This course examines innovations and movements to make cities sustainable and resilient places to live and work in the face of an array of challenges of environmental and climate risk, sprawl, and inequality. We draw from emerging models of “sustainable communities,” “resilient communities,” “healthy communities,” and “just communities.” We examine cities around the world, from New York and Los Angeles to Rio de Janeiro and Kathmandu, although the main emphasis will be the U.S.

Our analyses are rooted in the dynamics of power and conflict within “urban regimes” and “growth machines,” as well as emerging processes of collaboration, trust building, and hope among engaged residents, civic associations, environmental groups, nonprofits, professional associations, unions, public agencies, local businesses, and many other kinds of urban institutions (universities, school systems, museums, libraries, zoos). We draw broadly from the disciplines of sociology, political science, urban anthropology, urban and environmental studies, as well as related disciplines, such as policy, planning, public administration, architecture, and management.

Course Requirements

The class will be conducted largely as a seminar, to the extent that class size permits. Students are expected to do all readings before each session and to participate actively in discussions. “Further readings” are not required, but provided for further study or research, should you so choose.

There will be TWO (2) writing assignments, in addition to periodic class presentations. All essays should be double-spaced, paginated, stapled, 12-point font (Times New Roman or similar).

1. **Midterm essays** (10 pages), **due March 2** (40% of grade), based on lectures, presentations, and class discussions.

2. **Final essays** (10 pages), **due April 27 in class** (40% of grade). Final essays are based on course readings, lectures, and class discussions. Students may substitute research papers, service learning option (see below) for part or all of these final essays, contingent upon explicit agreement with professor. Research papers can be linked to presentations and draw upon further readings. Thus, someone might want to do a final paper on urban agriculture in more depth than we do in class, or focus in more depth on a particular city’s various sustainability strategies.

3. **Oral communication, case study presentations** (20% of grade): We will place much emphasis on the case study method in class, and students will be expected to present at least one case study from the readings (and/or from their own research). These case study presentations can also be done in teams. PowerPoint or Prezi format is recommended. See case study presentation guide at end of syllabus (below).
Service Learning: students have the option of combining the usual reading, research, and writing with internships and other forms of active civic engagement. Students must work out a specific agreement on community engagement and course writing with Prof. Sirianni in order for this work to count as part of the grade for Soc 147a. Students can also use this course to help survey and decide upon summer internships.

ABSOLUTELY NO USE OF LAPTOPS OR CELL PHONES DURING CLASS

Out of respect for each other’s contributions during class, all cellphones and laptops will be shut off and stored out of sight. Get a paper notebook for note taking, if you do not typically utilize one. (I will make an exception only if there is a dire emergency, such as a family member in surgery. You must inform me of such an emergency ahead of class.)

Required Books, at campus bookstore; all other readings will be provided as PDFs on LATTE or as links to reports on websites:


Jan 12-14: Introduction and case study

The first class will introduce the course, with an overview of topics, readings, requirements, and process. For the second class, we will look at a case study of New York in response to 9/11.

Required reading for Jan 14:


Jan 19: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Jan 21-26: Dynamics of Urban Risk

How do cities generate risk, even as they often expand opportunities for economic growth and public amenities? Patterns of urban spatial development, varieties of “urban regimes,” dynamics of “growth machines.” Public health in urban development. Climate change and urban vulnerability. How do grassroots groups and movements, as well as innovators within professional and business associations, help to reconfigure urban development logics?

Required Readings:

Jan 21:

Jan 26:

*Further studies:*


Oxfam America. *Exposed: Social Vulnerability and Climate Change in the U.S. Southeast* (Boston, n.d.).


Jan 28-Feb 4: Sustainable, Resilient, Healthy Communities: Key Concepts and Movements

Sustainable communities, resilient communities, and healthy communities, are concepts that have emerged as part of movements over the past several decades in the U.S and globally. How, why, and where did they emerge? How are they related to other concepts of community organizing, community development, just sustainability, community building, participatory budgeting, community policing? How have they been promoted through grassroots organizations, as well as through various nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and other institutions? The sociology of emotions in the face of risk, and the politics of hopeful and constructive civic action.

Required Readings:

Jan 28:

Feb 2:

Feb 4:

Further studies:


Urban rivers, while once used as open sewers for cities, have become the focus of restoration efforts in countries around the world, though not without conflicting visions and struggles among many kinds of actors to transform riverfronts from warehouses and factories to open space, parks, housing, ecosystem functions, and access by once excluded communities. Environmental justice at the waterfront.

**Required Readings:**

Feb 9-11:

Feb 23:

Feb 25:

**Peruse:**

River Network: [www.rivertnetwork.org](http://www.rivertnetwork.org)
Riverkeeper Alliance: [http://www.riverkeeper.org/](http://www.riverkeeper.org/)
Waterkeepers Alliance: [http://waterkeeper.org/](http://waterkeeper.org/)

**Further Readings:**

March 2: **Midterm essays due in class:** double-spaced, paginated, stapled, 12-point font (Times New Roman or similar).

