



## Review of Taylor et al. *Global Urban Analysis: A Survey of Cities in Globalization?*



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**Peter J. Taylor, Pengfei Ni, Ben Derudder, Michael Hoyler, Jin Huang and Frank Willox. 2011. *Global Urban Analysis: A Survey of Cities in Globalization*. London: Earthscan. 438 pages, ISBN 978-1849712132 Hardback (\$150).**

This is an attractive looking book, edited by prominent urban geographers, with a table of contents listing thirty-six different chapters in three broad sections (“Global-Scale Analysis,” “World-Regional Connectivity Analyses,” and “Key Country and Sub-Regional Connectivity Profiles”). It is a collaborative effort of the Globalization and World Cities (GaWC) project, headed up at Loughborough University by geographer Peter Taylor and his colleagues, and the Global Urban Competitiveness Project (GUCP) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing (which, according to the Preface, teamed up with GaWC in 2007 to assist with greatly expanding a large existing data set on cities around the globe).

This project builds on a large, earlier effort that was started by Taylor and his GaWC collaborators to compile data on world cities as producer service centers, initially for the year 2000 (later, 2004 was added). At that point, the idea was to establish a giant customized but standardized data set about corporate links between world cities to develop a rigorous assessment of Saskia Sassen’s global city hypothesis. In her work (based largely on case analysis of New York, Tokyo and London), Sassen (1991) identified these places as financial “command and control” centers, with both corporate headquarters of varying types but, more importantly, as loci

for all sorts of advanced producer services that made these cities the critical node in far-flung global business networks. So the GaWC geographers examined headquarters and subsidiary information on major financial and business service firms, attempting to “map” the companies’ multi-city office networks. Peter Taylor (2004) produced an impressive book, *World City Network: A Global Urban Analysis* that combines marvelous conceptual discussions of the key issues (and also pushing into even more abstract reflections on the “metageographies of the modern world system”) with dozens of tables and figures presenting the early empirical results of this project. That 2004 volume remains the definitive source on this work (and this edited book certainly won’t challenge that).

By the time this ambitious project was funded, other world city scholars (primarily sociologists, following Sassen’s substantive lead, but using quantitative network methods) were beginning to attempt to “model” global city hierarchies using data on ties and flows; so, for instance, Mike Timberlake and I used air travel connections to explore this structure in multiple papers (e.g. 1995; 2001) , and Art Alderson and Jason Beckfield (2004) developed a relational measure based on Fortune 500 corporate headquarters in an article that appeared in the *American Journal of Sociology*. This work was open to the critique that, although we used sophisticated network algorithms for estimation, the content of inter-city data on flows and ties was less than perfect to test world city hypotheses (and, arguably, the Smith/Timberlake use of airline connections was particularly problematic, in that regard!).

Taylor and his colleagues also wanted to look at world city networks, and as they were particularly focused on getting the “right” data, they collected headquarters/subsidiary information on large urban-based business service firms, and then coded each one for each city on a six point scale (where 5 meant the city housed the firm headquarters, 4 a regional office, 3 a large office, etc, all the way down to 0, which indicated no firm presence in that place). They argued that this data was “relational” in that it reflected “potential intra-firm flows” of knowledge and information. The “scoring” of places was done by summing up the numbers (so cities with lots of headquarters or major offices were “high” while those with minor offices – or none – ended up with a low point total). And the voluminous results (made promptly available on the GaWC website, which I also strongly recommend!) seemed to resonate with both the theoretical expectations of John Friedmann (1986) and Sassen, as well as overlapping with the results of the network analytic studies by sociologists. Their project involved massive amounts of data compilation and was widely praised by an array of interdisciplinary scholars of global and world cities; most of us felt that the GaWC study offered data that might lead to “better,” conceptually stronger measures of the sorts of world city networks than some of the rougher “proxies”: the Taylor book and various research reports that appeared on the GaWC website were enthusiastically welcomed!

