

# Globalizing Social Activism: Sustainable Development in Urban Areas

New York University  
Wagner Graduate School of Public Service  
P11.0017  
Spring 2011  
Tuesdays and Thursdays 6:45-8:00 PM

## Instructor

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## Course Description

According to current estimates of the World's population, in the first decade of the 21st Century the number of people living in urban areas exceeded the number of people living in rural areas for the first time and current global population growth projections indicate that most of the population expansion in the rest of the century will take place in urban areas of the developing world. This course examines the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in urban areas. Some of the major themes explored include indicators of sustainability, urban demographic trends, poverty, green building, urban sprawl, air and water quality, sustainable energy and transportation, and global climate change. In addition, the role of information technology (IT) and information and social networks in promoting sustainable development and the diffusion of ideas globally will be explored.

## Course Readings:

Two books will be required for the course. They are both available at the NYU Professional Bookstore (located at 530 La Guardia Place). They are:

- *The Sustainable Urban Development Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, edited by Stephen M. Wheeler and Timothy Beatley. Routledge. 2008.
- *Taking Sustainable Cities Seriously* by Kent E. Portney. The MIT Press. 2003.

These books will be available in the Course Reserves Desk, on Lower Level 2 of Bobst Library.

In addition, the following reports will be used in the course:

- *Planning Sustainable Cities: Global Report on Human Settlements 2009*, United Nations Human Settlements Programme, Earthscan Press. Available for download at: <http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?typeid=19&catid=555&cid=5607>
- Beyond Economic Growth An Introduction to Sustainable Development, Second Edition by Tatyana P. Soubbotina, The World Bank, Washington, D.C. Available for download at: <http://www.worldbank.org/depweb/english/beyond/global/index.html>

### **Class Assignments and Grading**

#### 1. Midterm Exam

The midterm exam is 30% of the grade.

#### 4. Term paper

This paper will be 30% of the grade.

#### 5. Final Exam

The final exam will be 30% of the grade.

#### 3. Class participation

Students will be expected to actively participate in class discussions. Class participation will be 10% of the grade.

### **Schedule of Lectures and Topics**

#### 1. What is sustainability?

January 25 and 27. Introduction to the course and overview of the syllabus. Introduction to the concept of sustainable development and how it applies to urban areas.

#### 2. Trends in urban population growth and urbanization

February 1 and 3. Current and past trends in urbanization and growth of cities. Emergence and growth of mega-cities. Differences in current and projected urbanization

growth rates in developed countries and developing countries. Social indicators and general health issues in rapidly growing urban areas.

### 3. Measuring sustainability

February 8 and 10. How do we measure sustainability? Discussion of indicators of sustainability and how they can be applied to cities and urban areas.

### 4. Urban sprawl and smart growth

February 15 and 17. Discussion about urban sprawl and smart growth. Definitions, trends and projections. Factors affecting and driving urban sprawl.

### 5. Environmental justice, social equity and social dimensions of sustainability

February 22 and 24. Discussion about the social dimension of sustainability in cities. Environmental health risks and vulnerable populations, environmental justice, income inequality, crime rates and trends.

### 6. Green buildings and sustainable housing

March 1 and 3. Discussion about green building and housing. Description of the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Green Building Rating System. Potential of green building in developing countries.

### 7. Sustainable transportation

March 8 and 10. Discussion of sustainable transportation systems and vehicles. Trends in transportation use and modes of transportation. Can developing countries learn from developed country experiences? Discussion of innovative case studies in developing countries such as the bus rapid transit system of Curitiba, Brazil and the Cable Car of Medellín, Colombia. Air pollution and public health.

### 8. Sustainable energy

March 22 and 24. Past, current and projected trends in energy production and consumption. Alternative forms of energy production. Energy use, pollution and public health.

## 9. Sustainable use of materials and waste management

March 29 and 31. Trends in material use and waste production. Factors affecting waste production, re-use and recycling. Introduction to eco-efficiency.

## 10. Sustainable water use

April 5 and 7. Trends in water use, water treatment and water scarcity. Differences in access to water in urban areas in developed and developing countries. Differences in use of water treatment technologies around the world. Access to clean water and sanitation, water pollution and public health in urban areas.

## 11. Urban areas, parks, public spaces and biological diversity

April 12 and 14. Rates of urbanization around the world suggest urban areas will continue to grow and replace natural areas. Examples from Brazil, South Africa and the United States will be used to discuss how urban areas are affecting biodiversity hotspots and how urban parks and green areas can contribute to biodiversity conservation while providing environmental services for people.

## 12. Urban areas and global climate change

April 19 and 21. Discussion about global climate change and its impact on cities and urban areas. Topics explored will include sea level rise, extreme weather events and changes in temperature.

## 13. IT and Sustainable Development

April 26 and 28. The role of information technology in the diffusion of ideas.

## 14. Global Activism and Sustainable Development

May 3 and 5. The rise of global activism and activism as way to promote sustainable development in urban areas.