ES 450 & ANTH 321
Urban Planet: Sustainable Cities in Global Context

Course Overview

Enacting urban sustainability is one of our most pressing environmental challenges. And yet, we are still learning what urban sustainability means, at various scales, in different places, and from different social positions. In this course, we take an anthropological approach to urban sustainability: we ask how it is experienced, and how it is made meaningful, from a range of locations and perspectives. We will consider: what constitutes sustainability in a city? What behaviors and practices are sustainable and why? How are scientific ideas about sustainable environments translated into everyday life in cities, and who stands to lose and gain as transitions to sustainability are planned and implemented?

Course Objectives

- Apply an anthropological approach to the analysis of sustainability
- Understand how cities are produced and transformed through sociocultural, political, and ecological processes
- Understand the importance of social scales and geographic context for analyzing sustainability
- Understand how social and ecological scales interact in cities
- Trace the development of theoretical interests in cities and sustainability, and critically evaluate key theoretical approaches

Assignments

1. Attendance and Active Class Participation (15%)
2. Reading group work: posts, facilitation, full and active participation (20%)
3. Midterm Examination (25%)
4. Film response April 21 essay (10%)
5. Final Paper (30% evaluated in stages)

Class Format: Seminar

We meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Attendance and participation are mandatory for all sessions. This will ensure that you get the most out of the lecture content and the readings. All class content will be clarified through guided and informal discussion, and course participants will take turns leading discussion. We will also use class time to explore data, to develop research skills, and to learn from one another.

Course Commitments

- Mutual respect: careful listening and active discussion with everyone in the class. We’re in this together, and we all have things to learn and things to teach.
- Careful and thorough engagement with course materials is the only way to get the most out of the class.
- Clear communication regarding unavoidable absences or incomplete work: If anything (e.g., religious observance, family duties, illness) hinders your participation in this course, please speak with me in advance of a necessary absence.
- Unexcused absences adversely affect your grade. This is in fairness to your colleagues.
- Give credit where credit is due: plagiarism is a serious offense. We check all work to be sure it is original and your own. It’s not worth the risk.
- No electronic devices (cell phones or laptops) should be used in class unless you are giving a presentation.
- No food is permitted in class unless you are sharing it with everyone.
- Please be patient with e-mail. I try to respond to class e-mail within 24 hours, but this cannot always be guaranteed. My response time will be slower on weekends and may sometimes exceed 24 hours. Your best bet: speak to me directly before, or just after, a class meeting. Plan ahead so that you can avoid email as a medium for dealing with questions that require immediate attention or detailed conversation.
Major Due Dates

- Midterm Exam: March 24
- Final Presentations Begin: April 28
- Final Paper: May 11

Please note that to assure fairness in grading, late assignments are never accepted.

Honor Code and Abilities

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 published or unpublished literature, other students, textbooks, the internet, or any other source. Plagiarism is a serious offense and will be immediately referred to the Dean’s office.

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
Assignments

Readings

All readings are available through Classes, Bobst Library, and the NYU Bookstore. You are required to read assigned texts before class, by the day they are listed on the syllabus. The Classes site will be the most updated resource for weekly readings, assignments, and other materials. The book in this syllabus, Rademacher's *Building Green*, is available as an open access (free) publication.

Reading Groups, Class Facilitation, and Participation

Each of you is assigned to a reading group with a set of other classmates. This group will form a core aspect of your engagement with, and participation in, the class; it will help create an intellectual esprit de corps among the group as a whole. You are encouraged to meet face-to-face with each other once a week for at least 30 minutes to discuss class readings and then craft a collective short response to one of the readings chosen from those labeled [RG] on the syllabus. You will then write a brief discussion board post about this reading – available to the entire class – that addresses the following:

1. What is the author's core argument, and why does this argument matter?
2. What forms of evidence does the author use to substantiate this argument?
3. What forms of evidence are missing? What questions does this argument raise?
4. How can you connect this reading to another core reading for the course and why is this connection significant?

Most weeks involve a Reading Group post. Reading Group weeks are indicated on the syllabus with numbered brackets, e.g. [RG 1, 2, 3]. Reading Group work, reflected in required posts, facilitation, and in a brief peer-evaluation of the group at the end of the semester, are worth 20% of your grade. Posts will be graded on a check +, check, check - scale, along with narrative feedback when applicable. Each of these checks are roughly equivalent to the grades of A (95), B (85), and C (75). These will be turned into a scaled 100-point final grade for this portion of the class at the end of the semester, taking into consideration overall performance, progression, and group dynamics.

Your end of semester peer evaluation will be graded on a complete/incomplete basis.

