

# Journal of Sociology

<http://jos.sagepub.com/>

---

**Book Review: Global Shift: Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy, 5th Edn : Peter Dicken New York: The Guilford Press, 2007**

Jeb Sprague

*Journal of Sociology* 2011 47: 219

DOI: 10.1177/14407833110470020604

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://jos.sagepub.com/content/47/2/219>

---

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



The Australian Sociological Association

**Additional services and information for *Journal of Sociology* can be found at:**

**Email Alerts:** <http://jos.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

**Subscriptions:** <http://jos.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

**Reprints:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

**Permissions:** <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

**Citations:** <http://jos.sagepub.com/content/47/2/219.refs.html>

the later chapters of the book are intended to apply the systems approach that is developed in the early chapters. Chapter 9 on 'Measuring Progress' is an absolutely first-rate review essay, evaluating the status of the countries of the world in meeting generally accepted post-Washington Consensus goals like economic development, social equity, human rights and environmental sustainability, but it has nothing to do with complex systems theory. It makes no mention of the advertised 'tipping points', 'nonlinear global waves', 'coevolution', 'fitness landscapes' or 'complex adaptive systems'.

A lack of direct application of systems theory is similarly evident in Chapter 10 on neoliberalism and Chapter 11 on the global financial crisis. The complex-systems concepts of 'path dependency' and 'critical turning points' are used, but superficially. For example, the 'critical turning points' in Ireland's developmental trajectory have been 'the absence of a Reformation; the colonization of Ireland by Britain; the growth of a nation project entwined with Catholicism; decolonization and suffrage-democracy; joining the EU and internationalizing the economy; and the development of neoliberal corporatism' (p. 394).

Overall, the book falls flat on its subtitled unifying theme of complexity theory, but offers much that is thoughtful and new in its individual chapters. The lack of a preface makes the book difficult to judge (or to use), since it's not obvious what the book should be used for. Perhaps if the subtitle was removed and the introductory and concluding material on complexity theory stripped out, the book would make for a comprehensive and in places deep commentary on the phenomenology of inequality in the age of globalization. Under a title like 'Multiple Inequalities' (and appropriately edited) it would be a fantastic course accompaniment for graduate and advanced undergraduate units on global inequality. Unfortunately,

in its current packaging and under its current title it is more a collection of (often deep) ideas than a unified monograph. One hopes for a second edition.

**Salvatore Babones**

*University of Sydney*

## **GLOBAL SHIFT: MAPPING THE CHANGING CONTOURS OF THE WORLD ECONOMY, 5TH EDN**

**Peter Dicken**

*New York: The Guilford Press, 2007.*

Widely cited and read by scholars and students of globalization, Peter Dicken's *Global Shift* is best known for its concise examination of structures of the global economy. Now in its 5th edition with over 250 newly designed figures and graphs, few texts are as effective in showing the incontrovertible changes undergone in production, distribution and consumption. Written prior to the crisis of recent years, it remains a useful guide for understanding the truly global nature of today's world economy. However, where Dicken does a remarkable job in dissecting the structure of the global economy, he has little or nothing to say about how the state and economic structure are grounded in broader class and social relations.

Dicken starts, in Parts 1 and 2, by laying out distinct ways in which scholars conceptualize globalization and the importance of technological and networked development, as well as the role of transnational corporations (TNCs) and national states. Part 3 describes shifting economic sectors in the real economy: agriculture, autos, computers, textiles and logistical infrastructure. Included within Part 3 is a chapter on finance, but this is just 29 pages in a 599-page book. This chapter covers the spread of financial services but has little discussion of derivatives (p. 386) and nothing on the role of central banks or stock markets.

Most importantly though, for the purposes of this review, how does *Global Shift* treat the role of social agency?

Toward the end of the book, in Part 4 'Winners and Losers', Dicken reviews some social processes, environmental crises and conflicts unique to globalization. Citing for instance Leslie Sklair (2001), Dicken refers to a dominant social class in globalization, a 'transnational capitalist class' as the 'the owners and controllers of the major corporations' (pp. 442–3). But in his discussion on TNCs throughout the book Dicken never relates this to such critical theories of class. From Dicken's approach, TNCs are not grounded in the social basis of capitalist expansion, with systematic and heightened exploitation of lower-income communities and the uprooting of local cultures and environments. Instead, Dicken focuses on the 'potential impacts': transferring R&D technology, ties with local businesses and the *kinds* of jobs they provide (pp. 454–73). These are very useful and important issues to explore, but how might such a realist approach explain the social inequality and conflict that undergirds globalization? By understanding these economic structures from a realist perspective in which states and corporations are thought of as rational unitary actors moving toward their own interests, economic structures are mischaracterized as autonomous and separate from social relations. In this approach a deeper, more critical, understanding of our world is lost. Economic and state structures are theorized untethered from the social relations from which they spring.

