

In 2000, Luzerne County had 260,496 people 16 years of age and older. Of that number, 58.3% or 151,869 people were employed. In Pennsylvania, the average percentage of the 16 and older population that worked was 60.0%. During the same period, the per capita income in Luzerne County was \$18,228. If Luzerne County had the same 60.0% workers as the Commonwealth average, the total number employed would be 156,298, or an increase of 4,429 workers or 2.9%. If you multiply the 4,429 new workers by the year 2000 Luzerne County per capita income of \$18,228, it would add \$80,731,812 to the aggregate income in the county.

Per Capita Income

In 2000, Luzerne County had a total of 151,869 people 16 years of age and older employed, with a per capita income of \$18,228. During the same year, the average per capita income in Pennsylvania was \$20,880. The aggregate income amount in Luzerne County in 2000 was \$2,768,268,132. What would Luzerne County's

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aggregate income amount be if it had achieved the state's average per capita income of \$20,880? The amount would have been \$3,171,024,720, or an increase of \$402,756,588.

Median Household Income

Luzerne County had a total number of 130,703 households in 2000. During that same year, the median household income in Luzerne County was \$33,771. In 2000, the average median household income in Pennsylvania was \$40,106. The difference of \$6,335 per household would create an additional \$828 million in income in the county.

Education

There are currently 37,126 or 16.4% of people 25 years of age and older in Luzerne County who possess a bachelor's degree or higher. The average number of people 25 years of age and older in Pennsylvania who possess a bachelor's degree or higher is 22.4%. If we were average, there would be 50,708 people, or 13,582 more people, with a bachelor's degree or higher in Luzerne County.

The Big Picture

Each of the above categories assumes what the county would look like if we were average. What would happen if population and median household income were both average? What if the number of workers and the per capita income were average? The information below contains two sets of data. The column on the left provides the facts about Luzerne County in Census 2000. The information on the right is what the numbers would be if all the state averages were applied to Luzerne County in 2000.

Luzerne County in 2000		Luzerne County in 2000 (if average)	
Total Population	319,250	Total Population	339,307
16 and Older Population	260,496	16 and Older Population	276,874
16 and Older Population Employed	151,869	16 and Older Population Employed	166,125
Per Capita Income	\$18,228	Per Capita Income	\$20,880
<i>Total Income of 16 and Older Employed</i>	\$2,768,268,132	<i>Total Income of 16 and Older Employed</i>	\$3,468,690,000
A Difference of: \$700,421,868			

The Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton MSA needs to be proactive to reverse its trends. The continuing decline of the young population, the increase of the older generation, the lack of economic competitiveness, and the drifting economy are all elements that will eventually take our area from below average to nonexistent.

JUSC believes that the region needs to focus on land use policies, local government collaboration, improving K-12 education, and more aggressive economic development. JUSC also focuses on the importance of the aesthetics of a community and the positive impact on its economy. These strategies, case studies and best practices are elaborated on in this report and the report identified below.

JUSC suggests that the reader review another JUSC study: Strategies and Recommendations to Implement the Brookings Institution Report: "Back to Prosperity: A Competitive Agenda for Renewing Pennsylvania." This research report uses the five recommendations from the Brookings Institution Report and outlines a list of strategies for government, education, non-profit, business, and industry to work to improve our region. The recommendations in this companion study will pave the way for this area to become average in comparison to the state. Only then can we move forward with additional strategies to increase indicators to reach national averages and beyond.

JUSC pledges to continue to provide data, strategy development, and best practices to assist stakeholders in moving the region forward. JUSC's expertise lies in working with clients (governments and nonprofits) individually, to provide customized strategies for implementation after a thorough review of the client, community, or organization.

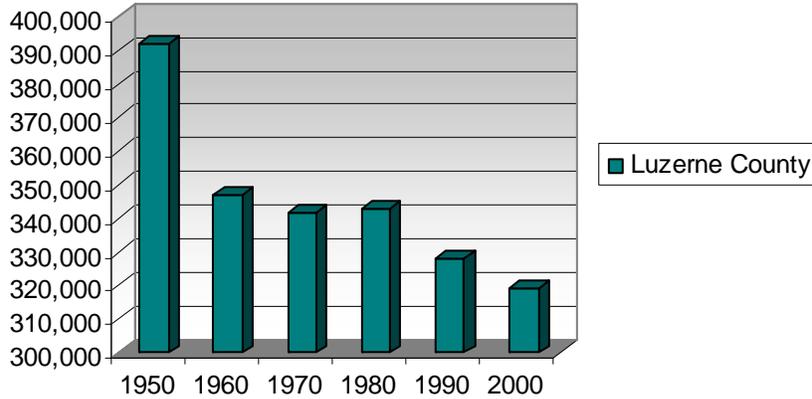
COMPARISON OF CENSUS DATA 1950-2000

PART A: POPULATION

Luzerne County has had a declining population for decades. By comparing statistical population data from the early 1950s to that of the year 2000 (Figure 1), this trend can be seen.

Figure 1ⁱ

Population in Luzerne County 1950 to 2000



According to the Department of Commerce, the total population in Luzerne County was equaled 392,241 in 1950. That population was a decrease of 11.2% from 1940 to 1950.ⁱⁱ

Moving on to the 1960s, as compared to the 1950s, Luzerne County faced yet another decline in population. The population decreased by a painful 11.5%, to 346, 972 people. Of that number, 81.1% were urban residents and 0.3 percent were non-white.ⁱⁱⁱ

During the 1970s, we saw the population decreased yet again. In fact, the population fell to 341,956, a total of 5,016 fewer people than in 1960, or a 1.45% difference.^{iv}

The 1980s also had another change in population statistics. This time, however, the population was not decreasing; rather it was increasing. In 1980, the total population equaled 343,079, a positive increment of 1,123 or 0.33%. Statistics, which become more thorough at this point in history, also showed that the total population was comprised of mainly white Americans.^v Table 1 shows Luzerne County’s population breakdown by race, from 1980 to 2000.

Table 1

Luzerne County Population by Race			
Race	1980	1990	2000
<i>White</i>	98.61%	97.00 %	96.02%
<i>Black</i>	0.66%	1.16 %	1.63%
<i>Hispanic</i>	0.38%	0.62 %	1.16%
<i>Hawaiian, Asian, American Indian</i>	0.35%	0.54 %	0.71%

The total population in 1990 was 328,149 individuals; 14,930 inhabitants fewer than in the 1980s and a 4.35% decrease.

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Finally, as the year 2000 approached, the population suffered a loss yet again. At the turn of the millennium, the total population was 319,250 (Table 2), a total of 8,899 people fewer than in the 1990s and a 2.71% decrease.

