The Political Economy of Urban and Regional Development
Community and Regional Development, Department of Human Ecology
University of California, Davis
Spring 2017

CRD 245 / GEO 245
Instructor: Abigail Martin
Thursdays, 4:10-8:00 p.m.
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I. Seminar description

This is a four unit graduate seminar that relies extensively on graduate student engagement in seminar discussion of selected critical readings that have shaped the current boundaries of the theoretical and practical discourse on urbanism and urban development in the social sciences. The object of the course is to stretch these boundaries and open up new spaces for theory, research, and action.

In this seminar, we explore the construction of “place” at the urban and regional levels through four ongoing, multi-scalar social and ecological processes: (1) the restructuring of the global political economy, often captured under the rubric of “globalization”, (2) “transnational urbanism”, or the increasing interconnectivity of localities across borders forged by transnational networks, movement and institutions, (3) the evolving nature of policy-making and social activism at all levels of governance (household, metropolitan, subnational, national, supranational, international), producing new forms of “neoliberal governmentality,” and (4) the co-production the natural and social world, and what some urban political ecologists refer to “urban metabolism.” We explore how these processes give form to the character and quality of life in localities at the urban and regional level, and how the local actions of urban and regional communities, in turn, help shape and reflect these processes. The course also provides a review of key debates in urban studies, as well as the material and cultural turns in conceptual approaches to studying urban and regional political economy.

In addition, this seminar covers a number of issues pertinent to urban developmental politics in California specifically, including community development, migration, natural resource use, environmental justice and democratic politics in the urban policy thinking. The readings include both theoretical works and case studies drawn from interdisciplinary social science fields including urban studies, geography, sociology, political science, and political ecology.

II. Requirements

Seminar meetings will begin with a short lecture, followed by class discussion centered on the week’s readings. Course evaluations will be based on the below requirements.

(A) Seminar participation (40%): All students should be prepared to offer critiques of the selected seminar readings each week. Two additional forms of participation are required:

1. Each meeting, a team of two or more students will take responsibility for leading discussion of the assigned readings.
2. Paper proposal and/or progress report: In the second half of the term, each participant will present their research to the class during the semester. To facilitate discussion of your research, each seminar participant will prepare a short 1-2 page prospectus or outline of your paper to be distributed to the class the day before your research presentation (online).
(B) Research paper (60%): A research paper with bibliography, min 20 - max 30 pages. Hard copies are due at the beginning of class on June 8, 2017.

III. Schedule of assigned readings

**Readings will be available online and in the course reader.**

Week 1, April 6: Introduction to the course

In this opening session, we have an organizational meeting to discuss the course schedule and required readings, course requirements, and the structure of class participation. We will also review some of the key trends in how scholars have imagined and investigated urban space and processes of urban/regional development.


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<th>Part One: Socio-ecological processes in the construction of urban space</th>
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Week 2, April 13: Studying urbanization in a historical, political economic context

This week, we selectively dip into a particular lineage of urban studies, what some refer to as the “grand narratives of macro-social development,” to understand key processes of global political economy. These works focus on “primitive accumulation,” “accumulation by dispossession,” and enclosure as key processes that continue to shape urbanization.

Glassman, Jim, 2006, “Primitive Accumulation, Accumulation by dispossession, Accumulation by extra-economic means”


Supplemental:

RSA ANIMATE, Animated explanation of David Harvey on the Crises of Capitalism: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qOP2V_np2c0


Week 3, April 20: From urban to transnational social movements

How has urban society responded to capitalism’s crises, dispossession, globalization and neoliberal economic restructuring? This week, we examine historical and contemporary social movements working across various political scales (from grassroots mobilizations to the ‘higher’ realms of global governance institutions) to understand urban spaces as sites of what Peter Evans terms “counter-hegemonic globalization.” We also explore scholarly discourses on “the right to the city” and on “common space” as an arena of cultural, political and social urban conflicts, from Occupy to anti-gentrification struggles. The readings also highlight a number of regulatory problems facing modern state institutions, raising the question of how to understand the role of the state in urban conflicts.


Supplemental:


Week 4, April 27: Transnational Urbanism and the politics of meaning and everyday practices

In this week, we shift our focus from the structural transformations of global capitalism to consider the interplay of meaning-making and everyday practices that give shape to transnational flows of capital, people, and culture. We examine M.P. Smith’s critique of the “global cities discourse” and his concept of Transnational Urbanism. These readings bring a social constructivist perspective to the study of cities to emphasize the complex sociocultural and political-economic relations that link people, places and processes to each other transnationally.


**Supplemental:**


**Week 5 (May 4): “Urban Political Ecology”: Cities, nature and technology**

Cities are not only dense networks of socio-spatial processes that weave together global and local flows of people, goods and culture, but are also involve physical processes and agents that give for to and support urban life. The selections for this week draw from the fields of geography, political ecology and environmental history to explore the intersection of nature and urbanization. To quote Harvey (1993), “It is in practice, hard to see where “society” begins and “nature” ends…in a fundamental sense, there is in the final analysis, nothing unnatural about New York City.”


**Supplemental:**


Part Two:
Capitalism, community power and the politics of metropolitan growth

Week 6, May 11: The “Urban Growth Machine” Discourse

The "city as a growth machine" thesis has been one of the most influential approaches to the analysis of urban politics, the commodification of place, and local economic development in the United States. Three decades later, how do the core ideas hold up? This week’s readings examine the original thesis against more recent attempts to apply it to contexts that have changed significantly since the thesis was first proposed.


Supplemental:


Week 7, May 18: Local choices in metropolitan development

How do cities enforce their boundaries or expand at their edges? What are the processes and politics driving suburbanization, sprawl and shrinking cities? Why do some cities realize their promise as engines of economic growth, human development and equality, while others fail? This week we examine the politics and policy practices that shape cities and metropolitan regions, looking closely at the processes of de-concentration and de-densification.


Week 8, May 25:  Democracy and the City

This week’s readings examine the threats to, and possibilities for, improved community-level democratic self-governance. What are the impacts of globalization on democracy? Where should reforms focus if the goal is to strengthen local capacity for democratic decision-making? To what extend can cities be sites of political innovations?


Williamson, Thad, Making a Place for Community, “Sprawl, the Environment, and Climate Change,” Chapter 8, and “Reforming Sprawl and Beyond,” Chapter 9 pp. 249-285.

Week 9, June 1:  Climate change and cities


Week 9, June 1:  Participation and planning in an age of inequality (*Additional readings TBD)

Caldeira, Teresa and James Holston, 2014, “Participatory urban planning in Brazil,” Urban Studies, 52(11).


Supplemental


Papers Due at the beginning of class.