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Luc-Normand Tellier. 2009. *Urban World History: An Economic and Geographical Perspective*. Québec QC: Presses de l'Université du Québec. 629 p.

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Tellier is an unorthodox but rigorous thinker, and here he has written a very ambitious book, a history of the world as seen through the lens of the spatial dynamics of urban and economic systems. The basic thesis of the book is that there exist regional and global scale organizing principles that produce spatial and temporal patterns of urban and economic development, and that the conventional history of nations, empires, religions, and cultural realms is largely a reflection of these underlying principles. In the end, the book is not entirely convincing in its support of this position, but it is nevertheless interesting, and valuable for the major questions it raises as well as for some of the approaches it advances in attempting to answer them.

The two key concepts proposed are the topodynamic corridor and the urbexplosion. Topodynamic corridors are continental or global scale corridors within which urbanization and economic development are concentrated. There are three of them: the Great Corridor, extending outward from its historical origin in Sumer north-westward through the Mediterranean region to Britain, and eastward through South and Southeast Asia to Japan; the Asian Corridor, circling through India, Indonesia, and China; and the American Corridor, extending outward from New York westward to Los Angeles and Tokyo, and eastward through London and Berlin to Moscow. Within each of these corridors, development has occurred in a succession of urbexplosions, with each urbexplo-

sion consisting of the progressive growth of an urban system within which economic activity is concentrated; the urban system of an urbexplosion is typically transnational. In the longer sweep of history one urbexplosion replaces another, and usually the temporal sequence is also a spatial one, so that, for example, the early urbexplosion centred on Sumer was replaced by the Hellenistic one centred to the west in the eastern Mediterranean, and that in turn was followed by the Roman system even further to the west. Tellier posits that this spatio-temporal trajectory, or topodynamic inertia, is a fundamental phenomenon, one that exerts a guiding force on the course of history.

Are these arguments invoking macro-scale dynamics and topodynamic corridors as causal agents reasonable? On first encountering them it is easy to dismiss them, but if they are thought of in the context of a complex or self-organizing systems approach, they can seem justifiable, and at various points in the book more details are supplied to enable the reader to interpret them in this way, so that the topodynamic corridors, for example, do not have to be taken as pre-existing features, but can be seen as a generalized description of macro-scale spatio-temporal patterns emerging from the local dynamics. At several points in the book short chapters are inserted which introduce standard theory from spatial economics, economic geography and regional science in support of the concepts of topo-

dynamic corridors, topodynamic inertia, and urbexplosions. These chapters suggest how the phenomena described by these concepts actually emerge from the more basic, micro-scale phenomena addressed by the standard theory.

However, there is an underlying irony that runs throughout the book. Throughout his career, Tellier has been one of the leading theorists of regional science. He is known for his work on simulation modelling of urban and regional systems, and especially for his generalization of the Weber model to show how regional urban and economic systems structure themselves spatially. This large body of work is directly relevant to the major themes of the book, and could be used to show more rigorously how concepts like topodynamic corridors, far from being rigid, *a priori* Procrustean structures imposed from above to “explain” the course of history, are actually useful generalizations of emergent macro-scale patterns generated from below. And urbexplosions, although phenomena of a somewhat larger scale, are essentially what Tellier has been modelling in his simulation work; these could be discussed explicitly, and convincingly, within that framework. And yet all this work, which must have suggested and inspired the grand themes of the book, appears only in footnotes and references.

Of course there is much more to the book than the issues just discussed. Most of the text consists of a presentation of the development—and usually the subsequent decline—of individual urban systems and their associated economies throughout history and around the world, and there is much useful material here, as well as interesting interpretations of world historical events. The chapters covering earlier periods tend to read a bit like potted histories, complete with lists of rulers and advisors, included just because the periods need to be covered, and without much apparent relevance to the themes of the book. But the chapters dealing with the last 500 years are much more to the point, with the history being presented in a

way that imbeds it within the framework of spatial dynamics at all scales. Here the book comes into its own. The book concludes with several chapters that deal with the general issues that run throughout the work: topodynamics, transportation and polarization, and the broad patterns of history. These too are good.

Like all books, *Urban World History* has its strengths and weaknesses. For some readers the weaknesses will seem glaring, and the strengths less obvious. But this evaluation would be wrong. This is a book of ideas—good ideas, even if at first some of them may seem questionable. And ideas, especially new ideas, are what we need more of in regional science and related fields, so in that respect this book is particularly valuable. Read it, and use it as a starting point for developing your own ideas.