



Global enough? Toronto, October 2005 (Elvin Wily). “The Waterfront Task Force is headed by a financier connected to transnational finance capital and composed of senior representatives of all levels of the Canadian state, local power brokers, and representatives of landed capital and Bay Street, Canada’s Wall Street.” Stefan Kipfer and Roger Kiel (2002). “Toronto Inc.? Planning the Competitive City in the New Toronto.” *Antipode* 34(2), 227-264, quote from p. 247.

Globalization and World Cities

Geography 350, Introduction to Urban Geography

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What are the ways globalization works itself out in (and through) cities?¹ The link between “globalization” and the “world city” can be thought of as “a point of entry for studying the transformative sociological changes of our times, mainly because urban locales serve as critical nodes in the globalization process.”² Geographers have entered into this debate with everyone from political economists to politicians (whether they be “pro” globalization or “anti”) and they’ve done this to note the spatial dimensions of global economic restructuring. Studies of cities in the global context are not new *per se*,³ but a vast literature has been generated to address

¹ Paraphrased from Diane E. Davis (2005), “Cities in Global Context: A Brief Intellectual History,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 29(1), 99.

² Davis, “Cities in Global Context,” 99.

³ See Davis, “Cities in Global Context,” 92. Davis cites Weber’s *General Economic History* (1927, Greenburg Press: New York), and Pirenne’s *Economic and Social History of Medieval Europe* (1936, Harcourt, Brace, and

how the emergence of a global economy has fundamentally altered cities – “globalizing” them and creating networks between them. This body of work, “world city literature,” covers “a large terrain with a blurry perimeter.”⁴ To navigate this terrain, we can focus on a few key definitions and debates, and look to a few influential writers and their work. We can examine what geographers who work under the guise of “world city researchers” look at – what they study,

The world economy is not new, and neither is internationalization. But globalization involves a deeper integration, and greater power of transnational corporations.

where they get their data from, how they interpret it, and how they describe the limits or problems of their available data. This will provide us with a sense of the scope of the literature, as well as a sense of the various trajectories of current scholarship.

The world economy is not new,⁵ but those who talk about a globalized economy insist that there have been distinct changes in its structure and modes of production. Whereas earlier economic activities crossed national boundaries (“internationalization”),

globalization includes a deeper integration, where transnational corporations orchestrate production from various locations.⁶ The term also includes other factors. One author boils globalization down to five basic elements:

- “1) new technology,
- 2) the centrality of information made possible by instant communication,
- 3) an increasing trend toward the standardization of economic and social products,
- 4) growing cross-national integration, and
- 5) mutual vulnerability stemming from greater interdependence.”⁷

Other commentators on the globalization debate remind us that the term “is an ideologically saturated concept that emphasizes the ‘inevitability’ of western / US-style ‘free market’

Jovanovich: New York) as examples. Davis’ paper examines the intellectual geographies of those who studied cities and the economy, which, as she notes, “helps explain the content, character and assumptions of subsequent research on global cities....” (92).

⁴ Richard Child Hill and June Woo Kim (2000), “Global Cities and Developmental States: New York, Tokyo and Seoul,” *Urban Studies* 37(12), 2168.

⁵ As Short et al. write: “Globalization is often presented as a unified process, but processes of globalization occur in pulses, a series of reglobalizations that vary in form and intensity. Take economic globalization. The past 500 years have seen the growth of a functioning global economy. There have been a series of globalizations involving incorporation into imperial system, attempts at economic decolonization and movement into and out of various global trading arrangements. While the latest round of economic globalization is particularly intense, marked by the creation of global markets, rapid capital movements, global shift in manufacturing, long and complex production chains and interlocking consumer marketization, it is only the most recent in a series of processes that have been occurring since 1500.” John Rennie Short et al. (2000), “From World Cities to Gateway Cities: Extending the boundaries of Globalization Theory,” *City*, 4(3), 319.

⁶ *Dictionary of Human Geography*, 4th ed., s.v. “Globalization.”

