

CourseNo: PLANA4112_001_2015_1

Meeting Time: T 03:00P-05:00P **Meeting Location:** [AVERY HALL 114](#)

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Understanding the physical dynamism of urban life

Urban physical structure (buildings, infrastructure, open spaces and land uses), appears to be solid and unchanging. But that is a momentary illusion. Even as we view the urban built form, larger social, economic and political forces are acting to change it. Just as unseen microbes are constantly rearranging the planet so too are the unseen but real forces of social life, (politics, economics, technology and culture) rearranging the physical and spatial options for the urban expanses that are increasingly home to the vast majority of the human race.

To fully understand the planning challenges that face the physical structure of cities and their regions, we must appreciate the complex social, political and economic dynamics that govern their shape, that dictate their environmental impact and in many ways determine the degree of social equity among the inhabitants.

Understanding the connection between the continuous forces of societal change and the changing physical shape of urban places is never simple. It is never simple because the drivers of change are at the same time causal and reflexive. Reflexive here refers to the fact that social forces are always reacting to each other. Economic change, for example creates changes in social and political relationships and these in turn reverberate back upon the claims that are made among competing social groups for urban space. It is that dynamic and reflexive process in relation to urban planning that is the substantive focus of *the physical structure of cities*.

To illustrate, consider the industrial revolution; The transformative success of the substitution of mechanical power for human and animal power was largely determined by the urban social revolution that it reflexively set in motion. This urban social revolution drastically redefined the spatial and physical organization of the cities where it occurred. It forced cities to reorganize governance to accommodate the physical infrastructure that new and higher densities of people and activity required. This new density forced a wide array of people of different social backgrounds and levels of wealth into learning how to find political accommodations that would permit them to live side by side in productive ways. It was out of the turmoil that surrounded that time that the modern practice of urban planning first emerged.

As with the industrial revolution, so too with our contemporary revolution in information and communications technology (ICT); it has set loose social, economic and political forces that are causing us to once more rethink and reorganize the spatial and physical relationships of modern urban life. The challenge is further exacerbated by the need to create environmentally sustainable urban environments if we are to hold back the worst impacts of global climate change.

The planning challenge inherent in the physical structure of 21st century cities is going to require that space be organized in ways respectful of these new imperatives. We cannot know how all this will ultimately turn out, but we do need to grapple with this as we try to plan our cities as rewarding and safe places for people to live and work in the new age of global interconnection.

Course Readings

There will be four to five readings assigned for each class meeting. Students are expected to complete the readings and to come to class prepared to discuss them. All readings will be posted on Courseworks or found in the City Reader (5th edition), which is available as an e-book through the Columbia library system.

Course Assignments

Weekly Response Papers (20%) – students will be asked to complete 1 – 2 page responses to the week's assigned readings. These responses should illustrate the student's ability to make connections between the readings and to think intelligently on the response question posed.

Midterm Exam (30%) – A written exam will be administered during week 9 (March 24). Students will be given two hours to complete several essay questions based on the assigned readings and class discussions from the first eight weeks of class. A study guide will be distributed prior to the exam.

Group Project (40%) – In the first two weeks of the course, you will be assigned to a working group with another student (2 students per group). The nature of the assignment is analogous to frog dissection in HS biology class! For each weekly topic we cover, your work group will examine how that topic played out in the city you are assigned to investigate. The groups will post the results of their investigation on wiki pages that the entire class can see and have input into. Groups will also be asked to submit four response papers over the course of the semester. See below for additional details.

Class Attendance and Participation (10%)

Group Project

During Week 2, you will be assigned to a working group. For the weekly topics we cover in class, your work group will examine how the topic played out in the city you are assigned to investigate, paying close attention to how the issues influenced (or were influenced by) the built environment. Groups will post the results of their investigation on wiki pages that the entire class can see and have input into. We expect to have between 8 and 10 cities, which we will use to expand upon the readings.

In addition to building a wiki page, groups will be asked to submit response papers during certain weeks (see syllabus). Group response papers should address how your city relates to assigned readings and the topic being covered in class, more generally. Some weeks we will also ask you to submit one or two slides (with pictures) that you will present to the class along with a summary of your response paper. Sharing your case study findings with your classmates will allow everyone to learn about a range of cities and how the issues covered in class manifest themselves differently (or similarly) across different cases. By the end of the project we will have wiki pages discussing the physical structures and development of our city case studies.

All wiki pages should have pictures, data and text. Near the end of the semester groups will critique each other's wiki pages. Your final wiki page should be completed by the last day of class, Tuesday April 28.

Topics your Wiki Page should address (not exhaustive, questions are only guides):

History of the Built Environment

- Why does your city have the urban form we see today? How did the city development spatially? Why? How does the built environment relate to the issues listed below?

Walking and Tracked Cities

- In what time period would your city fit into these categories? How was your city different when it was a walking or tracked city?

Rubber Cities

- Is your city a "rubber city"? Why or why not?

Modernism and the City

- What vestiges of modernism are evident in your cities built environment?

Inequality, Social Exclusion and the City

- How do these issues play out in your city? How are these issues evident in the built environment of your city?

Race, Gender and Suburbanization

- How do race, gender and suburbanization influence physical structures in your city? And vice versa? How does your city compare to its suburbs re: demographics?

Regionalism

- How does your city relate to its larger region? What institutions or policies hinder or facilitate regional cooperation?

Post-modernism and the City

- How has your city responded to economic change in the 21st century? Change could refer to industrialization or de-industrialization, depending on your assigned city.