Table 2^{vi}

Population Comparison			
Year	Luzerne County	Pennsylvania	United States
1960	346,972	11,319,366	179,323,175
1980	343,079	11,863,895	226,542,199
2000	319,250	12,281,054	281,421,906

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PART B: EDUCATION

Education has changed dramatically in the past four decades. Facts and statistics on education have been documented throughout the years, with more in-depth research appearing during the 1980s.

As far back as the 1950s, the percentage of individuals 25 years of age and older who completed five or more grades was 76.1%. The percentage of 25-year-olds and older who completed high school was a mere 18.1%.

More information became available on the educational attainment of Luzerne County inhabitants in the 1960s. Tables 3 and 4 show the attainment levels and Luzerne County population by school type from 1960.

Table 3^{vii}

1960 Education Attainment Levels in Luzerne County		
	Completed Less Than 5 years of school	Completed high school or more
<i>Population 25 years old and over</i>	11.4%	35.3%

Table 4^{viii}

1960 Luzerne County Population by School Type			
	Kindergarten and Elementary	High School	College
<i>School Enrollment, persons 5 to 34 years old</i>	50,020	19,350	3,824

Moving forward to the 1970s, high school and college graduation rates were still very low. But statistics show a dramatic improvement in the high school and college graduation rates throughout Luzerne County from 1970 to 2000. Table 5 illustrates the increasing graduation rate in Luzerne County.

Table 5^{ix x xi}

Education Attainment of Persons 25 & Older in Luzerne County				
Level	1970	1980	1990	2000
<i>High School Graduates</i>	46.8%	61.2%	72.0%	81.9%
<i>College Graduates</i>	5.4%	9.2%	13.1%	22.4%

Table 6 illustrates the breakdown in Luzerne County, of the population that was 3 years and older.

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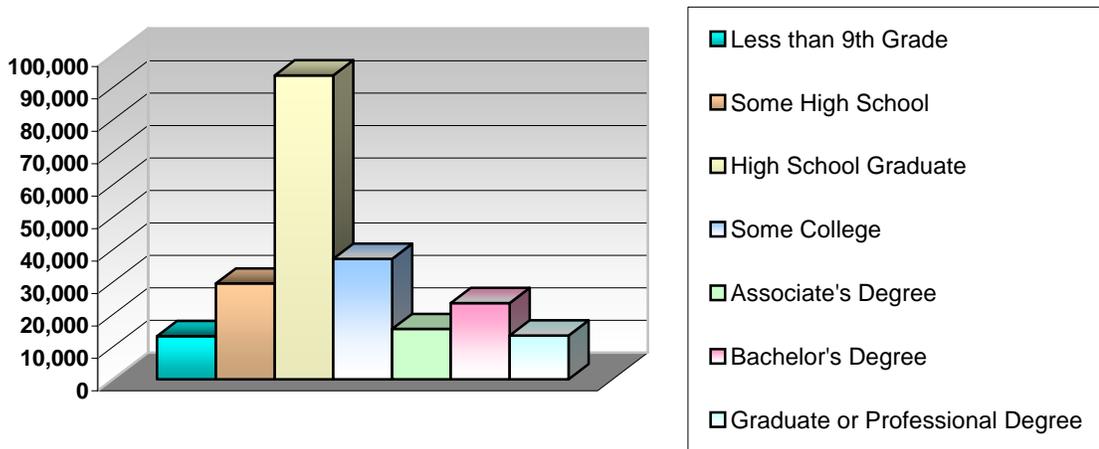
Table 6^{xii}

Enrollment by Type of School in Luzerne County			
School	1980	1990	2000
<i>Nursery School</i>	1,969	5,069	4,353
<i>Kindergarten, Elementary, or High School</i>	64,176	47,202	53,178
<i>College</i>	13,238	19,221	15,918

The year 2000 had the following educational statistics (Figure 2), school enrollment (Table 5), and attainment of higher education degrees (Table 6).

Figure 2^{xiii}

Educational Attainment in Population 25 Years and Over



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PART C: HOUSING

From the 1960s to the year 2000, there is an evident, yet not substantial, increase in housing units throughout Luzerne County.

In 1960, the total number of housing units in Luzerne County was 113,505. Of that number, 105,755 units were occupied, broken down to 63.1% owners and 36.9% renters.^{xiv}

In the 1970s, housing units continued to increase, with the total number of housing units at 116,138, while the total number of occupied housing units was 111,694. The occupied housing units consisted of 66.6% owner-occupied and 33.4% renter-occupied.^{xv}

There were 125,502 total occupied housing units in 1980, 68.9% of which were owner-occupied. The total number of housing units for Luzerne County in 1980 was 136,201, creating a 6.2% vacancy rate.^{xvi}

The 1990s had a total of 138,724 housing units, 69.4 percent of which were owner-occupied.^{xvii}

Figure 3^{xviii}

Housing in Luzerne County 1960 - 2000					
	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
<i>Total Housing Units</i>	113,505	116,138	133,851	138,724	144,686
<i>Total Occupied Units</i>	105,755	111,694	125,502	128,483	130,687
<i>Vacancy Rate %</i>	6.8%	3.8%	6.2%	7.4%	9.7%

There were 144,686 total housing units in 2000. The number of occupied housing units was 130,313, of which 74,994 were specified owner-occupied units (57.4%), while 42,901 were specified renter-occupied units (32.9%).^{xix}

Table 7 indicates statistics on Luzerne County housing as compared to the state and nation.

Table 7^{xx}

2000 Housing Units Comparison						
	Luzerne County	%	Pennsylvania	%	United States	%
<i>Owner-Occupied</i>	74,994	63.6	3,406,337	71.3	69,815,753	66.2
<i>Renter-Occupied</i>	42,901	36.4	1,307,666	28.7	35,664,384	33.8

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PART D: HOUSEHOLDS AND INCOME

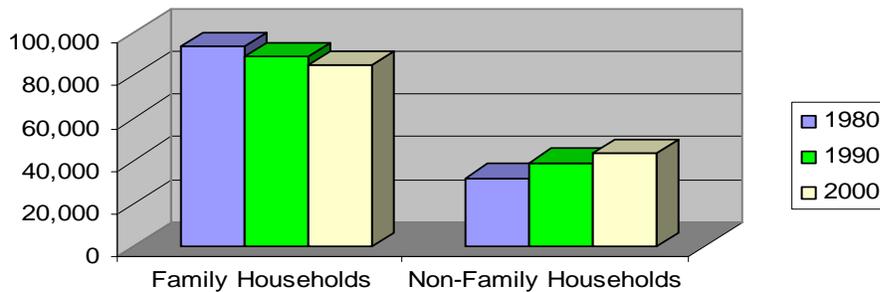
Statistics available on housing from the 1950s to the 1980s are somewhat limited. However, the statistics do show that from the 1950s to 1960s the median number of rooms per housing unit was 5.7, while the population per unit equaled 3.3.^{xxi}

During the 1970s, Luzerne County consisted of 111,694 total households. Of those total households, 90,642 were family households.

