Abstract

The notion that there is a 'European urban system' has been an attractive idea, since it appears to provide a coherent subset of cities to study within a regional context. Under conditions of contemporary globalization, however, the spatial order of European cities can only be properly understood as a 'porous Europe'. That is, it is impossible to sensibly discuss European inter-city relations separate from an encompassing world city network.

The Achilles heel of such global approach is the general lack of available data thatquantifies the changing positions of cities in a worldwide perspective. Our paper begins to address this poverty of data by showing that appropriate data can be identified and analysed to study relations between world cities, and thereupon analyses 77 European cities in the context of a global urban analysis of 234 cities across the world.

The main conclusion is that leading European world cities are specifically distinguished through their forming of global urban arenas. They should therefore not be thought of as being un-European, but as a special kind of world city that is highly cosmopolitan in its inter-city relations.

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