⁷ H.V. Savitch (2001), “What’s New about Globalisation and What Does it Portend for Cities?” *International Social Science Journal* 54(172), 180-181.

capitalism.”⁸ As Richard Grant and Jan Nijman comment, “overall, the globalization debate is not nearly as ‘global’ as it probably should be.”⁹

*Globalization does not mean the death of distance, the irrelevance of place, nor the death of cities. Indeed, Saskia Sassen’s work demonstrates that globalization **strengthens** the locational imperative to find key strategic places to coordinate far-flung networks of production and distribution.*

Early accounts of globalization assumed that place no longer mattered, that new technologies like the internet would make the office tower and central business districts obsolete. Saskia Sassen suggested that the opposite is true. She argued that a globalized economy remains a *place-bound* economy¹⁰ and that a world urban system or network has developed in which cities become key in the production of a range of services, such as financial transactions, R&D development, and so on. Sassen extends the globalization question to include people, and not just blackberry-toting business execs. Sassen writes, “When we focus on place and production, we can see that globalization is a process involving not only the corporate economy and the new transnational corporate culture but also, for example, the immigrant economies and work cultures evident in our large cities.”¹¹

World City Research: Hypothesis and Paradigm

Today, “world city” conjures up (post) modern images of a contemporary, high-technology, information-saturated, networked world. But the phrase has a long history. The term “world city” was coined by Patrick Geddes in his 1915 book, *Cities in Evolution*.¹² Geddes was “an unclassifiable polymath who officially taught biology (more probably, anything but biology) at

The phrase “world city” was first introduced by the regional planner Patrick Geddes in his 1915 book, “Cities in Evolution.”

the University of Dundee, gave India’s rulers idiosyncratic advice on how to run their cities and tried to encapsulate the meaning of life on folded scraps of paper.”¹³ Geddes’s comments on world cities were mostly forgotten, however, in part because Geddes became so famous for his work on *regional* planning. Half a century later, however, Peter Hall catalyzed a new generation of interest in the topic:

⁸ David A. Smith (2001), “Global Cities in East Asia: Empirical and Conceptual Analysis,” *International Social Science Journal* 56(181), 399.

⁹ Richard Grant and Jan Nijman, (2002), “Globalization and the Corporate Geography of Cities in the Less-Developed World,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 92(2), 320.

¹⁰ Saskia Sassen (2000), *Cities in a World Economy, Second Edition*. London: Pine Forge Press, 7.

¹¹ Sassen, *Cities*, 7.

¹² *The Dictionary of Human Geography*, 4th ed., s.v. “World City.”

¹³ Peter Hall (1988). *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, p.

“There are certain great cities, in which a quite disproportionate part of the world’s most important business is conducted. ... By what characteristics do we distinguish the world cities from other great centres of population and wealth? In the first place, they are usually the major centres of political power. They are the seats of the most powerful national governments and sometimes of international authorities too; of government agencies of all kinds. Round these gather a host of institutions, whose main business is with government: the big professional organisations, the trade unions, the employers’ federations, the headquarters of major industrial concerns. These cities are the national centres not merely of government but also of trade. ... Traditionally, the world cities are the leading banking and finance centres of the countries in which they stand. Here are housed the central banks, the headquarters of the trading banks, the offices of the big insurance organisations and a whole series of specialised financial and insurance agencies.”¹⁴

This is the opening page of Peter Hall’s aptly titled 1996 book *The World Cities*, which analyzed the attributes (politics, trade, communication facilities, finance, culture, technology, and higher education) of cities at the top of the world urban hierarchy (London, Paris, Randstad-Holland, Rhine-Ruhr, Moscow, New York, and Tokyo).¹⁵ Subsequent work by Manuel Castells and David Harvey suggested the decisive link of urban change processes to global economic forces.¹⁶ This was taken up by John Friedmann in his ubiquitously cited essay “The World City Hypothesis.” Presented as a research programme, Friedmann’s “hypothesis” was “neither a theory nor a universal generalization about cities, but a starting point for political enquiry” – that is it was intended as a framework for research.¹⁷ Here is a rundown (straight from his text!) of Friedmann’s framework, what he called its seven interrelated theses,¹⁸ and an explanation of what he meant by each:

The form and extent of a city’s integration with the world economy, and the functions assigned to the city in the new spatial division of labour, will be decisive for any structural changes occurring within it.

- Friedmann’s conception of the city is a “spatially integrated economic and social system at a given location or metropolitan region” (318). Metropolitan economies may carry out different roles – as locations for global capital’s head offices, or as financial centers, or as nodal points in a regional or nation economy – but important cities do all three.
- The form, intensity, and duration the link between the urban system and global capital may vary, and are historically based, but *for the most part* the changes occurring in cities are “externally induced” (318) by the “direction and volume of transnational capital flows; the spatial division of the functions of finance, management and production” (318). Changes to the urban system include “changes in metropolitan function, the structure of metropolitan labour markets, and the physical form of cities” (318).