In the 1980s, information on households in Luzerne County becomes more readily available. Statistics show there were a total of 125,462 households. Non-family households represented 32,123 or 25.6% of households in 1980. Figure 4 shows a comparison of household types, in Luzerne County, from 1980 to 2000.

Figure 4^{xxii}

Household Types in Luzerne County from 1980 to 2000



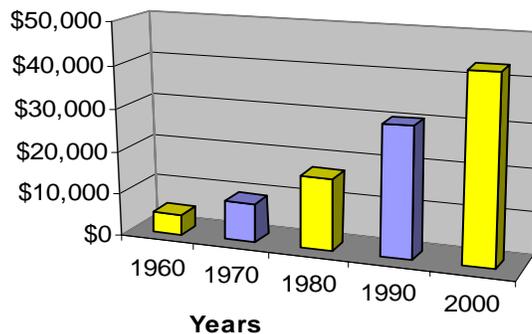
In the 1990s, there was a 2.4% increase in total households to 128, 282, of which 88,978 were family households. Non-family households made up 30.6% of the total households.^{xxiii}

2000 statistics show that the total number of households in Luzerne County was 130,687. Of that number, 64.8% were family households, compared to 35.2% non-family households.^{xxiv}

An important element in household statistics is income. Figure 5 shows data on median family income in Luzerne County from 1960 to 2000.

Figure 5^{xxv xxvi}

Median Family Income in Luzerne County 1960-2000



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In 1960, the median family income equaled \$4,722, with a total of 24.8% of families with an income under \$3,000.

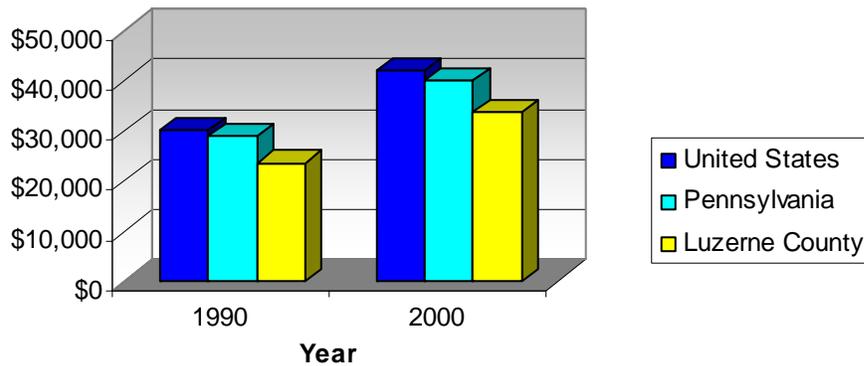
During 1970, the median family income level rose to \$9,233.^{xxvii}

In 1980, the median family income increased to \$16,953. The median family income level climbed to \$30,349 in 1990; and in 2000, the median family income was \$33,771.^{xxviii}

Figure 6 indicates the difference between local, state, and national median household income from 1990 to 2000.

Figure 6^{xxix}

Median Household Income, 1990 to 2000



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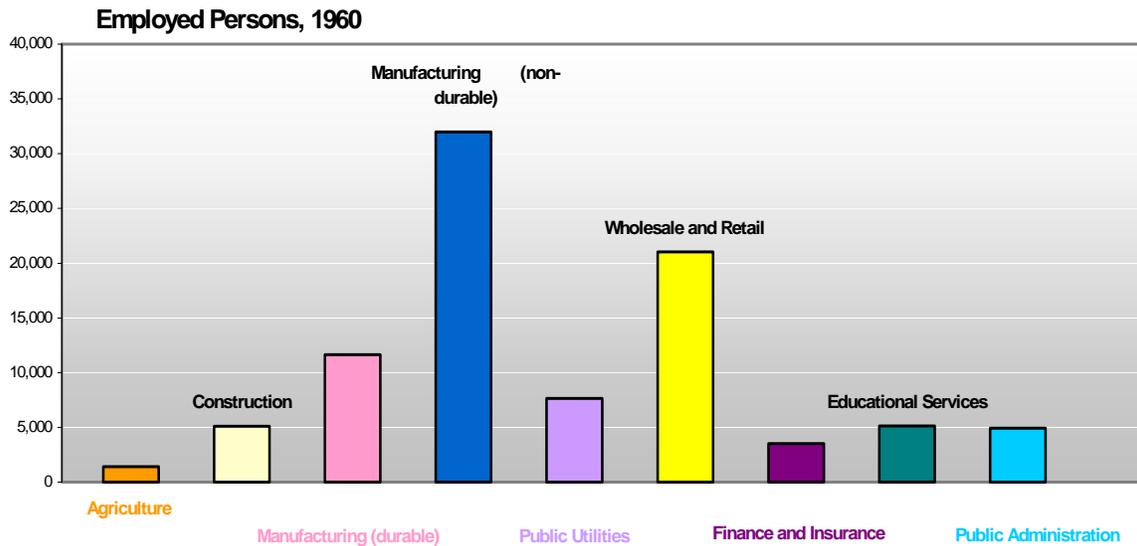
PART E: BUSINESS AND MISCELLANEOUS

The arrival and departure of businesses throughout Luzerne County has been an interesting factor in the current status of the area. From 1950 to 2000, here are the statistics:

In 1950, there were 6,343 retail trade stores in Luzerne County with a total sales amount of \$306,024 that year.^{xxx}

Moving forward to 1960, the total number of people in the civilian labor force equaled 136,064 while the percentage of unemployed civilians was at 10.4%. The total number of employed persons, on the other hand, was 121,920 (divided into categories as indicated in Figure 7.^{xxxii})

Figure 7^{xxxii}
Civilian Labor Force, 1960



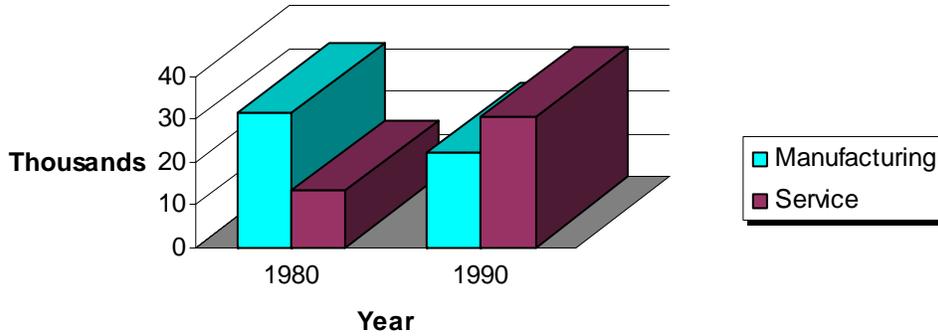
In the 1970s, the number of employed people over the age of 16 in Luzerne County dropped to 135,051 people. Even with the slight decline in overall employment in the 1970s, the number of people employed in the manufacturing sector increased significantly to 64,744 workers.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, the employment numbers slightly increased to 135,000 workers in 1980 and 143,046 in 1990. The significant difference between the decades was the switch from the manufacturing sector to the service sector. From 1980 to 1990, there was a 9.3% decrease in the manufacturing industry and a 17% increase in the service industry. Figure 8 illustrates the change.^{xxxiii}