Dicken looks at a diverse array of sectors: the development of globalized agro-industries (pp. 347–76), logistical industries (pp. 410–32), and the complex interactions between states and corporations (pp. 232–46). Attentive to the magnitude of changes taking place, he describes immense and unfolding global processes. The book is filled with

interesting examples: 'in the early 1990s, there were only a few hundred thousand subscribers to mobile systems', yet, as he points out, little more than a decade later there were around 1.5 billion (p. 89). Dicken provides interesting figures on new networks in globalization, pointing out differentiation between marketing networks of fair trade and commercial coffee (p. 351). These are helpful for understanding transnational networks, but what does it say about how these industries operate upon the backs of workers in the field?

Dicken usefully points out the need for understanding the economy through 'multiple scales', describing as problematic the aggregation into national-boxes of most 'statistical data on production, trade, investment and the like' (p. 13). He helpfully suggests that, to escape these boxes, we can think 'in terms of production circuits and networks' that 'cut through, and across, all geographical scales, including the bounded territory of the state' (p. 13). Might we also envision social relations, though hindered by many things, as also transforming in globalization? In theorizing globalization many scholars choose to emphasize the geographic rather than the social basis of change. Dicken, preferring the former as well, observes that while some cities and countries are well integrated with globalization, others are not (p. 89). The 'least developed countries' are 'not integrated into the system' (p. 39). But here he misses what I believe is more important: that we understand our world best by first emphasizing in explanatory importance inequality between social groups and classes, an approach made all the more important in globalization. Whereas worldwide different groups are operating as bulwarks of global capitalism, such as middle classes living in gated communities, in the 'third world' millions are pulled into credit card debt or crowded into urban slums. With global circuits of

capital accumulation entwining the earth's population in concomitant relations, in understanding our material world it is all the more important to emphasize as more determinant (of causal priority) the role of social production, and *then*, while also important, uneven geographic development.

Dicken provides a valuable explanation of various strategies and tactics that are carried out through TNCs and states, in seeking advantages in the global market: 'location tournaments', 'competitive bidding', 'incentivized tax structures', while at times 'investment capital may be provided by host government', with corporate taxes reduced, or as TNCs seek to exploit national differences between states, etc. (pp. 232–46). This manoeuvring, which he has studied in depth (Dicken, 2005, 2007; Dicken et al., 2006), provides the reader with useful ways in which to understand how TNCs and states are operated. But why are these state and corporate structures operated in this way? Who are the agents operating in and through these structures? We need studies such as *Global Shift* to be connected with a critical understanding of agency to get at how and why these structures work the way they do. In globalization, for example, if capitalists and state elites are operating through structures in which their social reproduction is tied to or dependent on circuits of global (rather than national) capital accumulation, then, while they still conflict with one another in many ways, they can share to different degrees in overarching *transnational* practices and ideologies (even as national and regional processes remain). The point here is that the *social basis* needs to be integral to any critical understanding of economic and state structures and the changes they undergo during globalization. I realize that Dicken has written in the past on actor-network theory (Dicken et al., 2001: 101–5), but, without the proper room

here to address this, I see this as a theoretically confused concept, understanding capital accumulation as disconnected from social conflict.

While Dicken emphasizes (rightly so) decisive changes in economic structures worldwide, we must ask throughout: how do these changes connect with people? Why and how do these processes and structures connect with different social strata and classes? Such questions go unanswered in *Global Shift*. This said, for a realist overview of the institutional structures of various industries and networks in globalization, and the institutional manners in which they intersect with states, this book remains a valuable and impressive text. Few have shown the immensity and particularity of global capitalist production so thoroughly.

## References

- Dicken, P. (2005) 'Tangled Webs: Transnational Production Networks and Regional Integration', *SPACES Working Paper 2005-04*. Geography, University of Marburg.
- Dicken, P. (2007) *Global Shift: Mapping the Changing Contours of the World Economy*, 5th edn. London: The Guilford Press.
- Dicken, P., P.F. Kelly, K. Olds and H.W.-C. Yeung (2001) 'Chains and Networks, Territories and Scales: Towards a Relational Framework for Analysing the Global Economy', *Global Networks* 1(2): 89–112.
- Dicken, P., H.W.-C. Yeung and L. Weidong (2006) Transnational Corporations and Network Effects of a Local Manufacturing Cluster in Mobile Telecommunications Equipment in China', *World Development* 34(12): 520–40.
- Sklair, L. (2001) *Transnational Capitalist Class*. Oxford: Blackwell.

---

**Jeb Sprague**

*University of California Santa Barbara*