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The Impact of Plant Closures or Deindustrialization on Local Labor Relations in Small and Mono-industrial United States Cities

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Abstract: Manufacturing has long been regarded as a primary engine of growth and economic development in developed countries, even as the rise of the service sector and deindustrialization have become increasingly prevalent since the 1970s. Despite these shifts, the manufacturing sector remains a significant contributor to employment and a major force in industrial relations. However, small cities and towns are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of deindustrialization, as plant closures can lead to severe socioeconomic consequences in communities across the United States (US) that are shaped as single- or mono-industrial towns or cities. While shutdowns are often driven by economic rationales such as cost and capacity optimization, efficiency, competitiveness, and globalization, workers and other residents in these towns experience substantial challenges following plant closures, including unemployment, social and psychological distress, forced migration, poverty and homelessness. These issues are captured by various local news programs uploaded to YouTube, offering real-time insights into the impacts on these communities. This paper aims to analyze these videos as a secondary data source to provide a more nuanced understanding of the socioeconomic consequences of plant closures, beyond mere statistical fluctuations. The primary qualitative data set consists of 15 videos, which were analyzed through qualitative content analysis (QCA), thematic analysis (TA) and narrative analysis. Among the 14 mono-industrial and small towns studied, the smallest had 155 residents, while the largest had approximately 61,000 residents. The findings indicate that mono-industrial towns are highly vulnerable to the exodus of a single economic player (so-called “the integrator”). The lack of alternative employment opportunities and low levels of industrial diversification jeopardize the well-being of residents, often forcing them to leave and risking the creation of ghost towns. The negative impacts extend to closures in the tertiary sector, disruptions in workers’ personal lives, psychological distress and interruptions in schooling for families. These findings will be valuable for anyone interested in understanding the effects of plant closures on small towns across the US, providing insights for policymakers and contributing to academic discourse on the socioeconomic dimensions of small-scale deindustrialization. Compared to econometric studies and highly stylized academic research, qualitative, human-centered perspectives remain scarce in academia, highlighting gaps in knowledge and methodology in the study of industrial relations.

Keywords: deindustrialization, factory shutdowns, labor relations, media, mono-industry, small cities, thematic analysis, towns, urban planning, qualitative content analysis, US economy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Industrialization has had a profound impact on the development and transformation of small towns in both the US and Europe. This transformation can be traced along several dimensions, including economic restructuring, demographic shifts and urban planning challenges. Firstly, industrialization has led to the emergence of specialized industrial cities. These cities often developed around specific industries, such as textiles, steel or mining, which formed their economic base. Thus, cities such as Hershey in the US and Grasse in France became known for their unique industrial production, which shaped not only their economic activities but also their cultural identity (Wang et al., 2023). However, this specialization also made these cities vulnerable to economic fluctuations. The decline of manufacturing, especially in mono-industrial cities, has led to significant socioeconomic challenges, including unemployment and population decline (Bole et al., 2019; Wolff & Wiechmann, 2017). It is safe to say that while industrialization provided new opportunities for the vast majority of the population, such as farmers and workers, its volatility proved to be one of the biggest challenges from the very beginning.

Recent observations, especially from social media, suggest an intriguing area for systematic analysis: plant closures and shutdowns significantly reshape social and industrial relations in small communities. While this notion is not new, the specific mechanisms by which these closures affect these relations remain understudied. Additionally, the rise of social media offers a unique perspective for examining the lived experiences of individuals and communities

impacted by plant closures. This study's primary research questions are as follows: How do plant closures and shutdowns (i.e., deindustrialization) impact social and industrial relations in small communities? How do emerging media agencies shape the discourse and mobilization of affected communities in response to plant closures shared on social media platforms?

Deindustrialization often leads to significant social upheaval, disrupting social order and generating substantial tension and personal dissatisfaction among the workforce (High, 2020). This study seeks to examine these effects using data derived from YouTube coverage of deindustrialization by local news channels. The primary methodology employed in this paper is a structured, note-based QCA. While previous research has examined the impact of deindustrialization on labor relations and labor markets in mono-industrial cities in the US, this study leverages recent media data to highlight the sustainability challenges faced by local economies in small, deindustrializing cities.

The findings reveal that major economic actors in small, mono-industrial cities often engage in inconsistent and unpredictable investment and divestment practices, primarily driven by economic considerations such as cost efficiency and market expansion. While the relocation of capital from local economies in the US may align with certain business rationales, it profoundly disrupts the emotional and economic well-being of local residents, leading to sharp demographic shifts and labor market volatility. Consequently, mono-industrial small towns face severe challenges from deindustrialization, including unemployment, poverty and migration, fueled by factors such as energy transitions, corporate relocations and industry decline. Media narratives and limited academic attention fail to adequately address the human and economic dimensions of these struggles. Residents often resist relocating despite uncertainties, emphasizing the necessity of strategic urban planning to mitigate overpopulation in larger cities and manage local economic disruptions. The ripple effects of deindustrialization on education, public services and secondary businesses further exacerbate these issues, underscoring the need for normative, action-oriented academic research and qualitative policy solutions to support these vulnerable communities.

The following section is the literature review, which examines case studies of small, mono-industrial cities that initially attracted substantial investments but later experienced deindustrialization. This section explores the underlying factors driving these cities' periods of economic growth and subsequent decline. Section 3 describes the data sources and methodology utilized in this study. Section 4 presents the findings of the qualitative analysis, providing a comprehensive perspective on the social and economic consequences of industrialization and its subsequent reversal in small, mono-industrial cities. The final section concludes with policy implications and recommendations, emphasizing the need for continued scholarly attention to these critical issues and outlining directions for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several small and mono-industrial cities in the US have been analyzed in the academic literature, highlighting their unique economic structures, challenges and responses to industrial change. These cities often serve as case studies to understand the dynamics of industrialization and deindustrialization. One prominent example is Hershey (Pennsylvania), known for its chocolate manufacturing. The city was founded around the Hershey Chocolate Company, which significantly influenced the economic and social fabric of the city. Studies have examined how Hershey's mono-industrial focus has shaped the city's development, particularly in terms of community identity and economic resilience (Wang et al., 2023). The city's dependence on a single industry has also made it vulnerable to market fluctuations and sparked discussions about diversification strategies (Bole et al., 2019).

Another notable case is Gary (Indiana), which was built around the steel industry. The economic development of Gary has been analyzed extensively, particularly in the context of the city's deindustrialization and decline. The city's dependence on steel production has led to significant demographic changes and economic challenges as the industry has faced global competition and technological changes (Wolff & Wiechmann, 2017). Research has highlighted Gary's efforts to revitalize its economy through initiatives aimed at attracting new industries and improving local infrastructure (Cercleux et al., 2023).

Flint (Michigan) is another well-documented example of a mono-industrial city known primarily for its automobile industry. Flint's experience of industrial decline, especially after the collapse of General Motors, has been a focus for studies of urban decay and economic restructuring (Hua, 2012). The literature often discusses the socioeconomic impacts of this decline, including population loss and deterioration of public services, as well as the community's efforts to rebuild and adapt to the new economic realities (Kortelainen & Albrecht, 2021).

