Public spaces play an essential role in the life of cities and their residents. Public squares, parks, and streets—these are often the signature spaces that help shape a city's distinctive identity. Public spaces are the settings of everyday life. They are mixing bowls, thoroughfares, and transfer stations where a city's diverse communities interact; forums for individual and collective action and expression; and spaces of protest and domains for the practice of citizenship. Overarching questions that animate the course are: What do we mean by “public” and “public space”? Why are public spaces important to urban life and to democracy? How are competing values such as social order and freedom of expression negotiated? What makes some public spaces successful and how do cities manage them? Specific topics include: political theories of public space; public spaces in history; democracy and free speech in public space; heterogeneity and identity in the public realm; regulation of conduct; surveillance; public space in the informal city; privatization of public space; public space in non-democratic societies; and the urban design of public space.

Intended Learning Outcomes
Students who complete the course will:

- Develop an understanding of key theories of public space from antiquity to the present
- Develop an understanding of key examples of public space from antiquity to the present
- Develop an understanding of public policy issues relating to the creation, funding, maintenance and operation of public spaces
- Develop an in-depth understanding of public space in New York City and at least two other cities linked to research projects
- Improve the ability to express thoughts cogently and persuasively in writing and to marshal evidence culled from research to support your arguments
- Improve research skills
- Improve the ability to articulate thoughts clearly and persuasively

Grade Scale
20% Participation and Preparation for Class
20% Short Paper
10% Class Presentation
50% Research Paper
Readings
Most of the readings are available in electronic form on the course website on NYU Classes. I have assigned all or most of the books listed below. They are available either as E-Books or on Bobst Reserve, but I have also ordered copies at the NYU Bookstore for those who wish to buy them.


Participation and Preparation
The following elements contribute to the grade for participation and preparation.

- Your comments demonstrate that you have come to class prepared and done the assigned reading.
- Your comments demonstrate that you have reflected on the assigned readings and how they relate to other readings.
- Your comments are germane to the class discussion. You respond to the dialogue and engage with the ideas of your classmates.
- You participate in the exploration of the artworks, actively trying to figure out what they mean and relating them to the readings and course themes.
- You are an attentive listener, taking in what your classmates say.
- You keep to the time limit in the presentation of your final paper, you communicate clearly and you respond effectively to questions.
- Attendance.

Weekly Outline with Readings
Unless otherwise stated, all required readings are available as PDF’s on the NYU Classes website.

1. January 24
There are no reading assignments for the first class.

Introduction

2. January 31
The Public Forum Doctrine in the U.S.
"expressive topography," a key concept in the book, pp. 53-59.  (E-Book: https://getit.library.nyu.edu/go/9415064)

3. February 7

**Public Space, Democracy and Freedom of Speech**


4. February 14

**Public Space and Cultural Diversity**

Kohn, *The Death and Life of the Urban Commonwealth*, Chap. 9, “Hetero-rights to the City.”  (E-Book through Oxford Scholarly Editions Online. Type the following Digital Object Identifier in Google to find the book: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190606596.001.0001.)

5. February 21

**The Networked Public Realm and Changing Conceptions of Public and Private**


6. February 28

**Research Paper topic description due.**

**The Public Square in Authoritarian States: Cairo, Egypt**


7. March 7

**Making a Public Space in New York City: Governors Island**

*Guest Speaker: Leslie Koch, former President and Chief Executive, The Trust for Governors Island*


Week of March 13: Spring Break

8. March 21

**Regulating Public Space: Standards of Public Conduct**, in particular considering homelessness, loitering, and nudity


Mitchell, The Right to the City, Chaps. 5-6.

Kohn, Brave New Neighborhoods, Chap. 8. (E-Book: https://getit.library.nyu.edu/go/9415063)

9. March 28

**Regulating Public Space: Security and Surveillance**


10. April 4

Group 1—Research Paper draft due.