During the term, your reading group will also be tasked with facilitating one class session. Your job will be to engage your fellow students in the material and to connect your specific Reading Group text with the other readings and themes of the course/session. How you choose to meet these two goals is up to you. For the session your group facilitates, you are required to turn in an individual 500-word essay after the class session. This should reflect on how you and your other Reading Group members handled the facilitation. The remaining part of this assignment is simply the challenge of being a respectful and thoughtful peer, class participant, and intellectual in the context of this course and related co-curricular activities. This includes reading thoroughly, being a good listener, showing up on time, and the like. This aspect of the class, "attendance and active participation," is worth 15% of your final grade and will be assigned by the professor based on a 100-point scale.

Exam

A midterm will be given in class on March 24. It will consist of identification/definitions, short answers, and essays. Questions for the midterm will draw from readings, lectures, and films covering material from the first half of the course.

Research Paper

Early in the semester, you will choose a case study city, and an urban sustainability question to investigate. Throughout the semester, you will prepare and present updates on the progress of your research. By the end of the semester, you will complete a full research paper (due May 11) and accompanying presentation (must be prepared by April 28). These projects will give all students in the class an opportunity to consider how urban sustainability changes across scales, contexts, and geographic locations.
**Weekly Schedule**

### Jan 28 & 30: Scale and History in the Urban Age / Is the planet urban?


*Watch:*


[https://www.thenatureofcities.com/2013/03/27/urban-sustainability-and-resilience-why-we-need-to-focus-on-scales/](https://www.thenatureofcities.com/2013/03/27/urban-sustainability-and-resilience-why-we-need-to-focus-on-scales/)

### Feb 4: What is a City? {RG}

Williams, Raymond. Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society. *(Available for online reading via Bobst Library.)* Read the entries for: Capitalism, City, Community, Culture, Ecology, Empirical, Nature, Positivist, Science, + 3 of your choice.


### Feb 6: Film Viewing: Death by Design

The class will meet at Avery Fisher for the viewing. If the film exceeds class time, it’s available at AF for full viewing.

### Feb 11: How is a city an ecosystem?


Pickett et. al. "Ecological Science and Transformation to the Sustainable City."

### Feb 13: Sustainability and Urban Circuits of Production


### Feb 18: The Problem of Cities/Problematizing Urban Sustainability in the 21st century {RG}

[https://maptia.com/michaelbuckley/stories/stealing-tibet-s-rivers](https://maptia.com/michaelbuckley/stories/stealing-tibet-s-rivers)


Feb 20: Theorizing the City since the 19th century
*By today, identify your case study city, topic, and justification. Next week you will present these to the class.*


Feb 25: Cities in Global Context
*Today you will present your case study city, problem, and justification to the class. Prepare 1-3 paragraphs to submit.*


Feb 27: Researching the sustainable city

This session is devoted to learning key research tools for your independent research project. **We will meet in Bobst Library; bring your research topic and questions and come prepared to do active research.**

March 3: Going Green as Politics  *READING GROUP B FACILITATES CLASS TODAY.*


March 5: Preliminary Paper Presentations
*Today you will present a first stage presentation on your research project. Prepare an abstract, statement of your research question, and a preliminary literature review (8 scholarly sources, annotated).*

March 10: Parks, Open Spaces, and City Forests {RG}  *READING GROUP A FACILITATES CLASS TODAY*

Wolch et al. “Urban Green Space, Public Health, and Environmental Justice”

**Recommended:** Escobedo, et al. “Analyzing the cost effectiveness of Santiago, Chile’s policy of using urban forests to improve air quality”

**March 24: Midterm Exam**

**March 26: Nutrient Loops, Waste, and Inequality {RG}** *READING GROUP C Facilitates Class Today*

Vinay Gidwani; Bharati Chaturvedi *Poverty as geography: Motility, stoppage and circuits of waste in Delhi*. *Urban Navigations: Politics, Space and the City in South Asia*. 2013:50-78.


**March 31: Food in the Sustainable City {RG} ** *READING GROUP D Facilitates Class Today*


**April 2: Enacting Sustainability through Design {RG}**

Rademacher 2017 *Building Green*, first third

**April 7: Enacting Sustainability through Design**

Rademacher 2017 *Building Green*, second third

**April 9: Enacting Sustainability through Design {RG}**

Rademacher 2017 *Building Green*, finish

**April 14: Green City-making and Making City Space {RG}**


Toland, A. 2017. Hong Kong’s Artificial Anti-Archipelago and the Unnaturing of the Natural. In *Places of Nature in Ecologies of Urbanism* (Rademacher and Sivaramakrishnan, eds. Hong Kong University Press,Pp 87-107
April 16: Disaster, Vulnerability, Resilience, Climate Change

Cutter et al. “The Long Road Home: Race, Class, and Recovery after Hurricane Katrina”

Hallegatte, et al. “Future flood losses in major coastal cities”

Adger, et al. “Are there social limits to adaptation to climate change?”

April 21: Class will not meet. On your own, and compose a 1-2 page response essay to this film
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pf0VlhGul4A&ab_channel=BestDocumentary

April 23: Future Cities {RG}


April 28, 30 and May 5: final research presentations. Final Papers are due on May 11.