¹⁴ Peter Hall (1966). *The World Cities*. New York: McGraw-Hill, World University Library, p. 7.

¹⁵ Jonathan V. Beaverstock, Richard G. Smith, and Peter J. Taylor (2004), “World-City Network: A New Metageography?” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, (1), 124–125.

¹⁶ John Friedmann, “The World City Hypothesis,” at 317. Friedmann cites Manuel Castells’ *La question urbaine* (1972, Maspero: Paris), and David Harvey’s *Social Justice and the City* (1973, Edward Arnold: London).

¹⁷ Friedmann, “The World City Hypothesis,” 317.

¹⁸ Friedmann, “The World City Hypothesis,” 318.

2. *Key cities throughout the world are used by global capital as ‘basing points’ in the spatial organization and articulation of production and markets. The resulting linkages make it possible to arrange world cities into a complex spatial hierarchy.*

- Friedmann presents a hierarchy of world cities “based on the presumed nature of their integration with the global economy” (319) whose selection criteria include “major financial centre; headquarters for transnational corporations; rapid growth of business services sector; important manufacturing centre; major transportation node; [and] population” (Table A.1, 320). His hierarchy presents primary and secondary world cities and further classifies these by core and semi-peripheral countries. All but two of the primary cities (Singapore and Sao Paulo) are in the global north.

3. *The global control functions of world cities are directly related in the structure and dynamics of their production sectors and employment.*

- World city growth has seen a growth in the particular sectors (see 2 above).
- World cities play an ideological role as centers in the production and dissemination knowledge (i.e. news, entertainment) and art.
- The labour force is dichotomized, with a high percentage of high-wage professionals and low-wage workers.
- World cities are also characterized as having a growth in the “informal” economy.

4. *World cities are major sites for the concentration and accumulation of international capital.*

- However, some world cities are atypical and do not have high concentrations of foreign direct investment. This is the case in Tokyo: “Although a major control centre for Japanese multinational capital, Japanese business practices and government policy have so far been successful in preventing capital from making major investments in the city” (with reference to an article by Rimmer, 1986, quoted at 322-3).

5. *World cities are points of destination for large numbers of both domestic and/or international migrants.*

- Both international and inter-regional migrants contribute to growth in primary countries. These countries attempt to curb “low-skilled” immigration and promote high-demand (“skilled” or professional) immigration through legislation and special programs.
- Semi-peripheral world cities experience growth from intra-regional migration, and have experienced rapid population increases. Attempts to curb migration have been largely unsuccessful.

6. *World city formation brings into focus the major contradictions of industrial capitalism – among them spatial and class polarization.*

- Friedmann identifies three scales of spatial polarization: Global – a “widening gulf in wealth, income, and power between peripheral economies...and rich countries” (324); Regional – which expresses the income disparity between high- and low-income regions within states; and Metropolitan – includes class polarization and the segregation of poor neighbourhoods, for example.
- “Contradictions” include the fact that the financial services sector, which employs high-paid professionals, also employs many in low-wage categories; the absence of middle

sectors in the semi-periphery and the vulnerability of the middle sectors to unemployment in core cities, for example, from the loss of unionized employment.

Friedmann's "World City Hypothesis"

- 1. The nature of a city's integration with the world economy is decisive for any structural changes occurring within it.*
- 2. Key cities throughout the world are used by global capital as 'basing points' for the organization of production and markets.*
- 3. The global control functions of world cities are manifest in the structure of their industrial structure and job markets.*
- 4. World cities are major sites for the concentration and accumulation of capital.*
- 5. World cities are destinations for large numbers of migrants -- both domestic and international.*
- 6. World city formation exposes the major contradictions of industrial capitalism, particularly spatial class polarization.*
- 7. World city growth generates social costs that exceed the fiscal capacity of the state.*

7. World city growth generates social costs at rates that tend to exceed the fiscal capacity of the state.

- "The rapid influx of poor workers into world cities – be it from abroad or from within the country – generates massive needs for social reproduction, among them housing, education, health, transportation, and welfare. These needs are increasingly arrayed against other needs that arise from transnational capital for economic infrastructure and from the dominant elites for their own social reproduction" (326).