March 2-9: **Community Gardening and Urban Agriculture**

Community gardening has a long history in the U.S. and elsewhere, but its most recent wave has been linked to questions of urban sustainability, multiracial and multiethnic community engagement, food security and justice, environmental learning and youth engagement, restorative environments, and open space organizing. Local civic and neighborhood groups contest and partner with city agencies, university extension services, school systems, and other institutions. We look at urban agriculture and community-supported agriculture (CSA) more broadly, as well as the larger problem of greening the food supply chain.

Required Readings:

March 2-4:

March 9:

Further readings:


March 11: Urban Forests

Urban forestry seeks to restore many of the vital ecological functions of trees within cities, and reduce the urban heat island (UHI) effects that result from built environments and climate change. Some cities have launched, even nearly completed, One Million Trees campaigns that engage ordinary families, volunteers, nonprofits, businesses, and public agencies, such as parks or forest departments.

Required Readings:


Million Trees NYC: http://milliontreesnyc.org/
Chicago Wilderness: http://www.chicagowilderness.org

Further Readings:


Joanne Vining, Elizabeth Tyler, and Byoung-Suk Kweon, “Public Values, Opinions, and Emotions in Restoration Controversies,” chapter 7 in Restoring Nature (143-161).


March 16: Walkable and Bikable

Making cities healthy and livable, with reduced air and noise pollution as well as carbon emissions, has been linked to local grassroots and national movements for urban design and planning that enhance opportunities to walk and bike, as well as to convenient public transportation and safe car and truck use. The cycling renaissance in Europe, North America, and Australia, with growing inclusiveness of women, people of color, children, seniors, and people with disabilities. Economic rationales, as well as health benefits and time costs. The role of bicycle associations. “Complete streets,” “smart growth.”

Required Readings:


Further Readings:


March 18-23: Building Green

The “green building movement” includes a broad array of citizen groups, homeowners, architects, building trades networks, real estate developers, and leadership teams within major institutions, such as schools, downtown businesses, and other institutions. It has established standards for green building through the U.S. Green Building Council and similar groups in countries around the world, and has engaged major professional associations, such as the American Institute of Architects. The movement has grown from the recognition that buildings consume 40% of the world’s materials, 14% of all freshwater, 40% of U.S. energy, 73% of U.S. electricity; they produce 40% of U.S. nonindustrial waste, and create 39% of the carbon emissions that cause climate change. Studies also show myriad benefits to health, learning, and productivity, as well as reduced costs. As Winston Churchill once said, “We shape our buildings, and afterwards our buildings shape us.” In short, we construct our identities and relationships as we construct our built environment.

Required Readings:

March 18:

March 23:


Further studies:


March 25-April 1: City Climate Action Planning

Cities have been increasingly developing and implementing “climate action plans” to integrate a broad array of responses to mitigate and adapt to climate change. These plans are often developed with public input and in partnership with various civic and environmental groups, and build upon previous efforts at sustainability planning. National and international nonprofit intermediaries, such as the U.S. Conference of Mayors and ICLEI, provide assistance to diffuse innovations and institutional templates.

Required Readings:

March 25:

March 30:

April 1:

Peruse:

ICLEI: Local Governments for Sustainability, Corporate Report 2012-2013:  

ICLEI: Local Governments for Sustainability: http://www.iclei.org/

Further studies:


ICLEI. Toronto, Canada. Moving From Assessment to Action on Climate Change. April 2012.


Tanner et al., 2009. Ten Asian Cities [PDF].


Seattle Office of Sustainability and Environment, Seattle Climate Action Plan. April 2013. PDF.


Spring Break: April 3-April 10

April 13-15: Data-Smart Governance, Games, and Visioning Tools

The information revolution has begun to alter the way cities are governed, services are delivered, and residents are engaged. Urban bureaucracies are challenged to become more nimble, responsive, and transparent. Data entrepreneurs and civic hackers are increasingly developing innovations – new apps, mapping devices, visualization tools -- to improve everyday life at the local level, as well as to engage with the big questions of sustainability. Young people, of course, are often at the center of such creativity. If, as Justice Louis Brandeis once said, states are the laboratories of democracy, then smart cities have perhaps become the key civic laboratories for democratic sustainability.

Required Readings:

April 10:

Anthony M. Townsend, Smart Cities: Big Data, Civic Hackers, and the Quest for a New Utopia (Norton, 2013), chapter 8 (“A Planet of Civic Laboratories”), LATTE PDF.

