

Review Essay

Sir Peter Geoffrey Hall

Cities in Civilization

Hard cover: New York: Pantheon Books, a Division of Random House and
London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998, Paperback: Fromm International, 2001

Reviewed by Eleanor D. Glor

This is a more ambitious book than most, both in terms of the amount of research done to support it and the scope of the issues it addresses in attempting to understand how and why innovation occurred where it did when it did. I first became aware of this large and interesting book in 1999, when I spoke at the Creative Cities Conference in Huddersfield, England. Huddersfield, near Manchester, was a town of the Industrial Revolution. Sir Peter Hall chaired the opening session, at which I also spoke. This book was discussed in tones of awe by the participants. As a Canadian, and a non-urbanist, I had not heard of it, and did not understand its importance until I was able to pick it up at the Harvard Bookstore (*America's Best Bookstore*) in the fall of 2002. The organizer of the Creative Cities conference, Phil Wood, a planner with the city of Huddersfield, proudly lives in a house owned by a progressive industrialist of the 1880s, who became mayor of Huddersfield. He is now a private consultant working full time on creative cities, with Charles Landry and Peter Hall, in a consulting firm they call Comedia.

The first Creative City Conference was held in Helsinki, Finland in 1996. The concept was subsequently explored and developed over three successive years at the Amsterdam-Maastricht Summer University. The 1999 event was the first Creative City event ever held in the UK, promoted jointly by COMEDIA and the Huddersfield Creative Town Initiative.

The location was significant. Huddersfield had been, over the previous three years, host to the Creative Town Initiative, one of a group of international Urban Pilot Projects selected by the European Commission to explore innovations in urban policy. One of the purposes of the Conference was to allow the opportunity for feedback on the findings and achievements of the project. Projects had been chosen to help cities and towns deal with the after-effects of the major economic shifts that occurred in the West beginning in the late 1970s, after the second oil shock, and marked politically with the election of Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom. Each of the areas, such as the Manchester area of England, the Ruhr Valley of Germany, and Helsinki, had been important actors in the western economy in their time, but had suffered major dislocation as industrial and commercial activity shifted to low-cost economies in the Far East, India, and Latin America. The focus in responding to these "adjustments" was to find creative solutions and industries to replace the lost jobs and industries.

Just as these western regions declined, communications technology growth was about to take off, due to the invention of the personal computer and the development of the Internet, based on semi-conductor technology and a series of inventions that made computers smaller, cheaper, more compatible, and linkable.

Cities in Civilization is about the Industrial Revolution and the information and communications technology revolution, the development of other golden ages in innovative milieus. These bursts of creativity caused their cities to become recognized as among the most important cities in the world. The innovations grew into transformational phenomena, and often fed periods of extraordinary economic growth. Hall examines twenty-one innovative cities through history. He divides them into four categories of innovation: culture, industry, the combination of art and technology, and the establishment of the urban order. He looks at the arts in ancient Athens, the Renaissance in Florence, theatre in Elizabethan London, two music milieus in Venice, art in Paris in the early 1900s, and theatre, film and other arts in Berlin during the Weimar Republic. For economic milieus he chose: the first industrial city, Manchester; shipbuilding in Glasgow; the first reliance on technology in Berlin; the automobile industry in Detroit; the informatics industry in *Silicon Valley*, California; and the role of the state in facilitating industrial innovation in Tokyo. He describes the marriage of art and technology to invent mass culture in movies in Hollywood and rock 'n roll music in the Mississippi Delta, both in the USA. Hall concludes by studying seven cities that played a key role in identifying and building the urban order as we know it today in the West: ancient Rome, London, Paris, New York, Los Angeles, Stockholm, and London.

