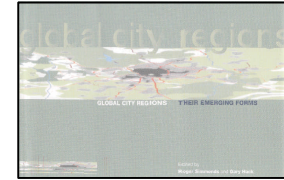


Book Review

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Global City Regions: their emerging forms.

R. Simmonds & G. Hack (Eds) Spon Press, London, 2000, p286.

Global City Regions developed out of two international symposia given by the members of the Global Cities Consortium. The book sets itself two questions; ‘what evidence is there that city regions are passing through moments of rapid transformation?’ and ‘what trends, if any, can we discover in their changing social, economic and physical forms and do these represent a new “type” of human settlement emergent.’ In attempting to answer these questions the book looks at 11 city regions in detail, these being Bangkok, Boston, Madrid, The Randstad, San Diego, Santiago (Chile), Sao Paulo, Seattle, Taipei, Tokyo and the West Midlands (UK).



The book itself is very American with a rather curious 3-column A4 landscape layout, which at times is somewhat uninspiring. For the British reader, the first world map (p5) showing the West Midlands occupying the Central Lowlands of Scotland is more than a little off-putting, while statements such as ‘cities throughout the world are facing the same forces of change at the same moment in history’ (p4) might raise more than the occasional eyebrow. It is unfortunate that the overview chapters are marred by these kinds of sweeping statements. In similar vein a series of highly contestable simplifications are made about British post-war urban policy, which merely serve to irritate.

Attempts to tie together disparate examples rather than acknowledge differences also leads to some confusion in the narrative as on p11 where:

‘It is interesting to compare the changing forms of the Madrid region and the Randstad over the past 30 years. Madrid, once a classic moncentric region has exploded into being polynuclear. The Randstad originally an agglomeration of independent towns and cities has become more of an integrated whole. The result is that in broad outline they have grown to be surprisingly similar. Because the major green zones of the Randstad however are in the centre (the Green Heart) and those of the Madrid region are on the periphery, one is in a sense the obverse of the other.’

Sweeping statements such as ‘Congestion has shifted to the suburbs’ (p183) further reinforce the problems caused by the initial premise that all cities are influenced by the same things. Equally assertions such as ‘large urban areas are concentrating people, wealth and power’ (p207) ignore all trends towards counterurbanisation and urban depopulation which clearly are occurring in many ‘post-industrial’ cities.

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The case studies are more useful providing a range of up-to-date information as well as some reasonable maps and diagrams. The use of identical mapping conventions for the case studies also facilitates effective comparison between 'city regions'. But once again, the determination to identify similarities to support the arguments undermines the later review chapters, as on p202; 'the tendency to rely on one instrument, particularly land use legislation is seriously debilitating for urbanism in the new urban epoch.'

The concluding chapters, which attempt to tie together the disparate case studies into a common notion of 'global city regions' appear rather selective in the evidence used to support the approach taken and again the desire to generalise results in a series of highly contestable statements which undermine much of the interesting empirical work contained in the case studies.