Chapter X

An E-Classification of the World’s Capital Cities: URL References to Web Sites

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Abstract

The world’s capital cities perform various political functions for their populations, contain embassies, consulates, and missions of other governments, and serve as headquarters for major corporations, cultural, and humanitarian organizations. While social scientists have classified major cities based on population size, number of corporate headquarters, banks, and airline connections, the emergence of ICTs suggests additional criteria. I use the number of URL references to Web sites listed in the Google search engine for 199 world capitals and classify them into five distinct categories. Small, prosperous city-states and major capitals in Western Europe and North America have the most hyperlinks. The fewest are for capitals in poor, rural Sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia. Capitals with multiple government offices, strong ICT economies and dominant tourist economies have the most hyperlinks per capita. These are mostly in wealthy Europe and North America. The lowest values are among African and Asian capitals in poor countries and those with repressive regimes. Major news items, embassy, financial, and tourism information are major themes on web pages. Additional research topics are suggested.
The emerging worlds of digital economies or e-commerce present challenges and opportunities for scholars in the social and policy sciences who are interested in the information that is available about individual cities and their linkages with other cities in a region (Brunn, 2003b). Valuable and insightful contributions into these new worlds of geography, economics, management, sociology, and politics have come from scholars in a number of fields including geography (Geographical Review, 1997; Janelle and Hodge, 2000; Wilson and Corey, 2000; Leinbach and Brunn, 2001; Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie, 2002; Environment and Planning A, 2003), sociology (Barnett, 2001; Castells, 2001; Hargittai and Centeno, 2001; Kick and Davis, 2001; Sassen, 2001), organizational science and management (Sacks, Ventresca and Uzzi, 2001). Cities, urban regions, and networks have also been a focus of disciplinary and interdisciplinary research initiatives (Castells, 2002; Van der Wusten, 2002). Among the topics addressed are telecommunications and the changing structures of cities (Graham and Marvin, 1996; Wheeler, Aoyama and Warf, 2000; Brunn and Ghose, 2003), the changing geographies of the Internet (Zook, 2001; Kellerman, 2002), the most and least linked regions (Saad, House and Brunn, 2002), the changing infrastructure of international Internet-based cities (Townsend, 2001), the changing dynamics of airline networks (Smith and Timberlake, 2001), and salient features of globally networked cities (GaWC Study and Network).

One feature of the contemporary urban world that has not been investigated to date is a classification of the world’s capital cities, in particular, based on how much and what kinds of information are available using major search engines. Classifying the world’s largest cities or urban areas has long been of interest among social scientists, including geographers, sociologists, and economists, because of their political, economic, and cultural significance. One of the major themes has been classifying world or global cities by using a number of indices, including population sizes, international sports venues, number of major corporations, head offices of major banks, stock agencies, advertising agencies, airline passengers, networks and freight volume, and cultural events (Brunn, Williams and Zeigler, 2003; Friedman, 1986, 1995; Short et al., 1995; Short and Kim, 1999; Knox, 1994; Knox and Taylor, 1995; Knox and Pinch, 2000; Hall 1966, 1984, 2001; Lo and Marcotullio, 2001; GaWC Study and Network; Smith and Timberlake, 2001; Wagenaar, Mamadouh and Dijkink, 2000). These studies are valuable in suggesting subsequent studies on specific types of cities or city systems using new databases and perspectives.

National Capitals

National capitals represent a major category of important cities. They are not only significant political, economic, and cultural nodes for the state in which they are located, but they are also significant for the roles they play and influences they have elsewhere. Capital cities are networked to rural areas and small towns within their state, as well as the major centers of commerce, industry, research and development, and learning. As the major administrative center for the country’s central government, the capital city is the place where national decisions are made regarding the lives of those within its
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