Topics in Environmental Studies
Introduction to Urban Political Ecology Theory and Method

Professor Anne Rademacher
Office Hours: By appointment

In the era of climate change, few aspirations hold the global promise, and political traction, of urban resilience. Concepts like resilience, sustainability, and the relative 'green' qualities of a city may be defined and measured through a host of metrics, but their actual lived practice often proves somewhat more elusive. This field- and reading-intensive seminar will draw from theories, methods, and research techniques associated with political ecology to consider how contests over environmental knowledge, sociocultural ideology, and discourse shape human engagement with urban nature. After laying the theoretical groundwork for political ecological inquiry, the course turns to methodological techniques and research approaches designed to illuminate these dimensions of urban environmental change. Our “classroom” is the city itself, and specific sites that have come to be associated with ecological resilience in New York City.

Course Requirements

This is a reading intensive, fieldwork-based, participatory seminar. We will spend considerable time outside the classroom, undertaking political ecological fieldwork. In order to do well in the course, you must attend every class session, and come prepared to contribute to the discussion or field exercise. All readings should be completed before the class meeting for which they are assigned; be prepared for unscheduled quizzes on reading content at any time.

You are also required to complete and present four short précis papers (Sept. 21, Oct. 5, Oct. 26, and Nov. 16) and one full-length research report. Students will use their précis papers as a basis for guiding a discussion of course material wherever the syllabus indicates a ‘led discussion.’

Field trips are an essential part of the course; please plan your schedule accordingly, in advance. Whenever possible, travel time to and from a given field site will be calculated so that you are able to reach class in the allotted timeframe. You will be
asked to use public transport to reach these sites, so please speak with me directly if this presents any difficulty.

Your final grade will be computed based on the following distribution:

Attendance and participation: 30%*
Four précis papers: 30%
Final Research Report: 40%

*Attendance is mandatory; participation will be assessed based on a students’ active verbal and written engagement in class sessions. We will discuss this at our first class session. “Participation” includes your performance on periodic quizzes and field assignments.

**Required Readings, available at NYU Bookstore**


- All other required reading will be provided through the Resources section of our Classes website.

In addition: please designate a sturdy, paper field notebook for this course. This notebook is for use on all field trips. We will take field notes in the traditional fashion in order to avoid distracting guest guides, speakers, or interviewees.

*This notebook may be collected and reviewed by the professor at any time, and its contents are considered part of your participation for the course.*

**Honor Code**

All written work in this course must be original and composed exclusively by you, the author. You must acknowledge in writing any assistance you receive from the literature, other students, textbooks, internet, or any other source. Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be immediately referred to the Dean’s office.

**Disability Disclosure Statement**

Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing.
Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980.

NYU's Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities
726 Broadway, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10003-6675
Telephone: 212-998-4980
Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114
Web site: http://www.nyu.edu/csd

Course Schedule

Week One (Sept 7): Course Introduction: Seeing vs. Observing Urban Nature

*We will meet at Minetta Street and Sixth Avenue (just across from Father Demo Square) at 2:15pm sharp. Bring your field notebook.

https://www.nycgovparks.org/parks/minetta-green/history

Use the Welikia Project map (https://welikia.org/explore/mannahatta-map/), the ZOLA map (http://maps.nyc.gov/doitt/nycitymap/template?applicationName=ZOLA) and the OASIS map (http://www.oasisnyc.net/map.aspx) to find the area that is today the Minetta Green.


Week Two (Sept 14): What is Urban Political Ecology?
*Class meets in the classroom for the first half. We will go on a field visit for the second half of our session.


https://www.newyorktour1.com/blog/untold-nyc-history-washington-square-park/
http://untappedcities.com/2012/03/16/hidden-history-of-washington-square-park/

Week Three (Sept 21): How does urban change take place? Structure, Function, Agency, and Scale
*Meet in the classroom. Your first précis (on LaFarge) is due; be prepared for a period of student-led discussion.


Finish LaFarge

https://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/25/nyregion/in-chelsea-a-great-wealth-divide.html?_r=1

Week Four (Sept 28): Ways of Knowing: Environmental Knowledge and Power / How do we know what we think we know?
*Class meets at the High Line.


Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw. Chapters One and Two.

Bollsdorf at al. Chapter 3 "Ten Myths about Ethnography."
Week Five (Oct 5): Integrating Biophysical and Social Assessment in Urban Political Ecology
*Class meets at the High Line. Your second précis paper (on the first three readings listed below) is due.


Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw. Chapters Three and Four.


Week Six (Oct 12): Techniques of Research for Urban Political Ecology: Google is not research
*Meet in the Classroom.

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw. Chapters 5 & 6.

Chapter 5: Conceptualization, Operationalization, and Measurement
Chapter 7: Indexes, Scales, Typologies
Chapter 8: The Logic of Sampling
Chapter 10: Survey Research

Read: Ethics and Guidelines for Social Research


Week Seven (Oct 19): Urban Ecology Research Design: the formal site
Week Eight (Oct 26): Refining Research Questions and Approaches
*Meet in the classroom. Your third précis paper is due (on the first three articles below) and be prepared for a student-led session.


Week Nine (Nov 2): Epistemologies and Politics of Urban Ecological Resilience
*Meet at Battery Park for Billion Oyster Project Restoration Station monitoring.


100 resilient cities: what is the framework and how would you critique it? How would you measure resilience?
http://www.100resilientcities.org/100RC-FAQ/#/-/
Week Ten (Nov 9):
*Meet in the classroom.

Finish Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw.


Week Eleven (Nov 16):
*Meet at the High Line. Your fourth précis paper (on David & Hammond) is due.


Week Twelve (Nov 23): Thanksgiving Break

Week Thirteen (Nov 30) Field work: No class meeting
Field research and professor consultations in small groups

Week Fourteen (Dec 7) Full and final presentations

Week Fifteen (Dec 14) Full and final presentations

Your full, final research paper is due by noon on December 14.