As these seven points illustrate, the scope of Friedmann's world city hypothesis is phenomenal. Many of the features he identifies are associated with globalization, particularly the increase of global financial markets and the rise of financial centres.¹⁹ In this way, world cities literature encouraged thinking about the imprint of globalization on the urban landscape. The early literature tracked, for example, the office and headquarter locations of multinational corporations as one way of measuring the importance of cities in a global-city hierarchy.²⁰ Saskia Sassen's *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* examined, among other factors, parallels between New York, London, and Tokyo in terms of the growth of the high-paying professional jobs and low-paying lower-order clerical work, as well as the growth in part-time and temporary employment,

¹⁹ Beaverstock et. al., "World-City Network," 125.

²⁰ Beaverstock et. al., "World-City Network," 125.

which she argued, is creating an overall result in income polarization.²¹ In this way, Sassen focused on “the *practice* of global control – the activities involved in producing and reproducing the organization and management of the global production system and the global labor force.”²²

Yet large financial centres (London, New York, Tokyo) are not the only “global cities” – economic globalization produces a matrix of connected urban centres. Most cities in the less-developed world²³ would be excluded from empirical and analytic attention if a “financial

Ever since Sassen’s 1991 book, “The Global City,” there has been nearly universal agreement that London, Tokyo, and New York are the world’s dominant global cities. Beyond this list of three, there is no consensus.

centre” criteria was applied to their cases. While Friedmann and Sassen have both insisted “there is no such entity as a single global city,”²⁴ the critics charge that New York, London and Tokyo have all too often been theory’s prototype.²⁵ The analytic danger is that focusing so much attention on the “top tier” cities ignores the linkages between and among primary and secondary cities, and ignores important differences in the development and trajectories of all cities. In a recent essay, for example, Richard Child Hill and June Woo Kim point out that there are key differences in the formation of New York and Tokyo as “world cities” and here they highlight the ways the historically- and spatially-situated restructuring of the US economy pervades Sassen’s definition of

the global city. Hill and Kim write:

“The practice of global control in Tokyo has not resulted in a social regime characterized by massive loss in manufacturing jobs, high levels of foreign immigration, extreme wealth concentration and social and spatial polarization.”²⁶

These differences, the authors assert, has to do with the history and the continuing role of the state plays in Japan in setting industrial policy and financial rules. Hill and Kim therefore challenge world city theory for taking up a globalist view which posits “that a single global system is becoming superimposed on nation-states which are losing importance as a result.”²⁷ In contrast, Hill and Kim assert that “fundamental regional differences among the world’s major cities might exist” and that the capitalist world economy is not a “single, globe-embracing structure and process.”²⁸

²¹ Saskia Sassen (1991), *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press: Chapter 8.

²² Sassen, *Global City*, 325.

²³ Grant and Nijman use the phrase “cities in the less-developed world” instead of more problematic terms “Third-World city” or “postcolonial city” (“Globalization and the Corporate Geography,” supra note 1 at 339).

²⁴ Sassen, *Cities*, 4.