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Figure 8^{xxxiv}

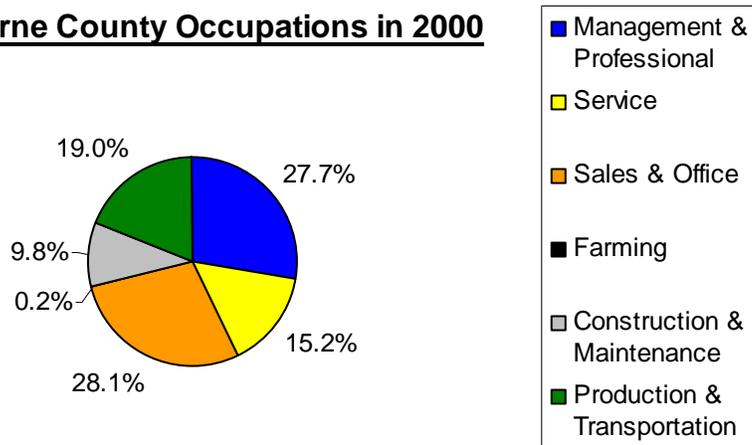
Manufacturing and Service Industry in Luzerne County 1980-1990



In 2000, industry and employment numbers were varied. There were a total of 141,168 people 16 years and older in the workforce.^{xxxv} Occupations included management, farming, retail, and entertainment. Figure 9 shows exact percentages.

Figure 9^{xxxvi}

Luzerne County Occupations in 2000



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REGIONAL VERSUS STATEWIDE CENSUS DATA

In this section, we'll compare statistical information (population, education, housing, income and business) on Luzerne County to statistical information for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

The total population in Luzerne County was 392,241 in 1950. The population dropped significantly to 319,250 individuals in 2000. For the Commonwealth, however, the total population grew from 10,498,012 in 1950 to 12,281,054 in 2000. Figure 10 shows a comparison of population change between Pennsylvania and Luzerne County.^{xxxvii}

Figure 10^{xxxviii xxxix}

Population Change from 1960 to 2000

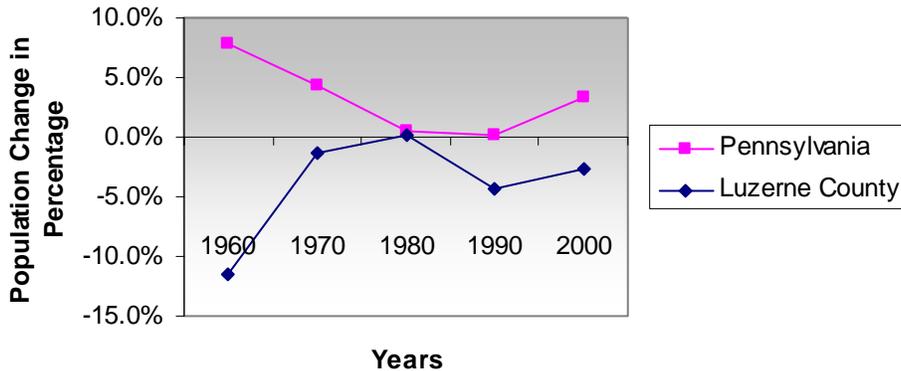
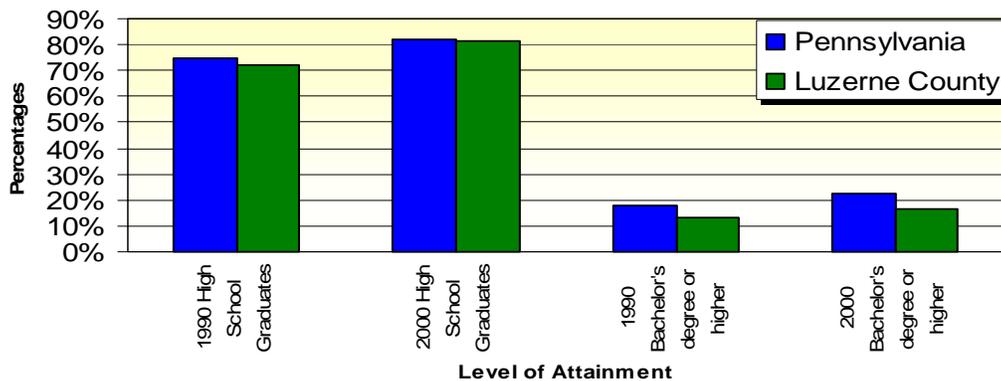


Figure 10 clearly identifies the difference between Luzerne County and Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania incurred a slowing increase of population between 1960 and 1990, but still maintained some growth. On the other hand, Luzerne County has continued to struggle with a declining population. Luzerne County experienced a mere 0.2% increase in population during the 1980s. Every other decade shows a loss of population for Luzerne County.^{xi}

By comparing the most recent statistical information on the educational attainment of the inhabitants of Luzerne County to that of the general Pennsylvanian population, as shown in Figure 11, it appears that the overall achievement of the population of Luzerne County did not have a great impact on the state.

Figure 11^{xli}

Education, 1990 & 2000



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Pennsylvania had higher percentages of both high school graduates and residents with bachelor's degrees or higher than did Luzerne County. Comparisons are shown above in Figure 11.

In 1990, 74.7% of persons 25 years of age or older in the state of Pennsylvania were high school graduates, compared to 72% in Luzerne County. That same year, 17.9% of Pennsylvania residents 25 years of age or older held a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 13.0% in Luzerne County.^{xliii}

In 2000, Pennsylvania still led Luzerne County in levels of educational attainment. Of the Pennsylvania residents 25 years of age and older, 81.9% were high school graduates in 2000, compared to 81.1% in Luzerne County. During the same year, 22.4% of Pennsylvania residents 25 years of age and older held a bachelor's degree or higher compared to just 16.4% in Luzerne County.^{xliiii}

As for housing, statistics show Luzerne County and Pennsylvania are similar in many characteristics. For example, both have hovered around the 64% owner-occupancy rate since 1990. All other statistical areas (such as renter occupancy percentage and number of total housing units) have increased on an even scale since 1980 in both Luzerne County and Pennsylvania. One major difference has been the increase in vacancy rate in Luzerne County. From 1990 to 2000, Luzerne County's vacancy rate increased from 7.4% to 9.7%. The 2.3% increase is significant when compared to Pennsylvania. During that same time span, Pennsylvania maintained its vacancy rate of 9.0%. Table 8 shows the housing comparison between Luzerne County and Pennsylvania.^{xliiv}

Table 8^{xliv}

Housing Comparison				
	Pennsylvania		Luzerne County	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
<i>Total Housing Units</i>	4,938,140	5,249,750	138,724	144,686
<i>Owner-Occupied Housing</i>	3,176,693	3,406,337	89,109	91,914
<i>Owner-Occupied %</i>	64.3%	64.9%	64.2%	63.5%
<i>Renter-Occupied Housing</i>	1,319,273	1,370,666	39,374	38,773
<i>Renter-Occupied %</i>	26.7%	26.1%	28.4%	26.8%
<i>Vacancy Rate %</i>	9.0%	9.0%	7.4%	9.7%

Household statistics also show some similarities between Pennsylvania and Luzerne County. Overall both the state and county have continued to grow in the category of total households. The differences between Pennsylvania and Luzerne County lie in the breakdown of the households.

