

BUSINESS DAY

Peter Hall, Who Devised the Enterprise Zone, Dies at 82

By WILLIAM YARDLEY AUG. 6, 2014

Peter Hall, a British planner widely credited with developing the concept of enterprise zones to spur growth by reducing taxes and regulations in blighted urban areas, died on July 30 in London. He was 82.

His death, at University College Hospital, was confirmed by University College London, where he was a professor in the school of planning.

Professor Hall, a student of cities large and small, was an innovative planner who favored expansion of rail service and the creation of “garden cities” — not suburbs but smaller cities, set amid small-scale agriculture, that he believed held particular promise.

But he was best known for proposing enterprise zones to help cities so awash in poverty and empty of industry that they needed drastic assistance. In his view, government needed to eliminate taxes and regulations that made businesses difficult to start or drove them elsewhere.

He was a socialist politically, but also a pragmatist. By the late 1970s he had begun working with officials close to the conservative prime minister, Margaret Thatcher, to create enterprise zones in several big cities in England. Appealing to small-government conservatives and liberals from stricken cities, the idea quickly crossed the Atlantic.

In 1980, United States Representatives Jack Kemp, a Republican from Buffalo, and Robert Garcia, a Democrat from the Bronx, sponsored a bill that would reduce taxes for small businesses that located in struggling neighborhoods and hired people who lived in them. Ronald Reagan embraced the notion in his campaign for president that year.

“Those who view poverty and unemployment as permanent afflictions of our cities fail to understand how rapidly the poor can move up the ladder of success in our economy,” Mr. Reagan said during the campaign. “But to move up the ladder, they must first get on it. And this is the concept behind the enterprise zones.”

Many states experimented with enterprise zones, but Congress did not approve the idea for years, despite the urgings of the Reagan administration and the editorial board of The New York Times, which declared, citing Professor Hall, that the zones “deserve a fair test.” Legislation was finally passed in 1993, renaming them “empowerment zones” and including social programs. President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, signed the bill into law.

Enterprise zones have had mixed success — they have not always created the jobs predicted — but politicians of various stripes continue to promote them. A recent Obama administration program in Kentucky has the support of Rand Paul, the conservative Republican senator considering a run for president.

Peter Geoffrey Hall was born on March 19, 1932, in London. His family moved to Blackpool, a resort town on the western coast, after his father, a clerk in the pension service, was transferred there. He received a master's degree from the University of Cambridge in 1957 and completed his doctorate there two years later.

Nearly half a century ago, with manufacturing declining and suburbs rising, he described the direction he believed urban life would eventually take: clusters of creative professionals dwelling among and reshaping the remnants of an industrial past.

“All these people live only on their ideas,” he wrote in “The World Cities” in 1966. “The central business district therefore can be seen as a specialized machine for producing, processing and trading specialized intelligence. And the ideas industry is growing many times faster than industry as a whole.”

Professor Hall wrote several dozen books, including the forward-looking “London 2000,” published in 1963, and “Cities in Civilization: Culture, Technology and Urban Order,” in 1998.

His ideas for good planning and how it should be carried out evolved over his long career. Early on, he favored government control and no shortage of demolition to make way for highways, rail and other projects. He later came to believe that a blend of government oversight and private investment was the better course.

Professor Hall also taught at the University of Reading, the London School of Economics and the University of California, Berkeley. In 2003 he was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II for being what she called a “pioneer in the life of the nation.”

Although Mrs. Thatcher embraced several of Professor Hall's ideas — Canary Wharf, which has become one of London's major financial centers, had been one of his enterprise zones — he was not immune to her efforts to reduce government. He was a member of the South East Economic Planning Council until 1979, the year she shut it down.

A version of this article appears in print on August 9, 2014, on page B8 of the New York edition with the headline: Peter Hall, Who Devised the Enterprise Zone, Dies at 82.