



# A roster of world cities

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**Although there is a general consensus on which are the leading world cities, there is no agreed-upon roster covering world cities below the highest level. This paper reports the construction of an inventory of world cities based upon their level of advanced producer services. Global service centres are identified and graded for accountancy, advertising, banking/finance and law. Aggregating these results produces a roster of 55 world cities at three levels: 10 Alpha world cities, 10 Beta world cities and 35 Gamma world cities. These are found to be largely geographically concentrated in three “globalization arenas”, northern America, western Europe and Pacific Asia. © 1999 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved**

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## Introduction

Large and significant cities have fascinated social scientists over the last century and this is indicated by the range of terms used to describe them: imperial cities, primate cities, great industrial cities, millionaire cities, world cities, global capitalist cities, international financial centres, mega-cities and global cities are all well-known designations. This variety in terminology reflects both the diversity in the nature of cities and differences of approach to the study of cities. Although often closely entwined, there is a basic division of approaches which can be easily identified. There is a demographic tradition which is largely interested in the sizes of cities and a functional tradition which treats cities as part of a larger system. The former tradition is today represented by the mega-city project, which is exploring the human and ecological implications of contemporary and future huge population concentrations. The functional tradition is to be found in studies of world and global cities which are interpreted as integral to contemporary globalization processes. In this paper we will be concerned solely with the latter cities.

It should be noted that this conceptual distinction

does not identify discrete classes of cities: New York and Mexico City, for instance, are both mega- and world cities. Despite such overlap – obviously there is a tendency for demographically large cities to be economically significant cities – the differences between the two approaches means that their respective rosters are distinct: Calcutta is a mega-city but not a world city, Zurich is a world city but not a mega-city. However, such discussion of rosters of cities is problematic in the case of world cities. Whereas mega-cities can be easily defined in terms of a given population threshold, which cities qualify for “world” status has never been so clearly specified. Hence, while it is obvious that cities like London and New York are world cities, as we move to less significant cities such as Manchester and Minneapolis for example, there is by no means any consensus as to their status in this context. It is the purpose of this paper to construct a roster of world cities.

The usual way of treating these cities below the Londons and New Yorks is to cite them as national, regional or even “sub-global” in their functional reach. This hierarchical approach is itself problematic since it relies on specification by city ranking rather than actual inter-city relations (Taylor, 1997). It is also somewhat doubtful given the pervasive nature of globalization. As a recent special issue of *Urban Geography* (Knox, 1996) has indicated, “medium cities” have just as much need to respond to globaliz-

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ation trends as their larger neighbours. Hence, in this study we do not approach the definition of a roster in terms of working our way down a possible hierarchy – the latter is considered a separate, albeit closely related, research question. Rather, we consider the *global capacity* of cities in terms of selected services they provide. Using key advanced producer services, we consider firms which have a *global competence* and enumerate their presence in cities across the world. Global capacity is then defined empirically in terms of aggregate scores and interpreted theoretically as concentrations of expertise and knowledge. In this exercise, we find 55 world cities and another 68 cities showing evidence of world city formation.

The paper is divided into two main sections. In the first we review the work of others in defining world cities. Within this functional tradition of studying major cities we identify four main approaches. However, the problem with this collection of approaches is the variety of criteria used; they range from being very specific to being quite subjective, and sometimes even vague, specifications of world city status. This exercise is useful for presenting the state of play in defining world cities but, most of all, it illustrates clearly the need for a systematic consideration of the question of world city status. This is what we attempt in the second section. Using Saskia Sassen's argument (Sassen, 1991) that it is advanced producer services which are the distinctive feature of contemporary world city formation, we focus on four key services: accounting, advertising, banking and law. Cities are evaluated as global service centres in each of these sectors and aggregation of these results provides a measure of a city's global capacity or world-cityness. From these scores we define 10 "Alpha" world cities, 10 "Beta" world cities and 35 "Gamma" world cities. In the conclusion we briefly evaluate our results comparatively and their utility in future research.

### **Functional approaches to defining major cities**

From the seminal work of Peter Hall (1966) to the comprehensive analyses of London, New York, Tokyo and Paris in the mid 1990s (Llewelyn-Davies, 1996), or international financial centres towards the end of the millennium (The Economist, 1998), the central facet of the world city literature has been to *rank* cities according to their disproportionate geo-economic power in the world-system. There has been broad consensus as to which cities are located at the top of the world city hierarchy (Table 1) but below this apex there is a wide range of opinion on which other cities qualify for world or international status (Table 2). Some of the variety exhibited in Table 2 relates to different criteria used in identifying world cities. Four major approaches have dominated the literature and before we consider the range of cities that have been cited as having world or international

status we need to briefly review these different types of study.

#### *Cosmopolitan characteristics and the multinational corporate economy*

The first phase of work concerned the very early proponents of world city research who identified the strategic domination of certain world cities in the world-system by analysing and ranking the locational preferences and roles of multinational corporation (MNC) headquarters in the "developed" world (Hall, 1966; Hymer, 1972; Heenan, 1977). Following the work of Patrick Geddes (1915), Hall's analysis (Hall, 1966) of London, Paris, Randstad, Rhine-Ruhr, Moscow, New York and Tokyo, has been widely cited as the starting point for studying the global urban hierarchy. For Hall (1966), these cities were atop the urban hierarchy because of their (global) functional capabilities, with respect to power and influence in: politics; trade; communications; finance; education; culture and technology. Whilst Hall's work (Hall, 1966) placed the concept of world city onto the agenda of contemporary urban studies, it did so under the auspices of urbanization, or cosmopolitanism, rather than reflecting world city growth as an outcome of the uneven geographies of capital formation in the world system (see Brenner, 1998). In our eyes, the most significant, yet under-reported, theorist of world city formation and the global urban hierarchy during this period was the economist Stephen Hymer. For Hymer (1972), the top management corporate functions undertaken within MNC headquarters "must be located close to the capital market, the media, and the government...because of the need for face-to-face contact at higher levels of decision making...[and]...-applying this scheme to the world economy, one would expect to find the highest offices of the multinational corporations concentrated in the world's major cities" (as shown in Table 1).

#### *World cities and the new international division of labour*

Building upon Hall (1966) and especially Hymer (1972), this second approach centered upon the decision-making corporate activities and power of MNCs, in the context of the new (spatial) international division of labour discovered in the late 1970s (Frobel *et al.*, 1980). This block of work, which includes Cohen (1981), Friedmann and Wolff (1982), Friedmann (1986), Glickman (1987), Feagin and Smith (1987), Godfrey and Zhou (1999) and to a lesser extent Knox (1995, 1996) and Thrift (1989) for example, has not only enriched the "theoretical" approach taken to world city studies, but has also been a major catalyst for the extension of research into the 1990s (see Knox and Taylor, 1995). Of this batch of writings, two major pieces stand out as taking empirical research forward in the development of world city rankings with the global urban hierarchy.

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