In 1990, Luzerne County's households were broken down to 69.4% family and 30.6% non-family households. Those numbers compare to Pennsylvania's 70.7% and 29.3% during the same time span. The difference occurred the following decade.

In 2000, both Pennsylvania and Luzerne County saw their percentages of family households decrease. While Pennsylvania saw a drop from 70.7% to 67.5%, Luzerne County's family household percentage declined 4.6%. That meant that in 2000, 35.2% of the total households in Luzerne County were non-family.

Table 9 further illustrates the household comparison between Luzerne County and Pennsylvania.

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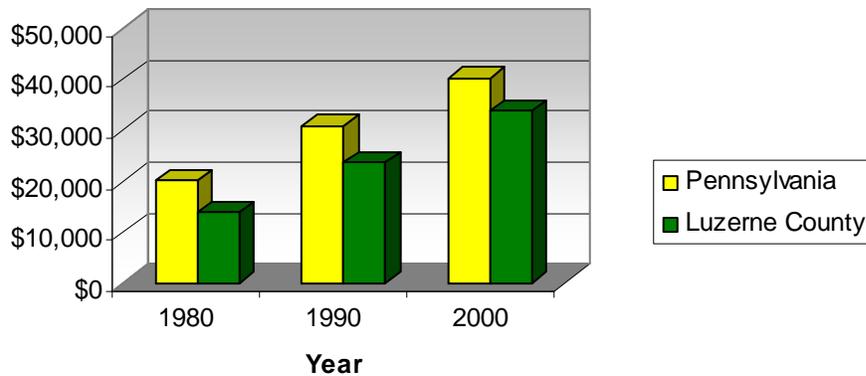
Table 9^{xlvi}

Household Comparison, 1990 to 2000				
	Pennsylvania		Luzerne County	
	1990	2000	1990	2000
<i>Total Households</i>	4,492,958	4,779,186	128,282	130,705
<i>Family Households</i>	3,176,451	3,225,707	88,978	84,729
<i>Family Household %</i>	70.7%	67.5%	69.4%	64.8%
<i>Non-Family Household</i>	1,316,507	1,553,479	39,304	45,974
<i>Non-Family Household %</i>	29.3%	32.5%	30.6%	35.2%

The drop in percentage of family household is an important factor in the makeup of a region. Another important factor is income. According to the Census Bureau, Luzerne County has been well below the state's average of median household income since 1980. Table 10 clearly illustrates the difference in income between Luzerne County and Pennsylvania.

Table 10^{xlvii}

Median Household Income, 1980 to 2000



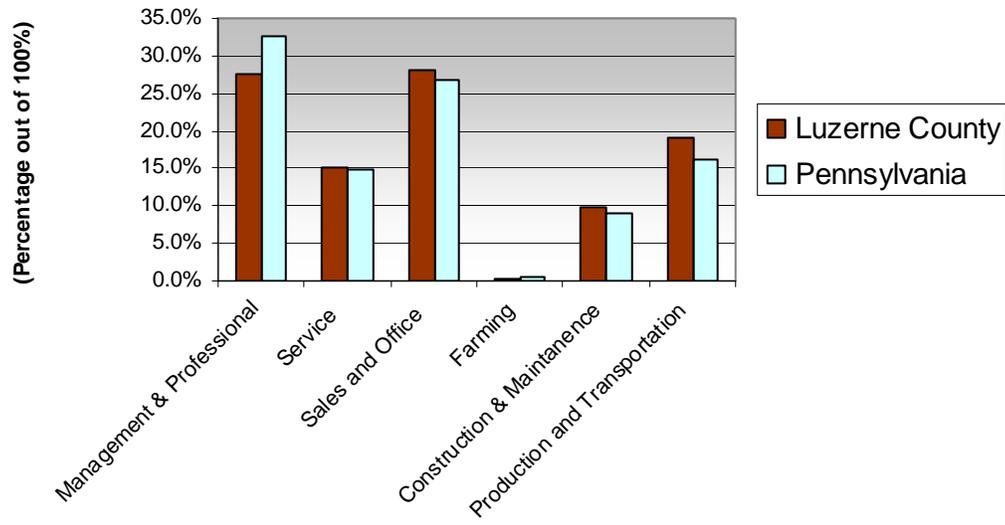
With regard to business and employment, 260,412 employed individuals over the age of 16 lived in Luzerne County as of the year 2000. Of that number, 27.7% had managerial and professional occupations; 15.2% were in service occupations; and 28.1% had sales and office occupations. Another 0.2% had farming, fishing, and forestry occupations; 9.8% had construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations; and 19.0% were in production and transportation occupations.^{xlviii}

Pennsylvania, on the other hand, had a total of 5,653,500 individuals 16 years and older in the workforce. They were divided as listed in Figure 12.

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Figure 12^{xlix}

Occupation, 2000



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QUALITATIVE ISSUES FROM 1950-2000

While reviewing the data provided in previous sections, it is possible to note trends in statistical data. These trends can be linked to historical events that occurred in the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton MSA.

A significant portion of the population decline in our MSA was among young adults. Overall, the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area's 25-34-year-old population suffered a 17.7% decline from 1950 to 2000. During that same time span, the area's elderly population equaled 18.9% of the population, or "the highest percentage among the nine largest metropolitan areas" and caused by the return "home" of retirees from the region that had left to pursue employment elsewhere.

The greatest increase in population was seen between 1990 and 2000 when the region's second-class townships increased by 5.2%, adding 10,241 residents to the total population.ⁱ While this occurred, as noted in Table 11, more established townships of the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area lost about 5.4% of their total population during the 1990's.