Youngstown (Ohio) also serves as a critical case study for analyzing mono-industrial cities. Once a thriving center of steel production, Youngstown faced significant economic challenges following the decline of the industry in the late 20th century. Scholarly work has examined the city's transition from a mono-industrial economy to one that strives to diversify and innovate, focusing on community resilience and grassroots initiatives (Hospers, 2012). Youngstown's experience illustrates the broader trends of deindustrialization and the search for new economic pathways in similar cities throughout the Midwest (Hua, 2012).

Finally, Bessemer (Alabama), known for its iron and steel production, has been analyzed in the context of its industrial heritage and subsequent economic challenges. Research has shown how Bessemer's historical dependence on the steel industry has shaped the cityscape and socioeconomic conditions, leading to discussions about the importance of heritage preservation and economic diversification (Rubtsov & Litvinenko, 2020).

While industrialization created single-industry cities to achieve economies of scale and higher marginal utility, the process of deindustrialization had a particularly harsh impact on small cities that were heavily dependent on a single industry. In many cases, these cities experienced a severe economic downturn as industries relocated or closed, resulting in a loss of jobs and a shrinking tax base (Cercleux et al., 2023). This phenomenon has been observed across Europe, where many small industrial cities struggled to adapt to market-oriented reforms after the collapse of communism, leading to economic stagnation and demographic decline (Cercleux et al., 2023). The socioeconomic impact of deindustrialization has led many cities to seek diversification strategies and shift to a service-based economy to mitigate the effects of industrial decline (Bole et al., 2019).

In response to these challenges, urban planning and policy interventions are crucial. Small towns have developed various strategies to revitalize their economies and improve their socioeconomic conditions. For example, some cities have focused on upgrading their industrial parks by promoting a mix of traditional and new industries to create a more diversified economic base (Hua, 2012). In addition, the concept of "placemaking" has gained traction, where cities seek to improve their public spaces and community engagement to attract residents and visitors alike (Kortelainen & Albrecht, 2021). In all cases, demographic and industrial labor relations have become a crucial aspect of industrialization and deindustrialization, both in developing and developed countries.

First, the demographic shifts resulting from industrialization and subsequent deindustrialization have led to significant changes in the social fabric of these towns. Many small towns have experienced a population decline as the younger generation migrates to the larger urban centers

in search of better opportunities (Wolff & Wiechmann, 2017). This trend has exacerbated the challenges these cities face as they struggle to maintain essential services and infrastructure with a shrinking population. Policy makers have begun to address these issues by implementing strategies aimed at retaining residents and attracting newcomers, such as improving local amenities and investing in community development (Hospers, 2012). Secondly, when industries downsize or relocate, the unemployment rate increases, leading to a decrease in local purchasing power and economic activity (Zaborova, 2021). Municipalities strive to develop the labor market, but they often lack the necessary financial resources and support from larger companies (Zaborova, 2021). Thirdly, relationships between employers and employees in small towns can be more complicated due to the high level of interdependence between community members. Conflicts may occur more frequently but can also be resolved through local mediation efforts (Zheng et al., 2014).

It is also logical to ask why large companies leave mono-industrial or small towns and communities, even though they once decided to invest in such towns and communities. Large companies often decide to relocate from small cities to larger urban areas for a variety of economic and business reasons. These motivations can be broadly categorized into cost considerations, labor availability, market access and strategic positioning.

One of the primary economic reasons for relocation is cost savings. Companies frequently seek to reduce operational expenses, which can include lower rental costs, reduced labor expenses and overall lower cost of living in the new location. Research indicates that firms experience significant excess returns when relocating to areas with lower living costs and higher labor availability, suggesting that these factors are critical in the decision-making process (Cox & Schultz, 2007; Alli et al., 1991). Furthermore, the consolidation of operations and the need for space associated with business growth or contraction are also significant drivers for relocation (Cox & Schultz, 2007).

In addition to cost considerations, labor availability plays a crucial role in the decision to move. Companies often relocate to areas where they can access a larger and more skilled labor pool, which is essential for maintaining competitive advantage and supporting growth initiatives (Cox & Schultz, 2007; Alli et al., 1991). The availability of specialized labor is particularly important for high-tech industries, which tend to cluster in metropolitan areas where talent is more concentrated (Zhang et al., 2022). This phenomenon is supported by the observation that medium-sized enterprises are more likely to relocate than small or large firms, often seeking proximity to agglomerations that provide these labor advantages (Zhang et al., 2022).

Market access is another significant factor influencing relocation decisions. Companies often seek to position themselves closer to key markets or suppliers, which can enhance operational efficiency and reduce transportation costs (Gheorghe & Panazan, 2021). The strategic repositioning of a company to tap into new markets or to align with industry trends is a common rationale for moving, particularly in sectors that are rapidly evolving (Gheorghe & Panazan, 2021). This is especially relevant for firms that rely on just-in-time supply chains or those that need to be near their customer base to remain competitive (Cox & Schultz, 2007).

Furthermore, the effects of relocation on employee retention should not be ignored. The decision to relocate can have a significant impact on employee morale and retention, as not all employees are willing or able to relocate with the company (Christersson & Rothe, 2012). However, in the past, these large companies have invested in small towns and created mono-industrial towns. The motivations of these companies were once the pursuit of cost efficiency, access to new markets, community engagement and the potential for sustainable development.

One significant factor driving large companies to invest in small towns is the opportunity for cost savings. Smaller towns often offer lower operational costs, including cheaper real estate

and lower wages compared to urban centers. This economic advantage allows companies to allocate resources more efficiently, enhancing their overall profitability (Kozma, 2024). Additionally, the cost of living in small towns is generally lower, which can attract employees seeking affordable housing and a better quality of life (Wrigley et al., 2018). Such factors create a compelling case for companies to establish operations in these areas, particularly when they can maintain or improve their profit margins.

Moreover, investing in small towns allows companies to tap into new markets. As urban areas become saturated, businesses often look to expand their customer base in less competitive environments. Small towns can provide a unique opportunity for companies to establish brand loyalty and capture market share in regions that are underserved by larger corporations (Antonova, 2023). This market expansion is particularly relevant in sectors such as retail and services, where local engagement can significantly enhance customer relationships and community support (Lin et al., 2023).

Community engagement and corporate social responsibility also play crucial roles in these investment decisions. Companies investing in small towns often seek to foster goodwill and build strong community ties, which can lead to a more stable operating environment (Besser, 2012). By contributing to local development, such as infrastructure improvements and community programs, businesses can enhance their public image and create a loyal customer base. This symbiotic relationship benefits both the company and the community, as local investments can lead to improved economic conditions and a more skilled workforce (Meili, 2019).

Furthermore, the concept of sustainable development is becoming increasingly important in corporate strategy. Companies are recognizing the potential for small towns to serve as models for sustainable practices, particularly in terms of environmental stewardship and social equity (Tripathi, 2021). By investing in small towns, businesses can lead initiatives that promote sustainability, such as green building practices and local sourcing, which can resonate well with consumers who prioritize corporate responsibility (Horeczki & Egyed, 2021). This alignment with sustainability goals not only enhances the company's reputation but also positions it favorably in an increasingly eco-conscious market. Moreover, by supporting small towns, companies can contribute to long-term economic growth and stability, creating a more resilient business environment for themselves and the communities they serve.

