

Two Men of War and Their Big Idea: Walter Christaller, Edward Ullman, and Central Place Theory

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In this paper I examine the role of war on the production of academic geographical knowledge by examining the case of central place theory. Central place theory was independently discovered at various times during the 1930s by three men: the Germans, Walter Christaller and August Lösch, and the American, Edward Ullman. Lösch spent the Second World War at a research institute, whereas Christaller became a member of Himmler's SS in July 1940, and Ullman joined the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) on December 8th, 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor by the Japanese. The paper focuses primarily on Christaller and Ullman. I detail the wartime activities of both men, and follow their later activities once the war is over until they meet at what became a key conference in post-war geography, the 1960 IGU Symposium on Urban Geography at Lund, Sweden. The conference was so important because it set out a scientific agenda for the discipline, one informed by central place theory.