Table 11ⁱⁱ
Population Change in Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton MSA

	1990 Population	2000 Population	Absolute Change	Percent Change
Older Area	442,267	418,339	-23,928	-5.4%
Cities	186,378	171,730	-14,648	-7.9%
Boroughs	224,686	215,974	-8,712	-3.9%
First-Class Twp	31,203	30,635	-568	-1.8%
Second-Class Twp	196,196	206,437	10,241	5.2%
Metro Total	638,463	624,776	-13,687	-2.1%

Employment figures were also affected throughout the same timeframe, but not as seriously as population. Job sprawl has stabilized while employment growth has been slow during the period. The Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area, in fact, had the slowest employment growth in Pennsylvania, despite a positive employment growth following the 1990s.ⁱⁱⁱ

The region's household income has also seen an increase through the years. While the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area's \$44,189 average household income is the lowest among the state's nine largest regions, income here is steadily rising: between 1989 and 1999, the average household income grew by 5.5%, surpassing the state's 5.1% income growth.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

Trends in history also indicate that a low level of education persists. According to The Brookings Report: "About 81.5% of Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area residents possess a high school degree...the percentage of area residents holding a bachelor's degree ... [is] at only 17.4 — significantly lower than the respective state and national averages of 22.4 and 24.4%".^{liv}

Trends in history are mainly linked to five historic events and two political elements of the area. These include:

Historic

- ❖ The gradual disappearance of coal;
- ❖ The Knox Mine disaster of 1959;
- ❖ The Agnes flood of 1972;
- ❖ 1980 national economic recession;
- ❖ Governmental fragmentation;

Political

- ❖ Weak planning;
- ❖ Non-strategic investment policy and barriers to investment.

Following the stock market crash of 1929, the Pennsylvania coal industry, as well as the national coal industry suffered greatly. The use of coal gradually decreased in succeeding years until it finally disappeared. Coal was replaced by oil, gas, and electricity, forcing most coal mines to shut down throughout the nation. This change

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caused a massive growth in unemployment rates, which rose to more than 12%, negatively impacting Luzerne County as well as the nation.^{lv}

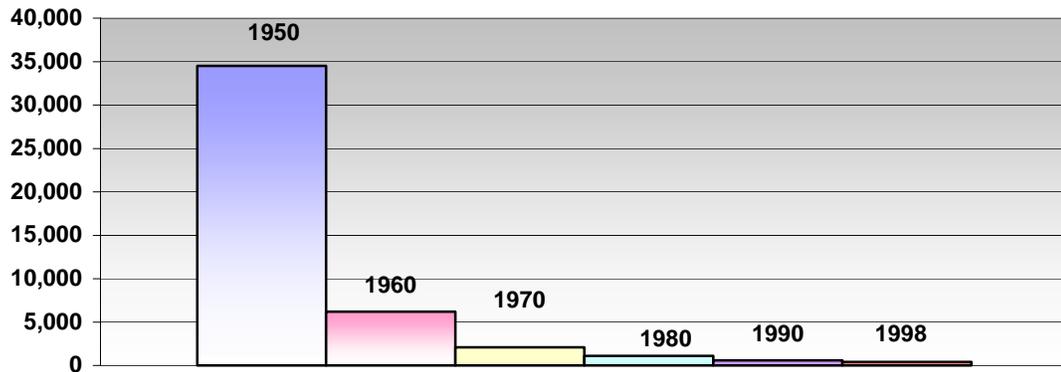
The Knox Mine Disaster of 1959 delivered a harsh blow to the area's economy. After years of a depressed economy, thousands of miners saw a bright and stable future ahead of them. Miners and laborers began working again in different area coal operations. That bright future was ended by the Knox Coal Co. and the disaster of 1959.

Under orders of the Knox Coal Co., workers were sent into the mines to begin digging near the banks of the Susquehanna River. On January 22nd, the workers dug too close to the river bed, and around noontime, the river broke through and flooded the area mines. There were 69 survivors who emerged from the mines. Twelve workers were never found. This disaster got the attention of many, both locally and nationally. For the first time, the Wyoming Valley's future was uncertain.^{lvi}

In total, 7,500 jobs were lost. The payroll deprivation was at 32 million dollars; anthracite production dropped by 94,000 tons. Figure 13 shows a significant decrease of employment in anthracite coal mining from 1950 to 1998.

Figure 13^{lvii}

Number of Persons Employed in Coal Mining in Luzerne County



Since 1950, the mining industry in Luzerne County evolved to manufacturing and currently to the service industry. While the presence of anthracite coal is still obvious today (one million tons of anthracite were in the area as of 1997), its importance has declined greatly, forcing anthracite producers to “downsize,” thus affecting the economy.

Tropical storm Agnes dealt the Wyoming Valley a devastating blow in June 1972. Agnes dumped 14 trillion gallons of water over much of the area, flooding the Susquehanna River and numerous communities throughout Pennsylvania.^{lviii}

The combination of the hurricane and rising river levels devastated the area by flooding more than 150 factories, destroying 3,500 homes, forcing 11,335 people out of work, and leading to 48 deaths. The aftermath of flood damage was listed at \$2.1 billion, or approximately \$6.3 billion in today's economy.^{lix}

After the devastation of the 1972 flood came the recession of the 1980s. Two years into his first term, President Ronald Reagan attempted to balance the U.S. budget. Under his plan, the president chose to cut budgets in nearly every department of the government, including social programs that help with school lunch programs and payments for people with disabilities. Not included in his cuts were Social Security, Medicare, and the military.^{lx}

After a year of debating, President Reagan's Recovery Act was finally signed in August of 1981. The Act was supposed to bring balance to the budget, which had a projected \$80 billion deficit — the largest to date in U.S. history. Not long after, the economy took a turn for the worse. Inflation rose to 14% per year, leading to a significant recession and deep unemployment across the country. By November of 1982, nine million people were

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out of jobs, approximately 17,000 businesses failed, farmers lost land, and many people became homeless. This was something the U.S. had not seen since the depression.^{lxi}

Since 1980, the gap between the high-end or technologically advanced and low-end companies or traditional blue collar has increased drastically. Since this region is comprised of mainly blue-collar or low-skill jobs, wages remain low and the economy stagnant.^{lxii}

The 1982 recession caused a substantial decrease in wages, leading to a lower median wage in Pennsylvania, as compared to that of five neighboring states. The minimum wage also lost its value because of the recession.^{lxiii}

Although Pennsylvania had a high share of “private sector workers with employer-provided pensions (59.2%)” it also experienced the ninth largest percentage point fall in coverage because of the recession.^{lxiv}

Pennsylvania’s family income was also affected by the recession. The median family income increased to an above-average status, perhaps due to the sharp increase in work hours of the 1990s. Pennsylvania’s poverty rates have also increased since the early 1980s. Regardless of such increases, however, the recession increased the gap between middle and poor income families. This gap has yet to be reduced.^{lxv}

Tax revenues and expenditures were also hurt. While the area and the nation seemingly recovered between 1982 and 1983, tax revenues and expenditures continued to drop causing a decline in total area expenditures.^{lxvi}

Government fragmentation has also influenced area trends. With 176 general-purpose governments — 28 per 100,000 people — the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area faces a lack of coordination among entities and sprawl in its development patterns, affecting the area’s economic growth in a negative manner.^{lxvii} To put Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton’s government fragmentation into perspective, the city of Philadelphia averages 7.4 local governments per 100,000 residents, well below Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton’s 28.

The Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area is also characterized by the presence of comprehensive planning and zoning ordinances. These ordinances, however, do not require the numerous municipalities to work together cooperatively, resulting in “redundant, uncoordinated development and sprawl”.^{lxviii}

The Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority (PIDA), the Opportunity Grant Program (OGP), and the Infrastructure Development Program (IDP), [Pennsylvania’s major economic program], “allocate more money on a per capita basis to this region than to any other of the nine regions in the Commonwealth,” identified in the Brookings Institute Report. The money, however, is allocated for the older communities, showing that significant subsidies are used in support of curbing the development of sprawl in the fringe areas.^{lxix}

TODAY'S DEMOGRAPHY & LONG-TERM GOALS

PART A: TODAY'S DEMOGRAPHY

The statistics for the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton MSA have changed greatly during the past few years.

The most recent statistics (2003) show that the total population in the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area equals 583,172, of which 280,866 are male and 302,306 are female. The population is made up of 566,332 Whites, 12,221 Blacks or African Americans, 752 American Indians and Alaska Natives, 1,533 Asians, and 4,344 of other races. Statistics also show that the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area population is divided by age as indicated in Table 12.

Table 12^{lxx}
Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton MSA Population By Age

Under 5 years old	28,566
5-9 years old	33,679
10-14 years old	37,383
15-19 years old	36,712
20-24 years old	36,846
25-34 years old	68,455
35-44 years old	85,885
45-54 years old	86,073
55-59 years old	35,346
60-64 years old	30,360
65-74 years old	48,883
75-84 years old	40,996
85 and over	13,988

While the median age is recognized as 41-years-old, Table 12 shows that the greatest portion of the area's population is between the ages of 45-84 years old, indicating that the population within the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area is generally made up of an older generation.^{lxxi}

Educational attainment statistics (2003) of the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area are also useful. They indicate there is a total of 135,608 individuals 3 years and older enrolled in school, of which 5,260 are in nursery school or preschool, 7,576 are in kindergarten and 57,310 are in elementary school (grades 1-8). The number of high school students (grades 9-12) is estimated at 32,026; and 33,436 are college or graduate school students.^{lxxii}

The total population in the MSA is 583,172, broken down into 248,235 households. Of the total number of households, 157,800 are family households, and 90,435 are non-family households.^{lxxiii}

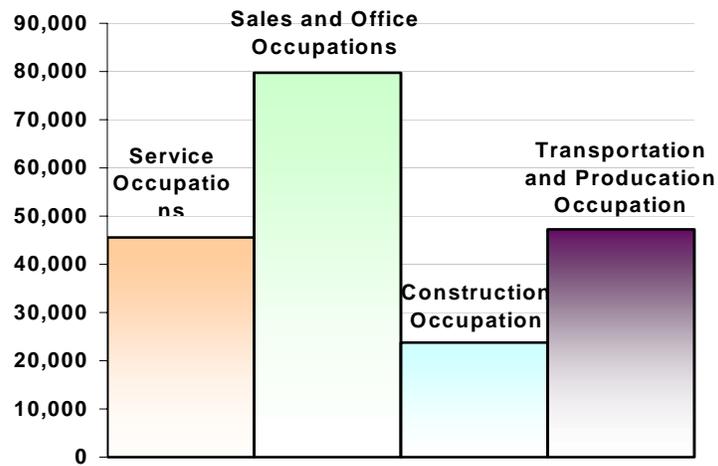
Housing statistics are also interesting. There are 282,184 housing units located in the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area: 248,235 are occupied housing units and 33,949 are vacant housing units. The occupied housing units are 169,367 owner-occupied housing units and 78,868 renter-occupied housing units. The homeowner vacancy rate equals 1.4% while the rental vacancy rate equals 4.8%.^{lxxiv}

Occupational statistics indicate a total of 474,447 individuals over the age of 16 are employed in the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton. Other occupational statistics are listed in Figure 14.

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Figure 14^{lxxv}

Occupation Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton 2003



The indicators provided throughout this study show that Luzerne County is currently at a below-average status across the board. The correlation between indicators and impact is clear: the lower the numbers, the lower the ranking of the area. These statistics graphically portray the area's declining condition. In order to remove Luzerne County from this detrimental condition, specific actions must be taken.

PART B: LONG-TERM GOALS & PLANNING

The Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton MSA must come together to address the region's issues outlined in this paper. The continuing decline of the young population, the growth in the older generation, the lack of economic competitiveness, and the drifting economy are all elements that left unattended could lead to further, serious deterioration of the region. As previously indicated, the statistics show how and why Luzerne County is currently at a below-average economical and social status. In order to reverse this condition, the Luzerne County area must reach the following goals:

- ❖ Reverse the downward trends.
- ❖ Focus on solutions to governmental fragmentation.
- ❖ Collaborate on a regional level.

If met, these goals will help to promote the redevelopment of the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area. Per the Brookings Institution, some useful strategies to help us reach such goals include:

- ❖ Improve Pennsylvania's state and local planning systems.
- ❖ Invest in a high-road economy.
- ❖ Focus on more effective investment policies.
- ❖ Encourage wholesale land reclamation and redevelopment where necessary.
- ❖ Promote regional and state governance.
- ❖ Implement more successful clean-up projects.
- ❖ Bolster the economy by attracting higher paying jobs. ^{lxxvi}

Over time, these methods can be implemented and followed. However the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area cannot implement these policies and reach these goals overnight.

By improving the state's state and local planning system, the area could promote more effective land use and economic competitiveness. Also, by focusing on a high-road economy and more effective investment policies, the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area would be able to target the resources that already exist within its area, specifically, on redevelopment in the regions' towns, cities and older suburbs and the promotion of those successes.^{lxxvii} Currently, investment and development are not focused within the region or the commonwealth. There is little or no joint planning among communities. Several statewide initiatives (like Keystone Opportunity Zones) allow for local entities to have total control over designating which buildings and land fall under the KOZ designation. Without some guidelines, there is no consistency in choosing KOZ locations, thus not reinforcing and strengthening the urban core.

The promotion of regional and state governance would bring about more regional collaboration. If regional and state governances would join forces, creating a more aggressive, collaborative workforce, revitalization would be swifter and more effective.^{lxxviii} This effort should be clarified because it doesn't mean creating more governments. We speak of "governance," which means including stakeholders from different organizations, governments, and businesses from across political boundaries within our regions. These individuals could work together to identify and implement solutions to problems. Then take those solutions to elected bodies that have the power to implement them.