In conclusion, industrialization has played a crucial role in shaping the economic, social and spatial dynamics of small towns in the US and Europe. The legacy of industrialization is evident in the specialized economic structures of these cities, the socioeconomic challenges resulting from deindustrialization, and the ongoing efforts to revitalize and adapt to changing circumstances. As these cities grapple with the complexities of their industrial past, the integration of innovative planning approaches and community involvement will be crucial to promote sustainable development in the future. In particular, industrial labor relations in small towns affected by deindustrialization require a nuanced understanding of economic, social and political dynamics. By focusing on local agency and promoting collaborative governance, these communities can overcome the challenges associated with industrial decline and work toward sustainable economic revitalization. The interaction between small businesses and local authorities will be crucial in shaping the future labor markets in these regions.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

To clarify the conceptual design of this study, certain definitions and selection criteria must be specified. First, this study adheres to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) definition of a “small city” within the US. According to NCES, a small city is a “territory inside

an Urbanized Area and inside a Principal City with a population less than 100,000” (NCES). Second, since the primary data source for this research consists of news clips posted on YouTube by various local news agencies in the US, a guiding principle was applied in selecting these videos for analysis. Only news clips that visually depicted and detailed the specific impacts of plant closures on local labor and industrial relations were included. Videos lacking such details were excluded from the sample. Additionally, after careful examination of each video’s content, those that attributed plant closures to extraordinary events, such as COVID-19 or the 2008–2009 economic recession, were also excluded from the final sample. Table 1 contains the details of the sources together with their web links and publication dates.

Table 1: The YouTube videos analyzed for the current study and the geographical and demographic coverage.

ID	Location and demographics	Title of the video	Publication date	Link
V01	Jarrat/ Greenville, Sussex counties, Virginia state—652	Boar’s Head plant closure impacting economy of small, rural town of Jarratt	2024	https://bit.ly/Jarrat
V02	Perry/ Dallas country, Iowa State—7,836	Iowa pork plant closure leaves quarter of town without work	2024	https://bit.ly/IowaPlant
V03	Perry/ Dallas country, Iowa State—7,836	Perry plant closure prompts more layoffs	2024	https://bit.ly/PerryTyson
V04	Dexter/ Stoddard County, Missouri state—7,927	Tyson Plant closure aftermath	2023	https://bit.ly/StoddardTyson
V05	Windom/ Cottonwood County, Minnesota—4,798	Windom plant closure could leave 1,000+ workers out of a job	2023	https://bit.ly/WindomHylife
V06	Moscow/ Clermont County, Ohio—155	For small communities, loss of power plant jobs makes a big impact on the local economy	2020	https://bit.ly/MoscowOhio
V07	Petersbourg/ Washington Township /Pike County, Indiana—2,304	How A Coal Plant’s Closures Could Affect One Indiana Town And What It Plans	2020	https://bit.ly/PetersburgIndiana

To Do About It				
V08	Export/ Westmoreland County/Pennsylvania— 893 people	Otis Spunkmeyer plant to close, leaving 130 employees jobless	2014	https://bit.ly/ExportWestmoreland
V09	Moraine/Montgomery County, Ohio—6,393	Residents look back on closure of Moraine GM plant	2018	https://bit.ly/MoraineOhio
V10	Lordstown/southern Trumbull County/Ohio—3,332	'Everyone is in shock': Ohio community reacts to GM plant closure	2018	https://bit.ly/LordstownGM
V11	Hamtramck/Wayne/ Michigan—28,433	After layoff news, GM workers worry about their 'next move'	2018	https://bit.ly/HamtramckGM
V12	Plymouth/ Massachusetts— 61,217	Plymouth selectmen meet on Pilgrim plant closure	2015	https://bit.ly/PlymouthPilgrim
V13	Canton/ St. Lawrence County, New York— 11,638	Workers at Republic Steel speak out after Canton mill closes indefinitely	2023	https://bit.ly/CantonRepSteel
V14	Brady/ McCulloch County, Texas— 5,118	How They Are Now?: Brady Sand Plant Closure	2019	https://bit.ly/BradySand
V15	Robbinsville/Graham County/ North Carolina—747	Furniture Plant Closing	2014	https://bit.ly/RobbinsvilleGraham

Source: Own construction.

Structured note-taking based on observations is a systematic approach that improves retention and understanding of information through organized documentation of key points. This method is especially beneficial in educational and professional settings, as the clarity and structure of notes can significantly impact recall and comprehension. This is the main reason why the present study uses such an approach to answer the research question.

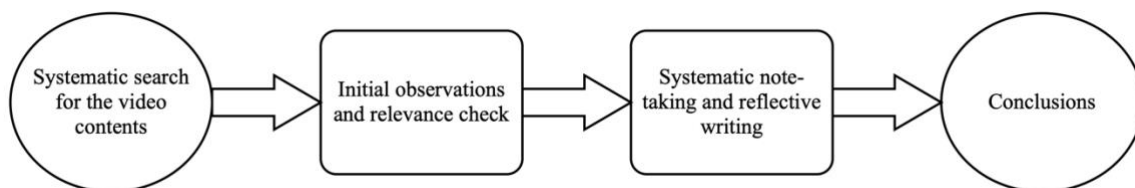
Research indicates that structured note-taking, which includes the use of headings, bullet points and organized layouts, facilitates better memory retention compared to unstructured methods. For instance, Hope et al. highlight that structured notebooks promote recall of trial information, aligning with broader findings that organizational cues enhance memory performance (Hope et al., 2012). Similarly, Olive and Barbier emphasize that designing documents to reflect the structure of source material aids in the selection and integration of information, thereby improving the note-taking process (Olive & Barbier, 2017). This structured approach not only helps in organizing thoughts but also fosters deeper cognitive processing, as noted by Jansen et al. (2017), who discuss the encoding effect associated with effective note-taking.

Moreover, the effectiveness of structured note-taking is supported by findings from various studies that compare different note-taking techniques. For example, Bui et al. found that structured note-taking strategies significantly improve recall compared to less organized methods (Bui et al., 2013). In a similar vein, Chen's research indicates that structured note-taking during lectures leads to higher test scores, suggesting that the method enhances both retention and understanding of educational material (Chen, 2024). This is further corroborated by findings from Meade et al. (2019), which show that structured doodling—an organized form of note-taking—yields better memory performance than free-form doodling.

The implications of structured note-taking extend beyond individual learning contexts. For instance, in collaborative environments, structured note-taking can facilitate collective understanding and engagement, as discussed by Mahyar et al. (2012), who analyze note-taking in collaborative visual analytics. Furthermore, structured note-taking systems have been shown to improve cognitive engagement and reduce distractions in video-based learning contexts (Fang et al., 2022). This suggests that structured note-taking not only benefits individual learners but also enhances group dynamics and learning outcomes.

Figure 1 summarizes the entire research process. First, a systematic search was conducted on YouTube using various keywords that would yield video content related to the mono-industrial cities where deindustrialization took place. Secondly, initial observations and a relevance check were carried out to determine whether the content found was suitable for analysis. Thirdly, systematic notes were taken and reflective texts were written to arrive at specific findings and conclusions.

Figure 1: The overall research process.



Source: Own construction.

The other important part of current research concerns reflective writing. Reflective writing is a powerful tool for qualitative analysis, especially when applied to video content. This method not only enhances the depth of analysis but also fosters critical thinking and self-awareness among participants. The integration of video and reflective writing allows individuals to engage in a more nuanced examination of their experiences, interactions, and the content itself.

