Principles of Urban Design: Contemporary Urban Design in Theory and Practice

Architecture 435/535 (Portland) Fall Term 2015
Instructor Gerald Gast (geraldgast@gmail.com)
Credit: 4 units. Meets in Portland, Wednesdays 9:00 AM -12 noon

"Making a plan for Berlin was an impossible job, although I would never say this to my clients. A civilized person is called urbane ... and when we refer to this term, we immediately think about all the beautiful cities that have ever been. We know, however, that they are not designed. They were, and still are, a product of organic growth. When you walk around these cities, what is beautiful is the very fact that what you are looking at has not been designed. Instead, it represents the materialization of the millions of life stories that have been enacted within their respective walls across centuries"

-Renzo Piano on the design of Potsdamer Platz, Berlin.

Plan for Potsdamer Platz Berlin. Renzo Piano Building Workshop
Objectives and Content

This course focuses on contemporary Urban Design in theory and practice. Urban Design is examined as both a subject of theoretical inquiry and an activity immersed in the living experiences within cities, a meeting ground of conceptual ideas and the real forces at work in cities.

Comparative studies of neighborhood conservation and development, central city regeneration, growth policies for metropolitan regions and emerging sustainable cities are discussed and debated. Future prospects for restructuring cities and metropolitan regions are examined and discussed. Case study examples are accompanied by direct field experience through urban design projects which address neighborhood, central city and regional issues.

The course focuses on contemporary Urban Design issues in North America and selected cities abroad using case studies from Portland, Seattle, Vancouver BC, New York, Baltimore, Berlin, Barcelona, Stockholm, Curitiba (Brazil) and other cities. The format combines lectures, discussions, workshops and urban design projects.

Course Focus and Projects

The course is structured in three parts, each with readings, lecture-discussions and project work:

- **Urban Development Theories and Models.** Focus on alternative visions of urbanism during the 20th and early 21st century – the classic contemporary models and influences of Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford and Le Corbusier. This provides a foundation upon which to consider emerging theories and models.

- **Urban Regeneration.** Central city development, conservation and design. Comparative studies and discussions focus on recent seminal and controversial urban regeneration projects. Discussion of emerging urban design theories as developed in Portland, Vancouver, Berlin, Barcelona and other case study cities.

  The process of urban design is applied to an urban regeneration project in Portland. Student teams conduct field analyses, develop urban design concepts, and formulate implementation strategies.

- **Regional Growth and Development.** Planning, design and environmental sustainability issues created by regional growth. Discussions examine suburban and regional growth patterns, alternative models for the future, and concepts that seek more equitable and environmentally-sustainable forms of regional development. Case studies focus on Curitiba, Brazil and other cities.

The Portland Laboratory

The Portland region is used as a laboratory for critical discussion of urban design concepts and principles, building on the metropolitan area's achievements in downtown development, neighborhood revitalization, land use / transit planning and regional growth management. Portland's development issues are viewed through the lens of contemporary urban design theory, comparing its approach to methods used in other cities in North America and abroad.

The course is designed to orient students to Portland's urban and regional context, providing an important foundation for projects in the design studios. It addresses issues of the central city and the larger metropolitan area, focusing on challenges facing the region as it strives to build a more livable, equitable and sustainable regional structure.
Research Opportunities

Students may extend project assignments and other topical studies through additional research for independent study credits.

Reader and References

Course readings are contained in a Reader issued in increments by the instructor. Video documentaries and other digital resources are used as additional sources.

Selected references are placed on the instructor’s course Reserve in the UO Portland Library and Learning Commons.

Instructor / Information

Gerry Gast  geraldgast@gmail.com
Office:  456 UO Portland Center

Gerry Gast is an architect and urban designer, Associate Professor in the University of Oregon Portland Urban Architecture Program, and principal of Gast Hillmer Urban Design in the San Francisco Bay Area. He has served as Visiting Associate Professor in the Program on Urban Studies at Stanford University, where he authored the principal urban design course in the Program on Urban Studies.

Arch 435 / 535  Principles of Urban Design

Class Sessions and Topics

Session 1.  "Societal Values and Critical Issues in Contemporary Urban Design”.

Introduction to Urban Design Analysis and Project 1

Video Documentary.  “Urbanized”

Preparation for Session 2:


Alternative Visions of the Contemporary City :


LeCorbusier, "A Contemporary City" from The City of Tomorrow and its Planning.

Donald Miller (ed.), The Lewis Mumford Reader, "Introduction: The Urban Prospect", "The Ideal form of the Modern City", "Home Remedies for Urban Cancer", "Yesterday's City of Tomorrow". Pages 157-161; 162-175; 176-183; 184-200.
O Reading related to urban analysis and diagramming methods:


O Handout examples of diagram techniques (please review before the field studies).

O Begin Project 1: Initial site visit and preliminary urban design analysis.

Session 2. “Alternative Visions of the Contemporary City”:

Jane Jacob's historic urbanism, the legacy of Le Corbusier's modernism, Mumford’s vision of planned communities and new towns.

O Class discussion of Project 1: Preliminary Urban Design Analysis.

Preparation for Session 3.

O Readings on Urban Regeneration:


Revitalization of Downtown Baltimore:


O Complete Project 1: Urban Design Analysis

Session 3. “Central City Regeneration: Theories and Strategies”.

Case study of Downtown Baltimore, MD.

Discussion of Project 1. Presentation of Urban Design Analyses. Project 1 Due.

Handout and brief Introduction of Project 2.

Reading For Session 4:


Video clips on transformative urban projects:
Cheonggyecheon. Seoul, South Korea:


New York Highline:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_W2Yq1zzxAc

Work on Project 2A: Initial Design Concepts

Session 4. “Transformative” Urban Design

“Back from the Brink: Saving America’s Cities by Design”. Documentary film by Public Broadcasting System and The American Architectural Foundation. Case studies of revitalization and growth in three cities (Portland, Oregon; Chattanooga, Tennessee; and Suisun City, California).

Project 2A Critiques. Preliminary Design Concepts

Reading for Session 5:


Readings on Pike Place Seattle, MASS MOCA, Brooklyn Naval Yard


Discussion of Case Case Studies.

Project 2B Critiques: Refined Urban Design Concepts

Session 6. “Public Health and Urban Design”

Documentary Film: “Social Policy in Concrete” in Designing Healthy Communities

Richard Jackson, MD, MPH. UCLA School of Medicine. Chair, School of Environment and Public Health, UCLA.

Project 2C Critiques: Urban Design Proposal

For Session 7:

Complete Project 2D. Final Proposal

Session 7: Project 2 Final Presentations and Discussion. Project 2 Due
Project Two is the major project of the course.

---

Readings for Session 8:

Reading: *Metropolitan Growth and Development*

Anthony Downs, "Metro Areas Can't Go On This Way" (Essay).


Hildebrand Frey, “Compact, Decentralized or What? The Sustainable City Debate” in *Designing the City: Toward a More Sustainable Urban Form*.

http://www.lcd.state.or.us/


---

Session 8. "Metropolitan Growth and Development: The North American Regional ‘City’"


O Introduce and Handout Project 3: “A Regional Urban Design Framework for Portland”

---

Reading for Session 9:

Peter Calthorpe, “Four American Futures”, P 106-117 and “A Sustainable Future”, P 120-126, in *Urbanism in the Age of Climate Change*.


Session 9. “Environmentally-Sustainable Cities and Regions”.

Focus on case study Curitiba, Brazil and the IBA Emscher Park, The Ruhr Region, Germany.