With more programs like "Clean and Green" covering a broader area, the MSA will become cleaner and more attractive to entrepreneurs and companies. A more presentable appearance would welcome investors, bolstering the economy.^{lxxix} This strategy should also be expanded to more brownfield development, as well as historic preservation projects.

Bucks County, Pennsylvania has seen a surge in redevelopment through implementing some of these practices. With the implementation of tax-exempt bonds, the county has been spurring redevelopment. The Federal Lands Reuse Authority of Bucks County is using tax-exempt infrastructure improvement bonds to improve sewer systems, roads, and lighting. Also, such bonds have helped to improve dilapidated buildings. By taking such action, the area is more appealing.^{lxxx}

The Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton MSA should follow the example of Bucks County. Investing funds in the improvement of the aesthetics and environment in the area would make the region more appealing. A visually

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appealing region would be more likely to attract those from outside the region, including investors and businesses. This follows that “place” is critical to a region’s economic success through image and identity. Regions that are alive with activity 24/7 and regions that are clean and aesthetically pleasing have stronger and more sustainable economies.

Like Pennsylvania, Missouri faced economic decline during a period of decades, underlined by the continual lack of focus on available resources throughout the area. By placing more focus on area resources and collaborating with regional and state administrators — regardless of the area’s modest population growth — Missouri was gradually able to rise above its state of decline, forming a more spread-out population and economy. If the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area were to join forces with regional and state administrators and focus more on its available resources (i.e., institutions of higher education, location central to the interstates, good quality of life, low taxes), it would be able to implement a more vigorous and less costly marketing campaign throughout the area. Prospective employers and interested entrepreneurs would be encouraged to move to the area, promoting population growth of the young, generating a more effective economy, and promoting redevelopment of the area without causing unnecessary debt.^{lxxxix}

Another state/county facing problems similar to those in our region is Adams County, Wisconsin. With an estimated population of 18,000 people, Adams County is working to attract new businesses and future employers. Adams County has implemented a development zone policy that will help the area to grow and prosper. The policy consists of creating a three-county development zone with surrounding Juneau and Marquette counties. Formed in 1996 by the Wisconsin Department of Commerce, the policy provides the zone with tax credits to businesses for hiring new workers. Following Adams County’s lead, a three-county development zone could be formed with Luzerne, Lackawanna, and Monroe counties. By collaborating, the zone could create more effective economic policies to encourage area growth and revitalization.^{lxxxix}

The Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton region could also follow in the footsteps of Middlesex County, New Jersey. While many counties rely on incentives to improve their distressed economy, Middlesex County draws new businesses and improves its economy through aggressive marketing per the National Association of Counties:

Middlesex County portrays itself as the “Hub of New Jersey” where there is a high quality of life, low taxes and a skilled workforce. Through brochures, a website (<http://co.middlesex.j.us>), and a videotape, Middlesex County is working to attract new businesses. To inform prospective businesses about the county, the Board of Chosen Freeholders (county commission) provides a Community Asset Profile that contains basic information about the economy, weather and education and provides detailed information about skills training, utilities ... federal, state, and local economic incentives.^{lxxxix}

It is clear that a more aggressive marketing strategy is needed to attract more business and industry to this area. Penn’s Northeast may need more resources to enhance its marketing and sales efforts. However, it is important to have a balanced economic development strategy, one that focuses not only on business attraction, but also on business expansion, retention, and business start-ups. Here, our local Small Business Development Centers, NEPA Technology Institute, and NEPA Alliance hold the keys to balancing these economic development initiatives.

Many communities have identified improvements in K -12 education as being a catalyst for improving the overall economy. Cities such as Boston, Chicago and Denver have had recent successes in enhancing education. While our region is rich in higher education, our K-12 system is not as strong. This area cannot rely on students from other states and countries to be its sole market for higher-end jobs. There should be a local system in place to foster goals for higher education amongst our residents. In addition, the region must seek ways to challenge average and above-average students in the primary grades. Our system addresses, through the Federal mandate “No Child Left Behind,” the needs of the less-than-average student, but fails those that have greater abilities. As these children pass through higher grades, they will not be able to compete with children educated in private schools. As is, this system may affect them negatively in their college performance or deter them from higher education altogether. Therefore K-12 needs to undergo a rigorous transformation to more thoroughly prepare children for higher education.

Business Development and K-12 education enhancement are two primary vehicles for developing a sustainable economy.

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Another factor in improving our region is to make the Commonwealth more business friendly. In a recent *Forbes* magazine study, the Commonwealth was ranked 45th among states in the U.S. Economic Freedom Index. The Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area was ranked among the worst regions in the state. The study examined 143 variables, including tax rates, state spending, occupational licensing, environmental regulations, income redistribution, right-to-work and prevailing wage laws, tort laws, and the number of government agencies. The five main sectors that grouped the variables were fiscal, regulatory, judicial, size of government, and social welfare.^{lxxxiv}

The *Forbes* survey concurs with the Brookings Institution that size of government is a negative factor in moving our region forward. Serious consideration must be given to consolidation of local government entities if we are truly going to make long-term improvements to our economy. Yet it is the one topic no one wants to address. Fear of reprisal prohibits state elected officials from addressing the issue and fear of loss of control and power are the major obstacles on a local level.

If we implement the abovementioned policies, the majority of the younger population who are leaving Luzerne County at a fast pace (thus creating a gap in society) may actually choose to stay. As the area becomes visually appealing, with more successful businesses and a stable economy, the younger population may grow. With the growth of the younger population, the area itself may prosper economically, educationally and visually, allowing Luzerne County to move from a below-average status to average. One step at a time, Luzerne County can achieve the prosperity it once had.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research project was to address the reasons why the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton region is considered below average. To do so, such elements as population, historic trends, economy, housing, and business were analyzed.

We also presented long-term goals for Luzerne County and policies, that may help. The area's long-term goals range from removing the area's current negative status to stabilizing the declining economy. Policies to help reach such goals include investing in high wage industries to implementing more clean-up projects in the area.

By implementing the policies provided throughout this study, Luzerne County can become more visually appealing to the public, allowing for an increase in population, a higher cash flow, increase in investments, higher standard of living; and much more. Improving one aspect of the area will lead to an overall improvement of the area as a whole.

The Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton region must change its current situation to avoid further damage to its economy, population, and general demographic features. If these suggested policies are implemented, the area will be a better place to live and work.

Finally, two thoughts must be kept in mind:

- ❖ Area revitalization will not occur overnight. Patience and determination are key elements to the success of the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre/Hazleton area. We must all work together, one step at a time, to improve the area.
- ❖ Both the state and local government must work together to implement these policies. The more people who help to revitalize the area, the greater and quicker the impact. The information provided in this research would be useless without teamwork, patience, and determination on behalf of all interested parties.

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