One significant advantage of reflective writing in conjunction with video analysis is its ability to shift focus from mere self-observation to a broader examination of interpersonal dynamics. Tatar et al. (2020) highlight that video-supported reflections encourage detailed analysis of student interactions, moving beyond individual behaviors to include observations of others'

actions and responses. This shift is crucial in qualitative research, as it enables a more comprehensive understanding of group dynamics and contextual factors influencing behavior. Furthermore, the objective nature of video recordings provides a reliable basis for identifying issues and generating solutions, thus enhancing the analytical process (Tatar et al., 2010).

Moreover, reflective writing facilitates the articulation of complex thoughts and feelings that arise during video analysis. For instance, Stufft and Gillern (2021) found that students utilized reflective writing to interpret multimodal symbols within video games, which significantly influenced their learning and decision-making processes. This ability to articulate selective attention and interpret information is essential in qualitative analysis, as it allows researchers to uncover deeper meanings and connections within the video content. Additionally, reflective writing can serve as a developmental process, helping individuals to confront their apprehensions and gain authenticity in their reflections, as demonstrated in the study by Parikh et al. (2012) on video journaling.

The qualitative analysis of reflective writing itself can yield valuable insights into the effectiveness of the reflective process. For example, Zhang's research indicates that many pre-service teachers' reflective writings remain at a descriptive level, lacking critical engagement (Zhang, 2023). This finding underscores the importance of guiding reflective practices to foster deeper analytical skills. Furthermore, the integration of reflective writing into educational contexts, such as nursing education, has shown to enhance critical themes like communication and empathy, which are vital for qualitative analysis (Hillier et al., 2020). This indicates that reflective writing not only aids in personal development but also enriches the qualitative data collected from video content.

To conclude, in this study, qualitative content analysis was applied to selected videos that explored local labor relations in the context of deindustrialization among mono-industrial cities. Narrative analysis was employed to examine the personal stories and perspectives shared in the videos, uncovering how individuals and communities framed their experiences and responses to economic disruptions. Thematic analysis complemented this approach by systematically identifying recurring patterns and themes, such as unemployment, migration, and shifts in community cohesion. Reflective writing was integrated into the process, enabling a critical examination of the researcher's interpretations and potential biases. Structured note-taking facilitated the organization and synthesis of data, ensuring that key insights were captured and aligned with the broader research objectives. This combined approach allowed for a nuanced understanding of the social and economic dimensions of deindustrialization and its impact on labor relations.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Beyond the Blame Game: Understanding Industrial Decline and Human Cost

The academic literature identifies various reasons for economic phenomena such as deindustrialization in developed and high-income nations. Deindustrialization in these countries is influenced by several factors, including increased automation and technological advancements that reduce the reliance on labor-intensive manufacturing processes, globalization and the emergence of lower-cost manufacturing hubs in developing nations, and a shift in consumer preferences toward services and high-value goods. In other words, while the causes are multifaceted, the socioeconomic impacts on the local labor force can leave enduring scars on both the productive capacity and psychological well-being of affected communities. Therefore, it is crucial to incorporate diverse narratives into the analysis of

deindustrialization and plant closures to gain a comprehensive understanding of the broader context and long-term implications.

Extraordinary events, such as a massive *Listeria* outbreak in meat products at the Boar's Head plant, can trigger plant shutdowns in the food industry, significantly affecting the only productive sector in small towns like Jarratt (V01). In this case, locals acknowledged that the plant's closure severely impacted their well-being due to the lack of alternative opportunities to participate in the local economy. Authorities were compelled to shut down the plant after the outbreak caused numerous fatalities (9 deaths and 57 hospitalizations), leaving no viable alternative. Consequently, the plant's closure placed the local workforce in a precarious position, threatening their economic security. Additionally, the town manager's limited willingness to engage with the media—possibly due to heightened scrutiny—exacerbated residents' distress about the town's future. As Richard Robinson, one of Jarratt's 630 residents, explained, *"People depend on Boar's Head. Look around, there is no farmland. That is the only employer, as far as employment wise."* This scenario underscores the vulnerabilities associated with mono-industrial towns, highlighting the economic risks in urban development and local labor relations management. Despite the apparent urgency, no immediate solutions or proactive efforts from local authorities were evident to address the crisis. Thus, while plant shutdowns are not always driven by economic factors, their consequences profoundly affect residents' well-being and social standing.

The closure of the Tyson meat processing factory left 1,300 families in Perry (V02) facing significant uncertainty after the company concluded that its outdated plants could not be modernized cost-effectively. While this decision caused considerable distress among the town's adults, some former employees sought to retrain through programs offered by community colleges, aiming to reenter the local workforce. From the content of V02, it is evident that most residents are reluctant to leave their hometown and are willing to seek employment opportunities in nearby areas. However, the sudden cost-saving measures by large companies like Tyson have a profound and often destabilizing impact on mono-industrial small towns.

As former employee Joe Swanson emotionally expressed, *"None of us picked this. I just want everybody to be okay, because I know how hard this is going to be for a lot of people."* In contrast, Sven Peterson, representing the Perry city administration, offered a more optimistic perspective, suggesting that finding a suitable buyer for the plant could create even better opportunities for the community (V03).

The closure also triggered negative spillover effects on related businesses, particularly service providers. For instance, Packer Sanitation Services Incorporated (PSSI), which handled cleaning services for Tyson, announced layoffs in Perry after Tyson ceased operations (V03). Similarly, Tyson's closure in Dexter had severe consequences for local chicken farmers, who faced the risk of financial default. One example is a multimillion-dollar chicken farming operation that struggled to remain solvent after losing Tyson as its primary buyer. Unlike former employees who could retrain and seek new jobs, farmers with substantial investments and collateral were unable to pivot easily, jeopardizing their ability to sustain other local production facilities (V04). These cases highlight the cascading economic challenges that arise when a major employer closes in a mono-industrial town, impacting not only direct employees but also related industries and broader community stability.

The analysis of news reports reveals that plant shutdowns in mono-industrial small towns and cities often result in rapid and significant negative externalities, alongside the abrupt cancellation of ongoing positive externalities. In the case of Windom, the closure of HyLife Foods was attributed to inflation, high foreign exchange rates and rising grain costs (V05). This decision caused a cascade of challenges, including a loss of tax revenue, declining school

enrollments and the termination of positive externalities such as wastewater treatment (V05). HyLife Foods had been a key sponsor of Windom's wastewater treatment program, and its closure left the town without this crucial support (V05). In addition to economic repercussions, unemployment and social distress were prevalent following the plant's closure. Many secondary and tertiary economic actors, heavily dependent on HyLife Foods, reported facing substantial difficulties. Stakeholders emphasized that a more diversified industrial base would have mitigated the economic shock, underscoring the risks of reliance on a single producer. The lack of industrial diversification placed Windom in severe economic distress as HyLife Foods evaluated strategic options to exit the town.

These case studies highlight a recurring pattern: the food industry frequently serves as the economic foundation for mono-industrial small towns. While food processing plants are common in such settings, other sectors have also exhibited similar vulnerabilities. This underscores the critical need for economic diversification to ensure resilience against such disruptions.