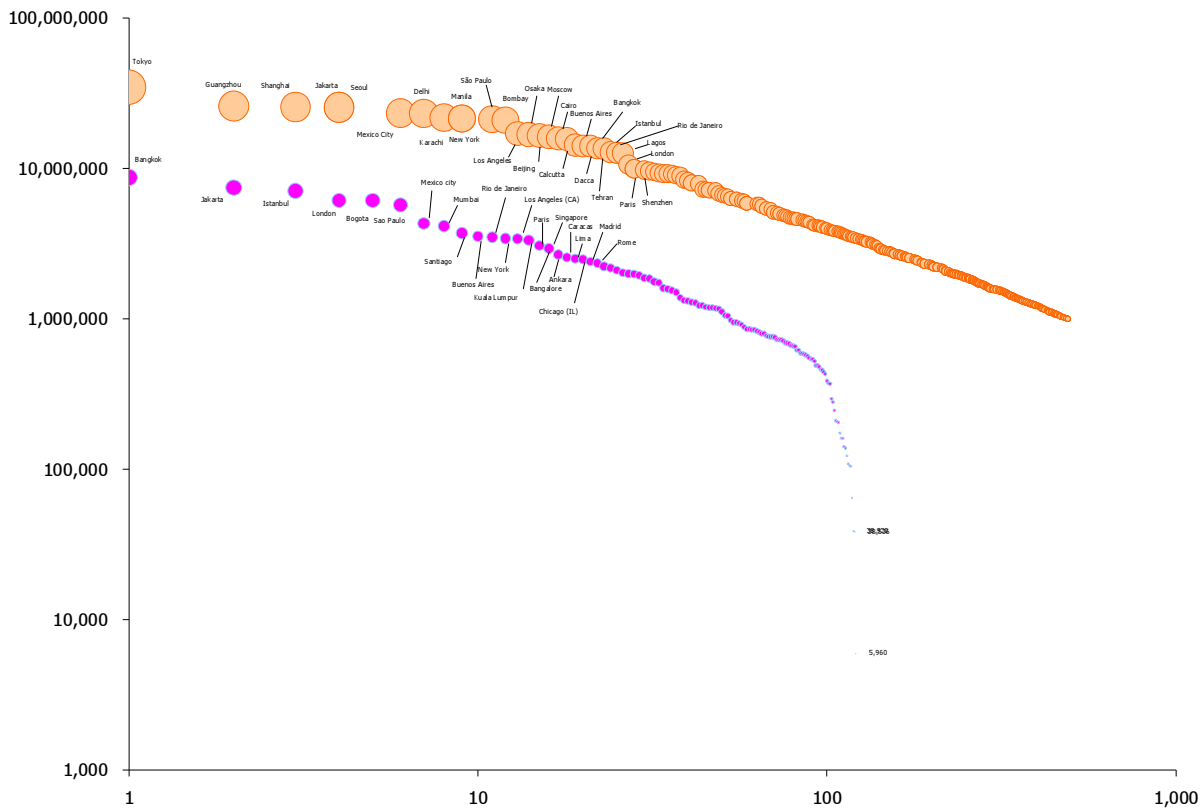
²⁵ Richard Child Hill and June Woo Kim (2000), “Global Cities and Developmental States: New York, Tokyo and Seoul,” *Urban Studies* 37(12), 2168.

²⁶ Hill and Kim, “Global Cities and Developmental States,” 2176.

²⁷ Hill and Kim, “Global Cities and Developmental States,” 2167.

²⁸ Hill and Kim, “Global Cities and Developmental States,” 2169.

It is also clear that changes in the social practices of information technologies are having consequences for hierarchical ideas about world cities. Until fairly recently, for example, the infrastructure of high-technology telecommunications was quite centralized -- and thus even as information technologies allowed certain things to be dispersed to low-cost locations, the most valuable economic activities remained anchored to the dense webs of fiber-optic cables in the central business districts of a small number of cities. Today, much of this centralization persists, but the range of activities that can be dispersed to cities farther down the urban hierarchy has expanded. This is particularly notable with the rise of mobile computing, which reflects and reinforces dramatic changes across cities of the Global South -- at least in those places where economic growth has allowed more people to gain access to some consumption goods. In particular, social networking is creating a multitude of new world-city hierarchies, where more and more people are spending considerable amounts of time. This time is spent doing a wide range of things -- in ways that defy conventional categorizations of work/play, friends/family, production/consumption. We can see this if we use the simple tools of the urban systems approach to visualize the rank-size pattern of “real” cities, and “social network” cities. Below is a rank-size distribution for Facebook -- just one of the many expansive networking sites recreating world-city hierarchies around the world. Note how many cities change position depending on whether they’re measured in terms of their “real” populations or their “Facebook” populations. But from an urban-systems perspective, of course, what matters is the overall pattern itself -- close to a straight line, suggesting a systematic regularity in the organization of socio-spatial collectives.



“Real” and “Facebook” World-City Hierarchies. The rank-size rule holds quite well -- showing a nearly-straight line for the log of population and the log of rank -- for both “real” city populations (in orange), and the “virtual” populations as proxied by the number of Facebook users by city (in purple). *Data Sources:* Social Bakers (2012).

Facebook Statistics by City. <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-statistics> London: Social Bakers; population data from Thomas Brinkhoff (2012). *City Populations, Compiled from National Statistical Agencies.* <http://www.citypopulation.de>. Thanks to Elvia Willyono for assistance in obtaining Facebook user estimates by city.

