

A TRIBUTE TO SIR PETER HALL

di *Simin Davoudi*¹

It is with deepest sadness that this tribute marks the passing of Professor Sir Peter Hall on 30 July 2014 at the age of 82. He was a true doyen of the planning world and a much admired and loved mentor and friend to many individuals including myself. I first met Peter in an interview for my first lectureship job in 1996 and ever since remained spellbound by his wealth of knowledge and his unparalleled ability to inspire. Doing justice to his monumental contribution to urban planning is beyond the limits of this short tribute. One small indication is the torrents of tributes that have appeared in the media; from his local newsletter (*Ealing Today*) to national newspapers (such as *the Guardian*, *the Economist*, *Financial Times*) as well as several learned societies. As I have suggested in a paper reflecting on his contribution to urban futures², Peter was one of those rare scholars of planning history who had the ability to look into the past and see the future. One of his most celebrated books about planning history is ironically called *Cities of Tomorrow*. Both the title and the text reflect Peter's mastery of combining insights with foresights. It was this ability which made his historical writing relevant to present day planning problems and controversies.

Peter is internationally renowned for his work on cities around the globe and on planning. He was a planning and regeneration expert adviser to successive UK governments and President of both the Town and Country Planning Association and the Regional Studies Association. After receiving his Master's and Doctoral degrees from the University of Cambridge, Peter began his academic career at Birkbeck College University of London in 1957. He then went on to teach in: the London School of Economics, University of Reading (where he became Dean of the Faculty of Urban and

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² Davoudi, S. (2014). Urban Futures. In: Tewdwr-Jones M., Phelps N. and R. Freestone, eds. *The planning imagination: Peter Hall and the Study of Urban and Regional Planning*, Oxon: Alexandrine Press: 252-266.

Regional Studies), and the University of California, Berkeley. In 1989, he took up the Bartlett Chair of Planning and Regeneration at University College London and awarded a Knighthood for his services to the Town and Country Planning Association. Peter was a Fellow of the British Academy and a member of the Academia Europea and received numerous honorary doctorates from universities around the world. Listing all the awards and honours that Peter received in recognition of his contributions is well beyond the limits of this tribute but below are some of the highlights.

In 2001, Peter received the Vautrin Lud Prize, known as the Nobel Prize in geography. In 2003, he was awarded the Royal Town Planning Institute Gold Medal, the first to be awarded in 20 years. In the same year, he was named by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as “a pioneer in the life of the nation”. In 2005, he was awarded the Founder’s Medal of the Royal Geographical Society for distinction in research, and also received the lifetime achievement award from the UK Deputy Prime Minister for his contribution to planning and regeneration. In the same year, Peter received the Balzan Prize for his work on the social and cultural history of cities. In 2008, he was awarded the Sir Abercrombie Prize of the International Union of Architecture.

What becomes clear from these impressive arrays of recognitions is that Peter’s work spanned disciplinary boundaries. He was as comfortable in political science and social psychology as he was in planning and geography. He could communicate his ideas in popular media as easily as he could do so in scholarly papers. His was a distinctive, incisive and visionary voice which was profoundly engaged with contemporary policy and practice. He published over 50 books and some 1200 articles. Among the earlier ones was his book *The World Cities* which was published in six languages simultaneously in 1966. Other prominent publications include *Cities in Civilization*, the *Great Planning Disasters*, and, one of my personal favourites, *Cities of Tomorrow* in which Peter combines his command of history with his knowledge of the present and his foresight into the future.

Behind all these accolades was a man admired and loved for his friendly approach, generosity of spirit, wonderful sense of humor, remarkable energy, unrivaled capacity for remembering historical details, and relentless intellectual curiosity.

The last time I saw Peter and his wife Magda was March 2014, only a few months before he passed away. I invited him to present the Thomas Sharp Public Lecture that is held every two years in Newcastle University. The conference hall was packed with audience eager to hear him. Despite his illness, Peter talked for over an hour, with his usual enthusiasm and

charisma, about his latest book on: *Good Cities, Better Lives: How Europe Discovered the Lost Art of Urbanism?*

He will be greatly missed by all who admired him as a scholar, were inspired by him as a teacher and mentor, and loved him as a colleague and friend.

Fig. 1 – Professor Sir Peter Hall presenting the Thomas Sharp Public Lecture at Newcastle University on 22 May 2014.