The planned shutdown of the William H. Zimmer power plant has raised concerns about the future of the village of Moscow, located in Clermont County, Ohio, particularly in light of the broader trend of coal power plant closures across the US (V06). This transition is largely driven by the expansion and dominance of the renewable energy sector, which is gradually displacing coal through its crowding-out effect. However, small communities like Moscow face significant risks to their economic stability, as their reliance on a mono-industrial structure leaves them vulnerable to the complete loss of income sources. The combination of extremely low population density and the lack of alternative employment opportunities outside of the power plant exacerbates these challenges. Such conditions make it difficult for these communities to sustain stable labor relations or maintain a functioning local economy (V06). This highlights the pressing need for economic diversification and strategic planning to mitigate the adverse effects of industrial transitions on small towns.

The city of Petersburg, Indiana, provides another example of how power plant closures can trigger the decline of local businesses, particularly those in the dining sector (V07). The primary focus of news coverage has been on the negative spillover effects of such shutdowns. Similarly, the closure of Otis Spunkmeyer in Export, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania, illustrates the difficulties faced by the local labor force in finding new employment within their areas of expertise (V08). This challenge is particularly pronounced as workers often require additional training to meet the demands of labor markets in larger cities if they choose to migrate. However, most prefer to remain in their hometowns (V08). The limited size of the local labor market further compounds the issue, offering few, if any, new employment opportunities. Additionally, there is a pervasive fear among workers of losing their severance packages if they voice dissatisfaction or resist the changes imposed by the shutdown. The decision to close Otis Spunkmeyer appears to have been driven by cost-saving measures initiated by its Swiss parent company, which opted to outsource operations. This example underscores the broader challenges faced by mono-industrial communities when external corporate decisions disrupt local economies.

The deindustrialization of the automobile industry in the US has been ongoing since the 1960s. However, mono-industrial cities such as Moraine (Montgomery County, Ohio) and Lordstown (southern Trumbull County, Ohio) continue to face significant challenges when large manufacturers, such as General Motors (GM), shut down their assembly plants. These closures often lead to cascading effects, including the shutdown of supplier companies like Fuyao Glass America Inc. in Moraine, as well as numerous smaller businesses (V09; V10).

The experiences of Moraine and Lordstown are emblematic of broader deindustrialization trends, with little that is unique to their cases. Local residents are generally aware of the consequences of such closures, often demonstrating a mix of realism and optimism about the future. Many express hope that the shuttered businesses will eventually reopen, bringing revitalization and economic recovery to their communities. However, this optimism underscores the broader need for strategic planning and diversification to mitigate the adverse effects of industrial decline.

The perception among community members is that GM demonstrates a lack of concern for the affected locality. Observations from media coverage reinforce this sentiment, as residents express disillusionment with GM's prioritization of financial metrics over community well-being. Despite appeals and efforts to retain the plant, the community feels their pleas are unlikely to influence the company's decision-making, which is viewed as being driven solely by business considerations. In fact, GM's decision to close idled plants in Michigan, Ohio, Maryland and Canada was part of a strategy to reduce production of sedans and shift focus to electric and autonomous vehicle technology (V11). Former employees said the company could no longer sustain rising costs due to low sales and profit margins.

"They do not care. Unfortunately, they do not care, watching the news and stuff and hearing them say how sad it is that GM do not care for employees, it is true. It is a business, we are numbers and it does not matter. All the begs and pleases for this community, it is not going to make a difference." — Tara Gess, former GM employee (V10)

"Everybody is in shock, I mean they are trying to figure out what to do with their future. Should they possibly move out of the area now? Should they wait and see what negotiations bring next summer with between GM and the UAW³? So I mean there is a lot of uncertainty, plus with the holidays coming up, it is, you know, it is a hard thing to come into work and be told that you know next March nobody knows what is going to happen, as far as your job. All total we have about 1,500 people that are union members that will be affected by the closing, and it is not just a Democrat or Republican or an independent issue, I mean, it is a manufacturing job as an American worker issues." — Tim O'Hara, United Auto Workers Local 112 (V10)

"I do not know what is going to happen. It is a really scary situation. I just hope Trump does something that brings all this stuff back, or at least, it makes a nice goodwill on something to get it back." — Michael Hayda, Car Parts Warehouse (V10)

"They know years in advance what they are going to do, what products are going, where it is not something that I think anybody can really now. Like I said, I think it is amazing this community, and what they have done and listening to the governor and listening to everybody and fighting for the stuff, but I just do not see another product here." — Tara Gess, former GM employee (V10)

In most cases, when a manufacturer that has served as the foundational economic integrator of small towns since the 1960s decides to close its factory, the initial response among locals is marked by uncertainty and shock. Such closures often bring heightened risks of homelessness, poverty and mass emigration, leaving the local workforce disoriented and pessimistic about the future. Additionally, considering that mono-industrial small cities and towns often have populations as small as a few hundred people, the effects of economic disruptions can have a profound and significant impact on the well-being of these communities.

³ United Auto Workers.

In the narratives of employees and residents affected by plant closures in the automobile industry, explicit blame directed at specific parties is less pronounced compared to sectors such as food production or power generation. However, there is a consistent expectation for better communication and a more pro-worker approach from large corporations like GM. These expectations reflect the desire for greater transparency and responsibility from major employers during periods of economic transition.

“We did not know. We found out after the fact, and that is not fair. We are not robots that you can push a button and say, OK, do this, now do that. You have to explain to us what is going on as much as you can, and that is all that anyone can ever ask for, is respect.”
— D’nitra Landon, former GM employee (V11)

One notable aspect of the deindustrialization of the automobile sector in the US is the historical peak in state and federal support for this industry. Over time, government backing has diminished, with little likelihood of renewed intervention to protect domestic auto industry workers. This shift places additional pressure on workers, particularly in small towns and cities, where opportunities to transition to new sectors remain limited.

This challenge is echoed in the official statements of various policymakers, independent consultants and union leaders, who highlight the economic and social vulnerabilities faced by workers in this industry. The lack of diversification in these communities further exacerbates the difficulties of adapting to changing industrial landscapes.

“The American consumer and taxpayer is not bailing out General Motors again. Everybody knows that. Every auto executive in Detroit remembers the 1990s, the 2000s, the 1980s, when car companies like General Motors built products even if they could not sell them, just to keep the plants running. That led, along with a bunch of other mistakes, to General Motors’ bankruptcy.” — Auto industry consultant, East Lansing, Michigan (V11)

Louisiana-based Entergy announced its decision to close the Pilgrim Nuclear Power Plant by June 2019, citing an annual operational loss of \$40 million (V12). While this rationale provided a strong justification for mass layoffs, local leaders prioritized efforts to safeguard Plymouth’s economic stability during the plant’s decommissioning process. These developments spurred significant activity among labor unions, with the union representing the plant’s 600 workers criticizing Entergy for prioritizing cost-saving measures over the plant’s importance to the regional energy supply and local economy.

In the other case, due to move of the steel mill, workers of Canton mill of Republic Steel experienced significant socioeconomic disruptions in their personal life (V13). Several workers lost their health insurance, benefits and stable income. The most important takeaway from this example is that due to cheap production factors in Mexico, the company decided to save costs on inputs and move overseas. Thus, the workers, once integral to the plant’s success, are discarded without regard for their livelihoods or dignity, while the community is left to bear the environmental and economic consequences. The process was also marked by inadequate attention to environmental regulations and safety protocols, which could further exacerbate the negative consequences of the plant’s shutdown—a concern that appears to be somewhat overlooked by the authorities.