April 15:

Further studies:

April 20-22: Urban Coastal Adaptation

Hurricanes Sandy, Katrina, and many other destructive coastal events around the world – some killing and displacing hundreds of thousands of people and destroying billions of dollars of home and business assets – have prompted local communities, cities, states, and national governments, as well as international aid agencies, disaster response organizations, insurance companies, and military institutions, to incorporate coastal adaptation into their professional, civic, business, and cultural repertoires. Adaptation contains many challenges, not least those having to do with the potential of enhancing inequalities, displacing costs, and managing loss and grief. How are communities beginning to deal with these challenges in a way that might secure greater equity and more robust democracy?

Required Readings:

April 20:

April 22:

Further studies:


April 27: Concluding discussion. Final essays due in class: double-spaced, paginated, stapled, 12-point font (Times New Roman or similar).

Relevant Websites:

ICLEI: http://www.iclei.org/
Urban Land Institute: www.uli.org
Carbon Disclosure Project: www.cdp.net
Smart Growth America: http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org

Relevant Journals

Journal of the American Planning Association
Urban Affairs Review
Journal of Urban Affairs
Urban Studies
Landscape and Urban Planning
Society & Natural Resources
Journal of Planning Education and Research
The main goal of a case presentation is to present enough of the basic architecture of a case, plus some engaging details, to help trigger a discussion among the class. You should be completely familiar with all the details, concepts (some of which might be from earlier chapters of a book or lecture), and dynamics of the case (i.e. progression over time) in order that you can help facilitate (I will also pitch in), but do not necessarily have to put this all down on your handout or PowerPoint. In some cases, you might wish to do this, so that you can easily recall, but don’t take everyone through every detail. That would be boring. The more that you present architecture and then lead to questions and discussion back and forth, the better. The goal is for you to be able to lead a dynamic discussion. A team presentation should have a smooth and dynamic transition from one member to another (thus rehearse or at least discuss division of responsibilities). A team presentation often has more opportunity for creative transitions and fun exercises. But whether individual or team, establish your presence and authority over the room.

There is no one right way to present a case study, but here are some basics in thinking about the architecture you want to construct.

- **The problem:** what is the problem or conundrum that has brought the actors to the point of searching for new solutions? Is a specific threat (environmental hazard, crime in a neighborhood, racial conflict between an agency and community) to the community, or some part of the community (some racial or ethnic group)? Has the community become stalemated, stuck in conflict or in the courts? Is the problem that the old tools of regulation aren’t working well? Or that some actors dominate the political and regulatory system? Of course, there may be a number of interacting problems. Don’t be overly technical or longwinded on this, you can always elaborate further in the discussion. WHAT IS THE CORE DRAMA? (And how does it carry through the whole case presentation?)

- **Historical background, identity of community:** what is the history of the community or workplace, different factions, gender/ethnic/racial/economic divisions (if relevant)? Are there historical layers of tradition, problem accumulation, sources of common identity or conflict extending back many years? Newcomers and old timers in community? Past patterns of discrimination, housing segregation that might help explain the problem?

- **Key players:** what are the key organizations involved in the drama? Who are the key individuals that take leadership, and what enables them to do so, to help move others towards a different/higher ground?

- **Framing:** how were the issues framed or reframed in the process? What slogans and rhetoric were employed (e.g. environmental racism/justice, community preservation, ranching traditions, community renewal, human rights, species rights/protection,
conflict/collaboration).

- **Existing tools:** what tools for regulation or community action have been used before in this community to address this or similar problems? Are they working? Why or why not?

- **New tools:** what new tools and approaches do citizens and stakeholders develop to try to address the problem? For example: land trust, transit-oriented planning and community development, watershed partnership, multi-stakeholder ecosystem management, urban agriculture or aquaculture, university-community partnership, environmental education, community visioning.

- **Key participants and stakeholders:** what were their self-interests? Who joined together in these efforts? How did they manage to collaborate (or not), engage broad organizational memberships, manage to deal with their traditional adversaries, reinvent themselves and their traditional missions? Did they develop a set of common values and interests? How did they create a broader ethic of stewardship? Build relationships? Get government bureaucracies to change their practices?

- **Resources:** what financial resources and community assets are available for the new initiatives, and from which sources? Are new funding tools developed?

- **Networks:** are there broader networks (social movement, professional, business association, government) that enable local actors to work effectively in solving problems and developing new approaches?

- **Results:** what were the results of these new efforts and innovations? Impact on environment, and how measured? Impact on community, and how measured? How did the stakeholders develop mutually acceptable measures?

- **Politics:** what are the dynamics of local (city, county) politics (elections, districting, ethnic/racial exclusion), as well as state and national politics (if relevant) as these dynamics impact problem solving?

**EVERYONE’S RESPONSIBILITY:** all students are responsible for the reading of that class and to help make the presentation and discussion go well. If presenter(s) throw out a question to elicit discussion, others should be able to pick up the thread, help catalyze further discussion, add to the analytic toolbox. We are all invested in everyone’s presentations going as well as possible and providing assistance and feedback.