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Spatial Economics Research Centre

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Aerotropolis

A couple of long flights seemed the perfect moment to have a look at Kasarda and Lindsay's [Aerotropolis: The Way We'll Live Next](#).

The book's [main argument runs as follows](#): "Not so long ago, airports were built near cities, and roads connected the one to the other. This pattern—the city in the center, the airport on the periphery—shaped life in the twentieth century, from the central city to exurban sprawl. Today, the ubiquity of jet travel, round-the-clock workdays, overnight shipping, and global business networks has turned the pattern inside out. Soon the airport will be at the center and the city will be built around it, the better to keep workers, suppliers, executives, and goods in touch with the global market."

I have to say that I am somewhat skeptical on a couple of fronts. The first concerns the extent to which activity will cluster incredibly close to airports. I buy that there are a small(ish) group of people who travel an incredible amount for whom living near a good airport is important. This group appears to be growing, but I can't imagine it will ever comprise large percentages of the population. I also buy that there are firms - involved in global supply chains, distribution etc - that benefit a lot from being near airports. Again, the book makes the case that this group is growing, but the non-traded part of the economy will remain substantial. Of course, in the old days the fact that merchants and firms wanted to cluster near ports (and then rail stations) was enough to drive overall concentration of non-traded activity around those infrastructure hubs. But that was because intra-metropolitan travel costs were high. When you no longer need to walk or take the omnibus to work, you can live a lot further away from your office or factory. This drop in within city transport costs decimated city centres. To the extent they are coming back, this is more about the amenities of city centre living than the need to be close to work. I don't see how airports as a key transport infrastructure changes that particular dynamic.

The second piece of skepticism concerned what was cause and what was effect. Airports are clearly going to be important in the future, but many of the examples in the book didn't appear that successful.

Still, a thought provoking read, and interesting for the wealth of detail on some fascinating case studies.

Posted by [Prof Henry G. Overman](#) on [Tuesday, November 13, 2012](#)

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