“They want to move operations to Mexico now because they can produce the same products we are making without paying comparable wages, providing insurance or adhering to labor costs. Additionally, they can hire and fire workers without restrictions since there is no union to protect employees there.” — Todd Fitzgibbon, USW Local 1200 president.

The last two examples of plant shutdowns in small towns further illustrate how such abrupt decisions can lead to immediate and far-reaching consequences. For instance, the closure of a sand plant in Brady (McCulloch County, Texas) triggered a cascade of negative effects within the community, including reduced demand for local businesses, declining school enrollments and widespread poverty (V14). Although locals attempted to support one another, the socioeconomic impact was profound. Similarly, the closure of the Stanley Furniture plant in Robbinsville (Graham County, North Carolina) represented the most significant disruption to local labor relations, jeopardizing the livelihoods of 400 families in the process (V15). Notably, the Stanley Furniture plant also employed workers from surrounding villages, sustaining economic activity in an already poverty-stricken region.

2. A Path Forward? Offered and Discussed Solutions for Mono-industrial Towns and Cities

Observing local community responses to plant closures in mono-industrial towns is essential for understanding the economic and social impacts of deindustrialization. Examining their strategies for adaptation and resilience allows researchers to identify effective policies and interventions to support these communities. Such insights can guide future economic development strategies, enable policymakers to anticipate challenges and contribute to the well-being of affected populations. However, based on my analysis of 15 media reports presented as video clips, the strategies employed by these communities appear relatively simplistic and offer limited long-term prospects. While it is beneficial to consider the economic and social realities of small towns, more robust and forward-looking decisions are needed from local authorities and business owners. The closure of factories, combined with the displacement of a productive labor force and the reluctance of residents to leave their homes, places immense strain on the economic stability and security of families and individuals. Therefore, these video reports provide an opportunity to systematically examine the proposed solutions and coping mechanisms, offering a foundation for summarizing and evaluating potential strategies to address the socioeconomic challenges of deindustrialization.

Retraining local laborers as truck drivers or plumbers may provide a partial solution to the unemployment caused by the shutdown of the Iowa pork plant; however, significant uncertainties remain for unskilled workers (V02). Enhancing personal skills to identify new job opportunities and fostering greater interaction with local authorities and business owners are also recommended, as finding new buyers for closed plants is often a slow and challenging process (V02). Retraining programs require substantial investment and time, with their long-term effectiveness uncertain in a rapidly evolving job market. Strengthening community ties and promoting collaboration among local businesses, educational institutions, and government agencies are critical to identifying and implementing innovative strategies to support displaced workers and address the broader challenges of economic transition.

In response to the economic challenges stemming from the Tyson plant closures, various stakeholders, including local governments, state agencies and private entities, implemented measures to support affected workers and businesses. City councils facilitated the efficient transfer of ownership for company properties, while state agencies and local churches provided assistance to low-income families until they could secure new employment opportunities (V03). In Dexter, Tyson engaged in negotiations with potential buyers for its real estate and facilities, offering hope to local workers, such as electricians and plumbers, who had been extensively involved in the company's operations (V04). Additionally, local farmers impacted by the closures expressed strong expectations for government support, including guaranteed loans and assistance through initiatives such as the Farm Service Agency (FSA), highlighting the critical role of political and institutional intervention in mitigating the fallout (V04).

One proposed solution to the challenges faced by mono-industrial towns and cities is economic diversification through the acquisition of shutdown plants by new buyers, aiming to preserve pre-existing industry-wide agglomeration relationships (V05, V06). In most cases, manufacturing remains the primary economic activity capable of sustaining local development (V05, V06). Analysis of news content suggests that the recurring solution is the need for an “integrator” to coordinate local economic and labor relations in mono-industrial towns. This reliance on a single integrator reflects a form of path dependency, as these towns have historically operated within a narrowly defined economic framework. However, intense competition and broader economic pressures often force companies to cease operations, creating challenges that extend beyond the capacity of individual entities to address, particularly in such highly specialized economies.

Residents of Moscow and Petersburg recognized the importance of economic diversification as essential for ensuring long-term economic stability (V06; V07). Efforts such as financing local technology parks and investing in solar energy initiatives demonstrate that some cities are more proactive in adapting to economic changes and pressures. Additionally, institutions like Pike County schools support small mono-industrial towns, such as Petersburg, by equipping students with advanced technical skills aligned with emerging market demands. However, in some cases, no solutions to the challenges of deindustrialization were mentioned in the media coverage (V09, V10). This underscores the necessity of collaboration among local governments, businesses and educational institutions to devise tailored strategies that address the unique needs of communities facing the impacts of deindustrialization.

Local residents often seek political support when making decisions during economic downturns, as seen in cities like Hamtramck, Michigan, and Lordstown. For instance, the bankruptcy of GM was a significant consideration for then-President Donald Trump, who advised residents not to sell their homes in response to mass layoffs (V11). However, lawmakers took a firm stance against bailing out GM, citing the failures of previous efforts to protect the automobile manufacturing industry. This scenario highlights the distinct priorities of lawmakers, politicians and businesses in addressing the declining economic viability of industrial plants. Unfortunately, the ethical and humanitarian concerns of the affected workforce remain inadequately addressed within these deliberations.

Another discussion centered on the Plymouth selectmen’s plan to engage with state lawmakers to explore compensatory measures for addressing the financial and energy impacts of the plant closure (V12). In Brady, the ongoing energy transition, including the construction of wind farms, presented new opportunities to mitigate rising local unemployment. However, the media coverage did not provide further details on these developments (V14). Such reports would benefit from follow-up media coverage to enable a more comprehensive and critical assessment of these claims. Additionally, in response to the closure of the Stanley Furniture plant in Robbinsville, local authorities sought a new buyer for the facility (V15).

The solutions and discussions aimed at addressing the challenges faced by mono-industrial small towns and cities vary significantly across regions, yet they share a common goal of finding a resolution to industrial decline. Some areas may have advantages, such as available land or ongoing projects, that allow them to build upon the remnants of closed plants and factories, enabling them to diversify their otherwise one-dimensional industrial structure. However, many small towns struggle to respond quickly or develop effective solutions. While this may be understandable from a policymaking and economic perspective, the personal stories of local residents are often tragic, and their well-being is significantly impacted by these trends. One thing remains clear: even in times of low expectations and hopelessness, it is crucial for government officials and local residents to collaborate in order to devise practical solutions and

strategies for overcoming the negative consequences of dependence on a single industry in small towns or cities.

4.3. Mass Communication Issue of the Slowdown of Firm-level Economic Activities

Prioritizing continual mass communication on the deindustrialization of mono-industrial cities is essential to effectively manage social, economic and psychological transitions in affected communities. Mono-industrial cities face significant instability when large employers reduce operations or close entirely. Deindustrialization disrupts livelihoods, local economies and social cohesion, often resulting in increased unemployment, poverty and decreased quality of life. By consistently communicating these issues, it is possible to raise awareness, prepare stakeholders and advocate for timely interventions, making it easier for local governments, policymakers and support organizations to mitigate negative impacts.