Other ways cities differ in their linkages to the global economy and to each other is the subject of recent research.²⁹ One stream of this research seeks to move beyond the study of comparative attributes between individual cities to describe the network of relations between them.³⁰ Attributive studies sought to define world cities and understand the world city hierarchy with the theoretical assumption that “if cities are linked in certain ways, then they should have certain attributes.”³¹ Theoretically developed from Manuel Castells’ notion of the “space of flows,” and called a “network analytic approach”³² this research agenda seeks to move beyond hierarchy-based rankings in the global urban system to focus on how (world) cities are places “produced and reproduced by what *flows* through them (information, knowledge, money and cultural practices, for example).”³³ In Beaverstock et al.’s estimation, comparing attributes of individual cities means “we learn a lot about the nodes in the network, but relatively little about the network itself.”³⁴

John Rennie Short exposed the “dirty little secret” of world-cities research: most of the rankings are based on information about the characteristics of individual cities -- whereas global-city theory requires comparative, relational data about inter-city networks.

But whatever the approach researchers take (attributive data can tell us something about the world urban system) questions also arise regarding the availability of reliable data. In a paper on measurement methodologies, Beaverstock and his colleagues write:

“... in the context of contemporary large-scale social change, measurement of trends, and thus the resulting data, have not kept abreast of the social changes they purport to describe. The key problem is that current tendencies towards globalization in many socio-economic activities transcend the states that have been the prime generators of *statistics*. Whereas in the recent past, data for countries, as collected

together in United Nations publications, provided an adequate evidential basis for studying ‘international’ changes, such data are simply inadequate for describing trans-state processes.”³⁵

Beaverstock et. al. thereby point out that most relational data is produced by states, so comparisons may be possible between whole nations, but not between cities.³⁶ There is,

²⁹ Grant and Nijman, “Globalization and the Corporate Geography of Cities,” 320.

³⁰ Jonathan V. Beaverstock, Richard G. Smith, and Peter J. Taylor (2004), “World-City Network: A New Metageography?” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90(1), 124.

³¹ Smith, “Global Cities in East Asia,” 402.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ J.V. Beaverstock, R.G. Smith, P.J. Taylor, D.R.F Walker, and H. Lorimer (2000), “Globalization and World Cities: Some Measurement Methodologies,” *Applied Geography* 20, 47.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Beaverstock, et al, “Measurement Methodologies,” 44.

³⁶ Beaverstock et. al., “Globalization and World Cities,” 47.

however, research that has compiled various kinds of flows between cities – for example, air traffic flow, postal flows, phone calls and internet linkages – but this data is limited as it can only measure general patterns of flow, and cannot differentiate between the purpose of the flows in the production and reproduction as it relates to world city processes³⁷: it cannot distinguish between a business trip and a vacation. Short et. al. suggest that this “dirty little secret of world cities research” — the lack of available and reliable or comparable data — can be augmented by trawling for new data sources provided by various governmental or industry organizations. But Beaverstock et. al. believe that we need to invest more time, money, and hard work actually creating new kinds of information, rather than trying to gather stuff from existing sources.³⁸ To this end, a research group and network on Globalization and World Cities (GaWC), <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/gawc/>, has been set up and one of their missions is to encourage and organize standardized data collection.³⁹

Here is one example of an attempt to create useful new measures of world city relations, by using information that is often hidden in plain sight. Beaverstock et. al. set out to describe the intercity relations of the global network by studying the office geographies of large firms. (It may be a geeky endeavor, but *someone's* got to do it.) From company web sites, internal directories, customer handbooks, and trade publications Beaverstock (and his research assistants):

“...collected data on the distributions of offices for 74 companies (covering accountancy, advertising, banking/finance, and commercial law) in 263 cities. An initial analysis of this data identified the 143 major office centers in these cities, and 55 of these were designated world cities on the basis of the number, size, and importance of their offices....”⁴⁰

Using their roster of world cities, they define network patterns by shared firm presences of the largest 46 firms (in this case, they tell us that “all of these firms have offices in 15 or more different cities”⁴¹). It is not surprising that they find London and New York ‘share’ 45 of the 46 firms, but, they say, more interesting interpretations about world cities comes from examining the lower levels of intercity relations.⁴² At the higher level – shared presences between cities greater than 35 – Sassen’s trio (London, New York, Toyko) form a triangular relationship, but they note that Hong Kong also shows a similar relationship to London and New York, each with 38 shared presences.⁴³ Beaverstock and company suggest an explanation:

“[the] pattern can be interpreted in terms of the different degrees of political fragmentation in the three major globalization arenas. In the most fragmented, Pacific Asia, there is no dominant world city, so that presences are needed in at least three cities to cover the region: Hong Kong for China, Singapore for southeast Asia, and Tokyo for

³⁷ Beaverstock et. al., “Globalization and World Cities,” 48.

