

Urban Geography. By Tim Hall. London: Routledge, 2007. 216 pages. £18.99 (Paperback)

Tim Hall's *Urban Geography* forms part of the Routledge Contemporary Human Geography Series. This series is designed for students new to human geography, with each book comprising an introduction to a sub-discipline of the broad field of human geography. This is ambitious, considering that urban geography is a large and diverse field in its own right: yet *Urban Geography* is a helpful introduction to this area. It should be noted at the outset that *Urban Geography* focuses on the western, capitalist city, with strong emphasis on the urban as it is found in the UK and North America. The reader must look elsewhere for accounts of urbanisation in other parts of the world and in other types of cities.

The opening chapter of *Urban Geography* is relatively traditional as it begins by calling attention to the importance of urban geography. It does so not by invoking rapid urbanisation of the world, but by highlighting the relevance of urban geography to the lives of many, and the potential of urban geography in solving problems of social inequality, a topic which emerges again in later chapters.

Together, the second and third chapters provide a foundation for the topics covered subsequently in the book. Here, Hall discusses the dynamism characteristic of cities themselves and the changes in approach to urban geography that have come about in the twentieth century. With regard to the dynamic character of cities, the author cautions against interpreting the changes evident in some cities as indication of a definitive shift in the form of 'the city'. Only time will tell, it seems, whether such a shift has occurred: for now, we must content ourselves that changes are indeed occurring. In the third chapter, Hall takes the reader on a swift tour through the shifts in approach to urban geography. Positivist, behavioural, humanist, structuralist, neo-Marxist and sociological approaches are described briefly. However, it is possible that the reader is missing important aspects of the evolution of urban geography, such as a more explicit description of earlier approaches, for example, those of the Chicago School or central place theorists. The reader is required to follow up on the suggested reading to gain a more full understanding of the history of approaches to urban geography. Contemporary approaches to urban geography or 'the city' are described in terms often associated with a postmodern perspective, such as "lack of any single philosophical hegemony" (p.34) and a "cynicism of grand theory" (p.34), although the term postmodernism itself is not employed at this point. There is a hesitance in this section of the book to make any claims about whether the changes we can witness in some cities represents a fundamental shift in urban form, and likewise, there is a reluctance to recommend any particular theoretical framework for contemporary urban geography. As such, readers are free to come to their own conclusions on these matters.

With chapters four to six, Hall introduces some of the main processes influencing the geography of cities. These include the operations of world economy, including deindustrialisation and the emergence of new industrial spaces; urban policy, focused

here on processes of urban regeneration; and finally place marketing. In introducing the relationship between cities and their economic context, Hall is careful to highlight that although cities are influenced by the global economy, they do not assume a passive role in this relationship. However, the local-based processes of regeneration and place marketing described in chapters five and six seem to be mainly reactive to wider processes such as economic restructuring. Regeneration is described here as “intended to ameliorate against the negative consequences of urban decline” (p.57), and the discussion of place image and place marketing emphasises the tailoring of the product (the city) to the requirements of potential investors, consumers and users. While Hall convinces us that the city is not passive in the relationship with a global economy, local-based processes of urbanisation seem to be very much influenced by processes operating at a more global scale. *Urban Geography* successfully conveys that contemporary urbanisation is entwined with globalisation processes.

The final chapters introduce the physical, socio-economic and environmental effects of contemporary urbanisation on the emerging geographies of cities. Hall examines elements of this ‘postmodernisation’ of urban form which are becoming manifest in the city, from the centre to the suburbs and beyond. Forms and issues considered include changes in urban governance, fortress landscapes, gentrification, and flagship and post-suburban developments. Crucially, Hall acknowledges that the process of change is uneven, varying between and even within cities (p.127). Perhaps this variation is the source of his reluctance to declare that a fundamental shift has occurred in the geography of cities.

In the eighth chapter, the reader is brought again to issues of inequality, which reminds us that despite the success and change heralded and even evident in many cities, there is often another side to such stories. The success of regeneration projects is not felt evenly and many urban residents are in a more vulnerable situation than ever before. Some of the socio-economic issues introduced here include displacement and the changing nature of work. This is probably one of the most significant chapters in the book (in this reader’s opinion) particularly considering how in the opening chapter Hall claims an important role for urban geography in helping to resolve inequality. Perhaps this chapter could be strengthened with more qualitative and personal case studies detailing the inequalities manifest in the daily reality of cities, which might help illustrate the message of this chapter.

Hall continues the discussion of the negative aspects of contemporary urbanisation, as urban problems are not limited to some cities or some sectors of society, but may indeed affect us all: urban sustainability is now on the agenda. This topic of sustainable urban development is introduced quite well here, and the chapter incorporates key concepts such as the ecological footprint, and key debates, such as those centring on issues of sustainable urban form, and the compatibility of urbanisation and development with environmental sustainability.

Urban Geography concludes with an appeal to the reader to engage with urban geography in everyday life, in the classroom by being critical of what is read, and ultimately by *doing* urban geography. Hall encourages the reader to undertake a dissertation or independent study in urban geography, and suggests resources to aid the reader in this endeavour.

This book provides a good overview of concepts and issues in (mainly contemporary) urban geography. Complex topics, such as economic restructuring and urban regeneration, are explained in simple terms. This may be one of the major shortcomings of the book for there does not seem to be scope to explore issues such as this in more detail, and the explanations offered are likely to appear overly simplistic to a more advanced reader. The recommendations for further reading help compensate for this, though perhaps in the next edition, these suggestions may also point the reader to resources on topics beyond the scope of this book, such as cities in the developing world, or post-socialist cities etc.

Yet *Urban Geography* is primarily intended for novice students of the field, and the central value of the book lies in how suitable it is for this purpose. This is a highly accessible textbook. Physically, it is a compact and unimposing starting point for the novice. Each chapter opens by introducing the five key ideas introduced in that chapter. Project ideas and discussion topics crop up frequently, requiring the student to consider the concepts introduced in this book in relation to a city with which they themselves are familiar. This combined with the annotated suggestions for further reading, sample essay titles and encouragement to conduct geographical research, makes *Urban Geography* a constructive resource for the budding urban geographer. *Urban Geography* does what it sets out to do: It is a good basic introduction to urban geography, which probably should be read by all new students to the discipline – due to its format and approach as much as content.

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