The media plays a vital role in highlighting the challenges and systemic issues associated with deindustrialization. By covering these developments in depth, media can frame the narrative around the structural challenges that mono-industrial cities face, thus helping citizens understand the broader economic forces at play. Comprehensive media coverage can also serve as a critical tool in holding businesses accountable, encouraging transparency and emphasizing the human cost of sudden industrial exits. Moreover, media can help highlight success stories where effective policies or alternative economic strategies have helped revive local economies, providing blueprints for communities undergoing similar transitions.

However, several failures limit the effectiveness of media in covering deindustrialization. First, sensationalism often overshadows substantive analysis, as headlines focus on short-term layoffs rather than systemic economic vulnerabilities and solutions. There is also a lack of sustained reporting on post-closure recovery efforts, which would better inform audiences about long-term recovery processes. Furthermore, without collaboration from policymakers, local businesses and community leaders, media coverage may fall short of mobilizing actionable responses and support for the affected populations. As policymakers, we must work closely with media outlets to ensure that reporting is accurate, ongoing and solution-oriented, thereby empowering communities and driving sustainable recovery strategies.

A qualitative content analysis of 15 news reports from various US small, mono-industrial cities reveals that media coverage tends to focus heavily on short-term issues and immediate headlines, lacking a systematic and long-term perspective. This approach limits the ability to understand and evaluate the broader consequences of deindustrialization, particularly in mono-industrial towns. Specifically, in many cases, news presenters claim to have sought additional information from relevant parties about the impacts of plant closures, but these efforts often fail to yield substantive follow-ups. There is a noticeable absence of longitudinal reporting to assess the long-term outcomes for individuals and communities affected by these shutdowns. Instead, news coverage typically prioritizes descriptive accounts of the immediate situation, which has become the dominant narrative style for reporting on industrial decline in the US.

Qualitative research is particularly attuned to personal stories and narratives, making it a valuable approach for analyzing social phenomena. Similarly, news reporting often parallels qualitative research by focusing on individual experiences and human contexts. American taxpayers and voters could become better informed if television channels emphasized personal stories that highlight the lived realities of industrialization and deindustrialization in small towns and cities. Therefore, the communication surrounding these issues should adopt a more human-centric rather than event-centric approach. News reports should employ a dynamic and engaging style to ensure their messages reach key stakeholders, enabling informed decision-making and greater awareness of the challenges faced by affected communities.

4.4. Industrial Policy Matters and Need for Diversification Among Mono-Industrial Cities

After analyzing 15 video contents related to plant shutdowns and deindustrialization in mono-industrial small cities, it becomes evident that industrial diversification in these locations has been significantly neglected for a long time. In contemporary economic discussions, much attention is given to the challenges faced by developing countries—particularly in the Middle East and North Africa—where resource-rich economies struggle to diversify their structures to achieve sustainable growth and development. However, it is apparent that even developed nations face similar challenges in small towns and cities where a single dominant economic producer has long dictated local labor relations and determined the socioeconomic well-being of the community.

The emergence of such mono-industrial towns is a subject for economic historians, but the pressing reality is their existence and the dependence of many families on these urban areas for their livelihoods. Any disruption to this fragile equilibrium results in significant economic distress and psychological hardship for the affected populations. This raises an important question: have there been any substantial research efforts or policy discussions aimed at transforming these small towns into more sustainable urban centers, at least over the long term? Addressing this issue is crucial to mitigating the adverse effects of economic monocultures and ensuring more resilient development patterns for these vulnerable communities.

Norman (2013) classifies small metropolitan areas into two broad categories: old economic cities and new economic cities. Old economic cities primarily rely on manufacturing-led economic production, whereas new economic cities focus on services-led economic value creation. In both cases, some urban areas tend to specialize in specific economic activities rather than diversifying their overall economic structures, leading to certain challenges and issues.

For instance, some small metropolitan areas may experience high population growth rates accompanied by low income growth or significant income inequality. Conversely, other cities may face low population growth rates while maintaining relatively equitable income distribution across higher and lower percentiles of the employed population. These observations highlight varying and sometimes opposing socioeconomic realities, which are largely shaped by the economic structures of small cities. However, regardless of these differences, the availability of abundant employment opportunities and robust tax revenue generation ultimately depends on the ability of these areas to create higher value-added activities through industrial diversification of the local economy. This underscores the importance of developing a well-balanced and sustainable economic base to support long-term prosperity in small metropolitan regions.

Industrial policies can play a transformative role in promoting the well-being of residents in small cities and towns across the US by addressing the unique challenges these areas face while leveraging broader economic trends and national dynamics. To begin with, targeted investments in industrial diversification are crucial. Many small towns are historically dependent on single industries, which leaves them vulnerable to economic shocks and deindustrialization. Policies that incentivize the establishment of diverse industries—such as green energy, technology hubs or advanced manufacturing—can create a more stable economic base. This diversification not only reduces reliance on a single economic driver but also broadens employment opportunities, thereby improving income stability for residents.

In addition to diversification, industrial policies can focus on fostering entrepreneurship and small business development. Local governments, supported by federal initiatives, could establish incubators and offer grants or low-interest loans to entrepreneurs in small towns. These programs could encourage innovation in industries that align with national trends, such as renewable energy, health technology or sustainable agriculture. Providing mentorship and

training programs, in collaboration with local universities or community colleges, would ensure that entrepreneurs have the skills and networks needed to succeed. A vibrant small business ecosystem not only boosts local economies but also fosters a sense of community and resilience among residents.

Infrastructure development is another critical area for promoting well-being. Small cities and towns often lack the modern transportation, digital and energy infrastructure needed to attract and retain businesses. Policies that prioritize investments in high-speed internet, efficient transportation networks, and renewable energy sources can make these areas more competitive and connected. The creation of “smart towns” equipped with digital tools and renewable energy systems can also appeal to younger generations and remote workers, reversing population decline trends.

Education and workforce development should be at the core of any industrial policy targeting small towns. By aligning training programs with the demands of modern industries, policies can equip residents with skills that match broader economic trends, such as automation, digitalization and sustainable practices. Partnerships between local industries and educational institutions can provide internships, apprenticeships and job placement programs tailored to local economic needs. For example, a town transitioning to green energy could benefit from policies that support training programs for solar panel technicians or wind turbine engineers.

Furthermore, industrial policies should integrate measures to improve quality of life alongside economic growth. Investments in public amenities, such as parks, healthcare facilities, and cultural centers, can make small towns more attractive places to live, particularly for families and skilled workers. Policies that promote affordable housing and accessible healthcare can also address socioeconomic disparities, ensuring that economic gains are equitably distributed among residents.

Lastly, fostering regional collaboration can amplify the benefits of industrial policies. Small towns often lack the resources to implement large-scale programs independently. Encouraging cooperation between towns, counties, and states can help pool resources and create regional hubs of economic activity. For instance, a network of small towns might collaborate on a regional renewable energy project or share training facilities to address workforce needs collectively.

Other policy measures should come from the corporate sector itself. For example, corporate social responsibility (CSR) can play a crucial role in ensuring that large companies operating in small and mono-industrial cities promote sustainable economic and regional development. By investing in community-focused initiatives such as workforce development programs, local infrastructure projects and environmental sustainability efforts, these companies can mitigate the negative effects of economic volatility and deindustrialization. CSR strategies can help build stronger relationships with local stakeholders, ensuring long-term social stability and economic resilience. In addition, these efforts can enhance the company’s reputation, attract a skilled workforce and create positive externalities that benefit both the community and the region as a whole, ultimately contributing to balanced and inclusive development. Recent studies support these claims through various case studies and theoretical insights (see works by Gigauri, 2025; Gigauri & Khan, 2025; Bakeshlo et al., 2025).