³⁸ Beaverstock et. al., “Globalization and World Cities,” 44. The Short et al. quote is from “The Dirty Little Secret of World Cities Research,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 20 (1996): 697-717.

³⁹ Beaverstock et. al., “Globalization and World Cities,” 48.

⁴⁰ Beaverstock et. al., “World-City Network,” 127.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² See Beaverstock et. al., “World-City Network,” 127.

⁴³ Tokyo has 37 shared presences with both New York and London. Beaverstock et. al., “World-City Network,” 128.

Japan.... In contrast, the U.S. consists of a single state such that one city can suffice for a presence in that market.”⁴⁴

Their approach, then, seeks to expand the interpretive range of world city research. Key in this endeavor is noting what researchers “simply do not know.”⁴⁵

But what about the internal structure of global cities and their second- or third-tier cousins? So far we’ve talked about the network of cities, but researchers also suggest that globalization has also literally *taken shape* in cities in particular ways. Major centers like New York or London have seen an upward shift of land prices – the result of speculative real estate markets and a transnational elite that can afford to pay: This has had the effect of intense gentrification in inner cities, and has resulted in – if not new – then intense growth of inequality. The urban “irony” is that “the growing inequality in the bidding power for space, housing, and consumption services means that the expanding low-wage work force that is employed directly and indirectly by the core sector has increasing difficulty living in these cities.”⁴⁶ The spatial (re)organization of cities and its relation to globalization takes different form in different cities.⁴⁷ Writing about Accra and Mumbai, Grant and Nijman suggest that structural changes in these sites exhibit “processes of corporate segregation based on domestic and foreign ownership”⁴⁸ and these “are not random or accidental”⁴⁹: they note, for example, striking similarities between Bombay’s colonial economic geography and Mumbai’s global economic geography.

Conclusions: The Urgency of World-Cities Research

Concern with world cities has not only become a paradigm of researchers who seem obsessed with rankings (and researchers obsessed with people who are obsessed with rankings), rather the notion of “world *class* cities” has also emerged as cities clamor for tourist dollars or other forms of “competitive advantage” in the post-industrial economy – a situation Friedmann has called “competitive angst.”⁵⁰ As Sassen asked, “what happens to city politics when the leading economic forces are oriented to the world market?”⁵¹ One answer is that city politicians, civic servants, and citizens rally to become place marketeers, and the “imagineering” of cities’ promotional strategies has come to be a “hegemonic economic project.”⁵² This leads us to a big Why question: Why do geographers study globalization and world cities? In a review of world city research and, yes, a critique of what some world city researchers fail to do (or fail to do very well) Chris Hamnett notes their important contribution: “They point out that there is nothing inevitable about either the structure of the world economy or its exact materialization in world cities, and that the driving forces of competition, the need for accumulation and political

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Sassen, *Global City*, 329.

⁴⁷ John Rennie Short, Carrie Breitbach, Steven Buckman and Jamey Essex (2000), “From World Cities to Gateway Cities: Extending the boundaries of Globalization Theory,” *City*, 4(3), 318.

⁴⁸ Grant and Nijman, “Globalization and the Corporate Geography of Cities,” 338.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ John Friedmann (1993), “Where We Stand: A Decade of World City Research.” Paper presented for the Conference of World Cities in a World-System. Sterling, VA: Center for Innovative Technology.

⁵¹ Sassen, *Global Cities*, 323.

⁵² Short et. al., “From World Cities to Gateway Cities,” 320.

struggles make the intersection of the world economy and world cities a point of intense conflict.”⁵³

⁵³ Chris Hamnett (2003), *Unequal City: London in the Global Arena*. New York: Routledge, 25. Hamnett’s comment is in relation to Friedmann and Wolff’s 1982 essay “World City Formation: An Agenda for Research and Action” (*International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 6, no. 3: 309-44), which Hamnett notes “established a new field of inquiry.” While the contributions of subsequent research (including Hamnett’s) have fruitfully expanded the range of world-city research, Hamnett’s comment, I think, can apply to the field as a whole.