Globalizing Social Activism: Sustainable Development in Urban Areas

(ENVST-UA 9417-001/SCA-UA 9617-001/UPADM-GP 9217-001)

Autumn semester 2016, Mondays, 1:00 to 4:00 pm.

NYU-DC classroom (to be determined) or Washington, DC field trips

Prerequisites

N/A

Class Description

Whether pulled by opportunity or pushed by conflict or climate change, by 2050 over 70% of the global population will live in and adjacent to cities. In acknowledging the urgent demands of our urban present and future, this course (1) examines the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of contemporary cities; (2) makes the case for sustainable urban development -- focusing on considerations of social equity and activism -- as a way to mitigate the impacts of population growth, globalization, social exclusion, and the effects of climate change. We will explore what is, and what could be, by discussing many themes, including: urban spatial planning, power, urban environmental activism, housing, slums and slum typology, urban policing, urban economies, urban food systems, new paradigms for energy/water/waste infrastructure, and green building. We will consider how to measure sustainability and discuss the effectiveness of sustainability indicators. We will examine examples of social entrepreneurship and the power of information technology and social networks in political enfranchisement and the diffusion of ideas. We will also highlight the role of art and culture as a pivot for activism and change.

Desired Outcomes

• To describe the impact of cities on their regional ecologies and the global ecology;
• To understand the role of activism and power in urban sustainability and sustainable urban design;
• To be able to apply this understanding to the development of solutions to real-world urban social, environmental, and economic problems;
• To be able to quantify or measure progress towards solutions.
Assessment Components and Expectations

Your grade depends on the following:

- Class participation: 20%
- Assignments: 40% total for essays and/or other short assignments (four total)
- Mid term examination: 20%
- Final collaborative project presentation and report: 20%

Failure to complete or submit any of these required components results in failure in the class.

Grade A: The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in his/her work. The student writes comprehensive essays / exam questions and his/her work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.

Grade B: The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.

Grade C: The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need of improvement.

Grade D: The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

Grade F: The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.

Grade Conversion

NYU Washington, DC uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93-90</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>89-87</td>
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<tr>
<td>86-84</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>83-80</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<td>79-77</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<td>76-74</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>73-70</td>
<td>C-</td>
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<tr>
<td>69-67</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<tr>
<td>65-66</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 65</td>
<td>F</td>
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Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. **To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students’ semester grades.** Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure. At all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must email or discuss with the Academic Program Coordinator in advance of their missed class. For an excused absence, students must produce a doctor’s note dated with the exact dates of the missed class and/or exam.

Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Academic Program Coordinator prior to the date(s) in question, who will communicate the absence to all relevant faculty members. If faculty members do receive notification, the student has not procured an excused absence.

Students observing a religious holiday during regularly scheduled class time are entitled to miss class without any penalty to their grade. This is for the holiday only and does not include the days of travel that may come before and/or after the holiday. Students must notify their professor and the Office of Academic Support in writing via email at least one week in advance before being absent for this purpose.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks), to be attentive, and to remain for the duration of the class. If full class attendance and participation becomes a problem, it is the prerogative of each instructor to apply the rule for unexcused absences, which may include a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should initiate email and/or office hour discussions to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.
(1) Any written work due should be submitted before the beginning of the class session by email, in modifiable MS Word format or equivalent, as an attachment sent to vk37@nyu.edu. Please use this naming convention for your work: yourname_essaynumber_date.

2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed. (If the assignment must be submitted in person, the Academic Program Coordinator can collect on behalf of the faculty between the hours of 9–5, M–F.)

3) Late work will be reduced for a fraction of a letter grade (e.g., A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for every day it is late, including weekends.

4) Written work during the semester that is submitted 5 days after the submission date (including weekends) without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

5) Students who arrive to class late for an exam do not have automatic approval to take extra time to complete the exam.

6) Students who miss an exam (including the final) without previously arranged permission will receive a zero on that exam.

7) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.

Accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website [http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html](http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.
As the University's policy on "Academic Integrity for Students at NYU" states: "At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others."

**Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.**

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images, or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

NYU Washington, DC takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

- [http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html](http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html)
- [http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity](http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity)
- [http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity](http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity)
Required Texts
Most readings will be available online or in PDF format as posted to our NYU Classes site. Please note that required readings, though they may seem numerous, are often only a few pages in length, or else a blog entry. For learning about urban sustainability, we will consult this text, available online through this NYU library hyperlink: The Sustainable Urban Development Reader, 3rd edition (Routledge, 2014), edited by Stephen Wheeler and Timothy Beatley. It is also available in hard copy in the NYU reading room. For further investigation, I have included recommended readings for each topic.

Other Resources
Urban blogs of interest include two from Atlantic CityLab (http://www.citylab.com and http://www.citylab.com/cityfixer/) and New Geography. London’s Guardian newspaper has published an interactive of best city blogs around the world; see this link.

Internet Research Guidelines
Open source internet research resources, while helpful, are not entirely reliable; this includes sources such as Wikipedia. Quotes or attributions from these sources will result in a reduced grade on written work.

Additional Required Supplies
We’ll conduct field visits during the semester. Please purchase a small notebook or sketchbook for taking notes and/or sketching during class field trips. We will engage in occasional diagramming exercises. Blick Art Supply, a good source, is a few blocks away, near 13th and I Streets, NW.

Session 1
Introduction. What is a city? What are the social, political, and environmental consequences of an urbanized world? How can cities respond to the pace of urbanization? What are the forms of social and environmental activism? What does sustainable development include, and what does urban sustainability look like in reality? Introduction to such terms and concepts as: “green”/participatory governance; urban resilience; adaptive design; biophilic design; whole systems thinking/integrated planning; climate security; global cities; the triple bottom line; measurement and rating systems; sustainability indicators.

Introductory readings:
• Lewis Mumford, “What Is A City?” (1937), 4-page excerpt posted to Classes.
• Walter Benjamin, “Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (1939), posted to Classes.

NO CLASS SEPTEMBER 5 – Labor Day.

1 The order of sessions is subject to change. Expect the addition of field trips during class sessions.
The urban plan as power -- how it determines social engagement, interactions, and human and environmental health. How people “produce” urban space. The vocabulary and concepts of urban planning. “Classic” urban planning/regulations vs. activist, sustainable paradigms. Scale and density. Place-making. Transitions and the urban edge. The planned (zoning) and unplanned.

Required readings:

- Jan Gehl and Brigitte Svaere, Chapter 3 (pp. 21-35) and pp. 106-7 from How to Study Public Life (2013), posted to Classes.
- Project for Public Spaces, “Eleven Principles for Creating Great Community Places,” and “The Origin of the Power of Ten.”
Power. Who makes decisions? Participatory governance, government regulation, the private sector, the informal sector, corporatization, social exclusion and activism.

Discussion of class project.

Required readings:

- Henri LeFebvre OR David Harvey (TBD), *The Right to the City*, excerpts as posted to Classes.
- Project for Public Spaces, “Toward Place Governance: What If We Reinvented Civic Infrastructure Around Placemaking?”
- The Architect’s Newspaper, August 12, 2016, “In quest for street success, Detroit invites architects and planners to tear down zoning red tape.”
**Housing and activism.** Top-down and ground-up examples of global housing design in cities. Owning, renting, squatting, displacement, affordability, exclusion, gentrification, and homelessness: how do these phenomena shape urban space?

**Required readings:**

- Atlantic CityLab, *“With London’s Affordability Crisis, a New Breed of Activism,”* March 27, 2015.
- Matthew Desmond, *“Unaffordable America: Poverty, housing, and eviction,”* March 2015.
- Ta-Nehisi Coates, *“The Case for Reparations,”* The Atlantic Magazine, June 2014.
- The Observer, September 13, 2015, *“Modernism in Britain: did it stand the test of time? Britain’s postwar estates fell rapidly from grace, yet for many today they are much-loved homes. Douglas Murphy looks back at an architectural utopian dream.”*
- Readings on homelessness TBD.