In conclusion, industrial policies tailored to the specific challenges of small cities and towns can promote well-being by driving economic diversification, fostering entrepreneurship, modernizing infrastructure, and investing in education and quality of life. By aligning these initiatives with broader economic trends, policymakers can create sustainable and resilient communities that thrive in an ever-changing economic landscape.

5. CONCLUSION

Mono-industrial small cities and towns face significant risks of becoming ghost towns due to various factors, including the partial or complete shutdown of power plants driven by energy transitions, the relocation of food processing companies seeking cost savings or responding to sanitary challenges, and broader trends of deindustrialization, such as those affecting automobile production. This study aims to qualitatively assess the impacts of deindustrialization by analyzing publicly available news narratives, offering insights that can be generalized to understand the broader implications of these economic changes.

The trends observed in small mono-industrial towns and cities are occasionally highlighted in news media reports, presented through various narratives and reporting styles. While such coverage offers some insights into the broader dimensions of the issue, the level of academic attention dedicated to this topic remains insufficient. The populations residing in these small towns should not, and must not, be regarded merely as statistical figures by government offices or private commercial companies. Achieving sustainable regional development, both in the US and globally, hinges on how effectively small cities address the challenges of deindustrialization and adapt to shifts in the productive capacity of the national production possibilities frontier.

Thematic saturation derived from the qualitative content analysis of 15 selected news video clips reveals that after examining 4-5 videos, the consequences of deindustrialization among mono-industrial cities and towns can be generalized into a few broad categories, including rising unemployment, increased poverty, mass migration and the closure of tertiary businesses. Following the shutdown of key economic drivers in small towns and cities, school attendance rates tend to decline significantly, and the mental health of affected residents deteriorates. The narratives provided by companies often focus exclusively on economic considerations, grounded in cost-benefit analyses and rational justifications. However, the responses to these challenges are neither dynamic nor rapid. Despite the efforts of local communities to mitigate the hardships caused by such economic disruptions, the small size of these towns and their geographic remoteness from major markets make swift recovery exceedingly difficult. These examples underscore the often-overlooked struggles of small towns and cities, which, while individually minor in scale, collectively represent a significant portion of communities adversely affected by ongoing deindustrialization in the US.

When analyzing certain news content, it becomes evident that local residents are often reluctant to leave their homes and relocate to unfamiliar areas amid high levels of economic and social uncertainty. Most residents express a strong desire to maintain their jobs and continue being part of their long-established communities. This observation underscores the importance of careful economic planning and urban development to achieve a balanced spatial distribution of the population, thereby alleviating some of the challenges posed by the overpopulation of medium and large cities.

High population density in urban centers creates significant risks for policymakers and administrators in ensuring the sustainable management of daily urban life. When a primary local economic actor or employer shuts down, the immediate consequences include rising unemployment and poverty. Forced migration often follows, leading to the closure of tertiary or supportive businesses that relied on the primary employer. This disruption also cancels the positive spillovers or externalities that the primary economic actor had generated for the community over time.

Another significant challenge is the impact on education. Families facing job losses are likely to move to larger regional or state economic hubs in search of better employment opportunities, taking their children out of local schools. This migration not only disrupts the educational

system but also creates a ripple effect, as reduced demand for public services may lead to layoffs of educators and other public service workers, further straining state funding.

While it is commendable that news media covers the challenges faced by mono-industrial small towns and cities, the broader public awareness and engagement with this issue remain insufficient. Short news segments, often limited to two or three minutes, fail to adequately convey the local realities, particularly the more humanistic aspects of these situations, to decision-makers who possess the authority and flexibility to influence the underlying trends shaping these outcomes. Moreover, academic discourse on this topic should adopt a more normative rather than strictly positive approach. Instead of focusing solely on precise diagnoses, scholars could emphasize calls to action, which would likely generate greater awareness and engagement across various sectors. This perspective aligns with the purpose of this paper, which seeks to highlight the deeper implications of these issues and encourage actionable solutions.

Watching news stories in which local residents express emotional distress over the shutdown of key manufacturers reveals that these situations are about more than just fluctuating statistical trends; they reflect the lived realities and unique struggles of each community. In the context of mono-industrial small towns, the economic and social dynamics are deeply interconnected with the histories and experiences of the residents. Thus, adopting a normative and ideological lens to evaluate these situations is both justifiable and necessary. Policymakers and other key stakeholders—who often serve as the integrators of these communities—must consider qualitative, context-sensitive policy suggestions to address the challenges faced by these towns, where opportunities are limited, and the reliance on past experiences shapes livelihoods and survival.

This study has certain limitations, and future research on similar topics should address these to enhance the depth and quality of analysis. First, this research is based on a small sample of selected video news clips that highlight small-scale deindustrialization in mono-industrial towns. While secondary data and qualitative content analysis can provide valuable insights, adopting a more direct approach, such as field studies or interviews, could yield richer and more context-specific findings. Second, while the US economy is vast and offers various opportunities for reabsorbing labor displaced by local deindustrialization, this capacity should be carefully estimated using quantitative methods. A robust evaluation of labor market absorption potential would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the economic impacts of deindustrialization. Third, personal narratives and ongoing economic developments should be systematically analyzed and compared through advanced qualitative coding methods grounded in theoretical frameworks from economics and sociology. A more sophisticated methodological approach and a multidisciplinary perspective are notably absent from this study but could significantly enhance future research. Additionally, a unilateral focus on the issue can sometimes obscure the broader context. Including the perspectives of policymakers and commercial entities would allow for a more critical and balanced assessment, which this study does not incorporate. Addressing these perspectives could help reveal the complex interplay between economic decision-making and local impacts.

While addressing these limitations requires significant effort and resources to conduct high-quality research, the current study provides a foundational conceptualization of the challenges faced by mono-industrial towns in the US, particularly regarding labor relations. Conducted by a non-US economist, this work aims to open discussions on these issues. Future studies should aim to overcome the identified limitations by employing advanced research designs, formulating comprehensive research questions, and utilizing robust data collection techniques to provide more nuanced and actionable insights.

A key question that arises from studies like this is: where do we go from here? While the contribution of the current paper is modest, its central message emphasizes the importance of focusing on the narratives and lived experiences of individuals who frame ongoing economic events, such as deindustrialization, within the context of small, mono-industrial cities and towns in the US. Comparative studies examining similar phenomena in cities of comparable size in other countries would greatly enrich academic understanding of this issue. Such research could provide valuable insights into commonalities and differences in coping mechanisms, policy responses and outcomes, thereby broadening the scope of inquiry.

The most critical takeaway, however, is the need to keep mono-industrial cities at the forefront of academic and policy discussions. Learning from their experiences can inform better urban planning and guide the development of effective economic programs aimed at fostering regional development. Moreover, additional case studies of industrial cities across the US could offer fresh perspectives, highlighting the need for more human-centered approaches in academic research. Such approaches would help uncover the elusive and often overlooked dimensions of labor relations, offering a richer understanding of the challenges and opportunities in these contexts.

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