In retrospect, I think that the aura around the work – and the interesting results – deflected some attention away from a surprisingly simplistic approach, embedded in the “scoring” system, to conceiving city *networks*: Sociological methodologists have developed a large array of formal quantitative measures of various qualities of relational data, including various approaches to network centrality, block-modeling, core/periphery relations, etc. There are key *differences* between, for example, “betweenness” centrality (which gauges “brokerage” and, arguably, gets at real network power) and other indexes that simply “count up” a node’s connections (known formally as “degree” centrality). The GaWC measures are based on interesting, conceptually compelling (and previously unavailable) information on global producer service firm structures – but the details of how the data is analyzed is less than optimal from the perspective of social network analysis methods. So while, the Fortune 500 headquarters/subsidiary information that Art Alderson and Jason Beckfield use in their 2004 article, “Power and Position in the World City System,” may not be as directly relevant to the Friedmann/Sassen approach, their use of “betweenness” centrality measures ensures that they tap more directly into the power dimension in the network (in a way that the “degree” centrality counts do not). This doesn’t mean that the GaWC results are not important: they do seem to “tap into” key aspects of world city hierarchies and they are regarded as the “gold standard” for measuring global city hierarchies in geography and regional studies.

This edited volume begins by explaining how the recent collaboration (which ended in 2010) expanded the data base by adding more cities (from 315 to 525) and more global producer service firms (from 100 to 175), and by making it more longitudinal (2008 data was compiled), but also by coding information on business hotels and business events (shows, exhibitions, conferences) in all those places, resulting in some new composite indexes of world city hierarchies. The first five chapters focus on the new global results, using various constructs from the data. For instance, a chapter on “the global city process score” discusses the rankings and differentials on “City Place Power” (with a measure of business headquarters as the key component) versus “City Network Power” (predominately gauged by service and financial firm network connectivity). A key finding was that U.S. cities consistently score highest on the “place” measure versus the “network” measure, but that the opposite is true in the rest of the world (where the network score is higher). Despite the fact that the authors acknowledge that the scores of the two types of city power were “somewhat arbitrarily” computed from composite percentages of various data rankings, these results are quite interesting. But (characteristic of this entire volume) there is very little effort to make any conceptual sense of this; we are provided a description and left to ponder the meaning.

The next section lays out regional results for various sorts of urban connectivity, providing a huge number of tables covering “Australasian Cities”, through various permutations of Asian

and African regions, to Europe and North and Latin America; Taylor provides a brief summary of how various regions “stack up against each” other at the end of this part of the volume.

The final – and longest part of the book (22 chapters) is composed of relatively short descriptions of a series of national city systems (thirteen of these, including in countries like the U.S., Germany, China, India, but also Switzerland, Mexico and Italy) and “sub-regional” city systems (some examples are South East Asia, Arabian Gulf, Nordic, Iberian). All these discussions use a common methodology and profile various cities according to how they score on the newly compiled data (again, lots of tables). These chapters may be of interest to area specialists or students of particular countries – but they make for less than scintillating reading.

The volume concludes with another descriptive summary chapter on the national/sub-regional patterns, followed by a “postscript” (by Derudder, Hoyler, Taylor and Witlox) that examines the “trends and change” manifest in comparing the 2008 data with the expanded 2000 GaWC data (which is the basic of all the discussion, description and tables in this volume). One key shift touted here is the rise of Asian, and particularly Chinese, cities (with some concomitant decline of western urban area scores). This essay also highlights how a few cities like San Francisco and Charlotte (along with New York, Singapore and Abu Dhabi) seem to “move up” in terms of bank capital measures (they explain this via particular bank mergers and acquisitions for the two U.S. cities, which seems right but not terribly relevant to broader issues). This postscript makes a brief attempt at relating changes in the rankings to the 2008 financial crisis – but, once again, even this chapter is broadly descriptive and largely atheoretical.

I know these authors and the GaWC project, so I was eager to read this book. But it is really mostly a compilation and summary of new data, along with comparisons with the 2000 baseline. It is very descriptive; the conceptual contribution is minimal. I’d recommend “passing” on this expensive collection, reading the 2004 Taylor book, and monitoring the GaWC website for the latest results of their research.

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David A. Smith

Department of Sociology  
University of California-Irvine  
dasmith@uci.edu