Through each example, Hall explores the basic questions of innovation and development: how did this come about, and, why here? He examines not only the intentional actions that led to bursts of creativity and economic growth, but also the circumstances (or context) that allowed them to happen. Whether it was the availability of needed skills and labour, the presence of a dynamic social environment brought on by the destruction of the old social order, the influx of talented people who were not committed to the existing order, the access to capital due to the creation of wealth in pre-capitalist or capitalist environments, the ability to secure the needed physical resources, the creation of new technologies or mechanisms, the drawing power that the cities already had, or other factors, Hall succeeds above all in identifying the elements that came together to make creativity and growth possible.

I like this book. First, it explains in a coherent and an informed fashion, the Industrial Revolution, Silicon Valley, and the art world of Paris. Second, I learned some new things. New for me was the creativity of the Weimar Republic, and its proletarian theatre. It led me to take the opportunity to see *Metropolis* when it came to our Ottawa, Canada art theatre in February. I wish I had known of the magnet Berlin represented for the playwright as I watched Bertolt Brecht's plays. I also wished I had more opportunity to hear the music of Eastern Europe and see the plays of the Weimar Republic. Canada's emphasis on American and western European art forms (with the possible exception of Baroque music) became clear to me as I read this book. Also, I appreciated even more the importance of the music and theatre coming out of Winnipeg, which has a substantial population of people of eastern European heritage, and the opportunity presented by the leadership of Lawrence Ewashko in presenting eastern and central European music in Ottawa. Ewashko takes his musical roots from Vienna, where he studied and worked with the Vienna Boys' Choir, which still draws the young and talented to Vienna.

Third, and most interesting of all was Hall's attempt to come to grips with what caused bursts of creativity and innovation. He lists the types of factors outlined above—dynamic social environments, the presence of creative people, but also credits patterns such as the Marxist class conflict; Kondratieff's, Kuznet's and economic cycles'; and Schumpeter's creative destruction as

clearly being at work. In other words, he discusses both factors that can be introduced and factors that must be observed, endured, and to which innovators must pace their activity.

Hall's roots as a professor of urban and regional planning became more apparent as he moved from art, economic development and technology to examine the origins of the urban order and the innovations that made it possible. This material has a direct relationship to *Cities of Tomorrow*, 1988, one of Hall's thirty earlier books.

In an odd throw back, Peter Hall credits his wife Magda as co-author in the Acknowledgements, but not on the title page.

Of course it is tempting to treat the elements Peter and Magda Hall found in these cities as prescriptions for economic growth. In fact, some observers have done so. Richard Florida, a professor of economic development at Carnegie Mellon University (the university at which James Gosling, a Canadian, was a student when he developed Java, the software that allowed the Internet to become interactive), and author of *The Rise of the Creative Class* and Meric Gertler, chair of Canadian Studies, and professor of geography and planning at the University of Toronto, have done so. They published, for example, an article in *The Globe and Mail* newspaper on January 3, 2003 (p. A9), extolling the virtues of the presence of artistic communities and diverse populations derived from immigration in cities, as attractors for creative employees and thus engines of economic growth. They found a statistical relationship between artistic activity, which correlated with social diversity and high levels of human capital, and technology-intensive business. Their work both confirms the Halls' findings, and points to its practicality.

I was curious to compare the innovative cities identified by the Halls and those chosen by Arnold Toynbee (ed.) in *Cities of Destiny* (New York, Toronto: McGraw Hill, 1967). Toynbee selected eight (of seventeen) of the same cities. Toynbee included many more from now-developing countries. He chose them, however, for the same reason: Of Goethe's Weimar, for example, W. H. Bruford says, "The tiny city of Weimar...for about fifty years, it was a centre of extraordinary intellectual activity and was recognized by all of Europe as a unique spiritual force." (p. 88)

Creativity and innovation appear to have played key roles in the development of great cities as identified by both Hall and Toynbee. Hall identifies the public sector as partner in creating these great cities, and credits politicians and public servants for having found the solution to serious infrastructure, health and transportation problems. Sadly for those like myself who believe in planning, in the only two cases he outlines where innovators pre-built transportation facilities, instead of building them after the development had occurred, the companies went broke. Their choices were surpassed by newer technology: the electric train by the car in Los Angeles, the subway by the car in New York.