**NO CLASS OCTOBER 3 -- FALL BREAK.**
Session 5  
Monday, October 10

**Mobility and access.** Transport systems as barrier makers and breakers. 
Case studies: Curitiba, Brazil; Medellin, Colombia; Washington, DC; Copenhagen; London; Singapore.

**Required readings:**

- For background, read section on Transportation in *The Sustainable Urban Development Reader*, pp.151-78, and
- Jorge Madrid, “*Medellin’s Amazing Metro System: Colombia Uses Public Transport To Drive Societal Change*”
- “*A Departure From Decades of Highway Policy: Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx is urging communities to think more carefully about where they build roads*,” *The Atlantic*, March 29, 2016.

Session 6  
Monday, October 17

**Urban metabolism.** The limits of conventional infrastructure (as “resource delivery”). New water/stormwater and energy paradigms (shared energy production systems, low impact development, microutilities, EcoDistricts and cooperative scale.

**Required readings:**

- For an understanding of how “conventional” infrastructure works, peruse Kate Ascher, *The Works*, "Power" (pp. 92 - 123) and "Keeping it Clean" (pp. 152-203). This is mostly a picture book. Excerpts posted to Classes.
- Herbert Giraudet, “*The Metabolism of Cities,*” *The Sustainable Urban Development Reader*, pp. 197-204.
- Review the website of “*Brixton [London] Energy: Power to, for and by the people!*”
Mid-term examination.

Session 7  
Monday, October 24


Required readings:
- Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (Verso, 2006), excerpts posted to Classes.
- Janice Perlman, *Favela* (Oxford, 2010), excerpts posted to Classes.

Session 8  
Monday, October 31

Food access and activism. Urban food systems and agriculture. Field trip.

Required readings:
- City of Detroit, Urban Agriculture Ordinance, April 2013, as posted.
- Food Metres entry on Nairobi.

Session 9  
Monday, November 7


Required readings:
- See the Atlantic CityLab’s blog post on Bangalore trash management.
- Chintan, New Delhi, India, on Scavengers to Managers.
**Session 11**  
Monday, November 21

**Voice and identity.** The role of art and cultural activism in constructing civic identity and in urban regeneration. Theaster Gates; public art; urban events and spectacles; art as an economic generator; global hip-hop and other cultural movements. Case studies.

**Required readings:**


**Session 12**  
Monday, November 28

“Best practice” cities: do they succeed in human and ecological terms? Ecocities, sustainability plans, contested examples, failures.

**Required readings:**

- New York City: skim *PlaNYC 2014 progress update*
- Read the Table of Contents and the Executive Summary of New York City’s *One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City* (2014), on Classes.
- Timothy Beatley, ed., *Green Cities of Europe* (Island Press, 2012), Chapters 1, 3 (Freiburg), 4 (Copenhagen), 8 (London).
- Review the website on London’s BedZed

**Session 13**  
Friday, December 2

**Urban resilience.** Design solutions for sea-level rise and coastal communities. **In-class film.**

**Required readings:**

- The Sustainable Urban Development Reader, pp. 309-36 (section entitled *Green Architecture and Building*); pp. 497-510 (section entitled *Urban Sustainability at the Building and Site Scale*); pp. 511-30 (section entitled *Urban Sustainability at the Neighborhood or District Scale*).
- Storm surge barrier designs for NYC [here](#) and [here](#)
- Douglas Farr’s Sustainable Urbanism (pdf’ed excerpts on NYU Classes), part of Chapter 7, “Sustainable Neighborhoods,” pp. 125-136. See the [NYC microhousing competition winner](#) and [post-disaster housing prototype](#)
- Access the Make It Right foundation [website](#) and read the description of process, homeowner eligibility, and review the designs of homes themselves.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session 14</th>
<th>Monday, December 5</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative work on final presentation. Vicky will spend review time with each presentation group. If possible, we’ll do a preliminary run-of-show (presentations do not have to be complete).</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Presentation</th>
<th>Monday, December 12</th>
<th>1 – 3 pm</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guest reviewers TBD. Venue will likely be the NYU auditorium.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Etiquette</th>
<th>Attention, engagement, respect.</th>
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<tr>
<th>Your Instructor</th>
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