**The Privatization of Public Space: Privately Owned Public Spaces and Business Improvement**
Districts

11. April 11
Group 2—Research Paper draft due.
The Privatization of Public Space: Sidewalks, Malls, Gated Communities

12. April 18
Public Space in the Informal City; New Ways of Representing and Mapping Public Space
Ways of mapping public space: Annette Kim, Spatial Analysis Lab at USC, http://slab.today/maps/

13. April 25
Group 1: Presentations of final paper

14. May 2
Group 2: Presentations of final paper

Final Paper due: May 8
**Writing Assignments and Class Presentations**

**Timeline of Due Dates**
- Week 4 / Feb. 14: Short Paper
- Week 6 / Feb. 28: Topic of Research Paper
- Week 10 / April 4: Group 1—Research Paper Draft
- Week 11 / April 11: Group 2—Research Paper Draft
- Week 13 / April 25: Group 1—Class Presentations
- Week 14 / May 2: Group 2—Class Presentations
- May 8: Research Paper

**Short Paper: On Placemaking**
- 5 pages + 2 photographs
- Due: Week 4 / February 14


In 1980 William Whyte published a highly influential book, *The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces*, which analyzed how people used public spaces and whether they were appealing areas to socialize. His analysis was based on close observation of human behavior, which he discerned in part by filming the spaces and watching use patterns over time. Whyte’s book has had considerable influence on the approach to public space, raising the bar on both design standards and awareness of public access issues, and it has engendered an approach to the design of public space called “placemaking.” For this assignment, please read Whyte’s classic, short book. The relatively short text is supplemented by extensive illustrations that are fundamental to his argument; examine them too. The chapters are attached as pdfs to this assignment. In addition, Whyte made a related 55-minute film, which is available on Vimeo and in Bobst.

Inspired by Whyte’s work, this assignment asks you to examine a public space in any borough of New York City. It could be one you consider exemplary, one facing capacity issues and compromised by its appeal, or one flawed and in need of alteration. You must visit the space in person, and at different times of day so you understand use patterns. Weather permitting, it would be preferable to choose an outdoor public space, but if cold weather keeps people indoors, then feel free to select an indoor public space.

The paper should analyze the effectiveness of the public space, its strengths and weaknesses, any issues you see in how different publics use the space, and your recommendations, if any, to modify the space. Whyte’s book provides a model of close, observational analysis and poses fundamental questions you’ll want to address, but you may also spot issues Whyte did not consider. Please include 1-2 photographs that you have taken to support your argument. The photographs are not meant to be scenographic; like Whyte’s photographs, they are evidence to support your points; do not download them from the web.

At the start of the paper, be sure to identify your public space and its location. Here are some questions to consider. This list is not intended to serve as an outline for your paper, just prompts for your thinking.

- How does the space work? Does it fulfill its intended purposes? Have unintended or informal uses developed?
• Does the space attract people? Who are the publics the space serves? Does it attract diverse people and accommodate diverse needs? Do you observe tensions between different types of users? Does the space exclude certain categories of users, by explicit or implicit measures?
• How the design of the space support its uses? What are the shortcomings of the space? How could it be improved?
• Who maintains the space? If the space is privately owned or privately managed, do you observe tensions between the public and private dimensions of the space?
• Is there advertising or commercial activity in the space? What impact does that have?
• What planning decisions informed the creation of the public space? What could a planner do to improve the space?

**Research Paper**

16-20 pages (double or 1.5 spacing) + bibliography

This paper should entail substantial research and in-depth analysis of a topic related to the course. Please note the following requirements. The class presentation (10% of the final grade) will be evaluated separately from the final paper (50% of the final grade).

**Paper Topic**
Due: Feb. 28
1 page
Describe your paper topic and specify the research questions you will investigate. It may take multiple iterations of the proposal to arrive at an approved topic.

**Paper Draft**
Group 1: due April 4
Group 2: due April 11
The draft should be a complete paper. Writing it will clarify your argument, the gaps in your analysis, and where additional research is needed. The revision process will allow you to evolve your thinking and produce a more substantial final paper.

**Class Presentation**
Approximately 15 minutes; precise timing to be determined
Group 1: April 25
Group 2: May 2
This should be a polished presentation with slides.

**Final Paper**
Due: May 8