

Fall 2013

School of Architecture  
University of Southern California  
Los Angeles, California

ARCH 566: Cross Cultural Topics in Landscape Architecture History  
Trans-national Urbanities & Urbanisms

Units: 3

Instructor: Vinayak Bharne ([bharne@usc.edu](mailto:bharne@usc.edu); 323-252-7145)  
Location: Harris 101  
Schedule: Tuesday, 6:00 p.m. to 8:50 p.m.  
Office Hours: By appointment

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The physical and ecological construct of urban landscapes across the world consists of a finite and identifiable series of elements – streets, buildings, rivers, infrastructure etc. However, the specific form, intent, intervention with, sustenance of, and inherent attitudes towards these elements, is shaped by deeper phenomenological forces and circumstances that create distinct identities and signatures of people, place and culture. Different histories, growth patterns, governance structures, cultural beliefs and aspirations all ultimately create different expectations of what the urban landscape is in the first place. This recognition has serious implications to the practice of landscape architecture and urbanism. How do we gauge the appropriateness of our interventions in a specific culture? How do we negotiate between our personal biases on what a place ought to be, versus reading it for what it is? How do we understand the practice of landscape design beyond passive physical amelioration, as a reflective engagement with cultural expectations, towards deeper change?

The examination of the contemporary urban landscape as an enmeshed duality of parallel culture-specific “urbanities” and “urbanisms,” forms the basis of this class. The term “urbanities” is used here to describe the myriad phenomenological traits and processes of urban life and cultural experience – from polarizations of poverty and wealth, to the rapid urbanization of cities. The term “urbanisms” in turn is used here to describe the diverse physical products and characteristics of the urban landscape – from the psychedelic streetscapes of Tokyo, to the slums of Dacca. Moving across urban history in time and space, this course will offer comparative perspectives on attitudes to the city and nature across various places and cultures. Where do they overlap? Where do they separate? How do their cross-influence one another?

The following are the specific learning objectives of this course:

1. To provide a solid, comparative, historically grounded exploration of urban design/urban landscape development in multiple contexts.
2. To educate students to read the formal characteristics of the urban landscape as the evolving results of multiple socio-cultural forces - culture, equality, citizenship, marketability.

3. To expose students to culture-specific attitudes and methodologies of urban design and intervention.
4. To allow students the opportunity to critique existing projects and efforts, and develop arguments and positions that support their analysis.

## **COURSE STRUCTURE & TEACHING METHOD**

The course will be structured around **10 themes**, each examined through a lecture, discussion or reading/s

Each class will consist of a 1 hr lecture, followed by 30 minute q & a, and a 30 minute discussion on the required weekly readings. The remaining time will be given to the development of the class assignment. Final presentations of student assignments will be reviewed by an invited jury.

## **REQUIRED COURSE READER**

***“The Emerging Asian City: Concomitant Urbanities & Urbanisms”*** edited by Vinayak Bhatne (Routledge 2012)

This 24-chapter volume is a comprehensive survey of the multi-faceted forces and confluences – social, political, historic – that are shaping the urban landscape of Asia today. Students will read selected chapters each week as outlined in the class calendar.

For every class each student will submit, based on the readings:

1. One sentence on something that stood out for them, or they felt strongly about.
2. One sentence on something they disagreed with.
3. One sentence on something that they did not understand (OPTIONAL)

This weekly submission will be tracked, and will count towards the grade for class participation.

## **GRADING**

Grading will be based on a mid-term assignment, and the final design project. The grade breakdown will be as follows:

Mid-term	40%
Final project	50%
Class participation	10%
Total	100 %

## **CLASS CALENDAR**

### **Week 1: The Invisible Forces behind the Visible City – A Trans-national Perspective**

This introductory lecture will overview the socio-cultural phenomena and issues that change the intentions and expectations of urban life in different parts of the world? Who are the actors and decision-makers that create and sustain cities in various parts of the world? How do cities actually work in various parts of the world?

This introductory lecture will also overview the 10 thematic lectures that follow and identify their overlaps and differences, and spell out their relevance and reasons for selection.

*Class Readings: Introduction: Framing the Asian City, pp. 1-12*  
*Epilog: Engaging the Asian City, pp. 265-266*  
*Chapter 24 – The “Dubai Effect,” pp. 254-264*

### **Week 2: Situating the City**

Across urban history, the specific location of an urban habitat and its relationship to existing geographic and ecological elements has been as much the result of practical considerations as cultural attitudes and beliefs. Some cities emerged through their fortuitous location along important trading routes – such as the Silk Route, other cities like Changhan and Kyoto were situated with intricate relationships to mountains and rivers based on both climatic as well as religious beliefs. Others like Tokyo and Los Angeles find themselves on fragile terrains or what Mike Davis has called “Ecologies of Fear.” This lecture will overview the diverse relationships of city and nature through a cultural lens.

*Class Readings: Chapter 11: The Changing Face of Chandigarh’s Capitol, pp. 119-128*  
*Chapter 20 – Reshaping Hong Kong, pp. 213-224*

### **Week 3: Publicness and Public Space**

Public life and its urban manifestations are profound barometers of a culture. The plaza, for instance, that originated from the Greek democratic ideal of the *agora*, was largely absent in the non-Western world until colonial times. Public life was largely centered on streets, temple and mosque grounds, markets and water tanks, reflecting a non-democratic and non-egalitarian social structure. Many such patterns thrive to this day, particularly in smaller towns in the non-Western world, expanding the rubric of what we typically consider “contemporary.” This lecture will offer a comparative analysis of traditional public spaces, such as the plaza, the square and the street and trace their formal and behavioral differences from Europe to Asia.

*Class Readings: Ch 15: Public Space and the Search for Identity in Post-War Japan, pp. 158-167*

#### **Week 4: The Land-Water Interface**

From the Rialto of Venice and the Ghats of Varanasi, and from Shanghai's Bund to Mumbai's Marine Drive, the city to water interface has merged urban and ecological design with cultural expressions and statements. This lecture will survey this land-to water nexus simultaneously as a urban design and social catalyst.

*Class Readings: Chapter 3 – Rereading Taj Mahal and its Environs, pp. 36-45*

#### **Week 5: The Agency of Water – Scarcity, Abundance & Urbanism in Dialogue**

The looming water crisis is one of the most pressing challenges facing planners and urbanists today. While arid desert megacities such as Tehran and Riyadh grapple with the issues of water paucity, other metropolises like Mumbai, despite an annual monsoon flooding, still face a water shortage due to inadequate harvesting and bad infrastructure. The issue of water stress in many parts of the world is not so much an issue of water availability, but inadequate distribution and weak policy. This lecture will overview the subject of urban water from a historical perspective, while tracing their physical embodiments – from the aquaducts and fountains of Rome, and the water tanks of Khiva to the acequias of New Mexico -provoking reflections on their implications to landscape design and community development.

*Class Readings: Ch. 8 – The Death and Life of Traditional Aquatic Settlements in Thailand, pp. 85-94*

#### **Week 6: The Transportation Palimpsest**

The cultural differences in urban mobility are some of the most decisive yet undermined aspects of urban design. In India, while two-wheelers still remain the dominant mode of transportation, the very patterns of non-lane driving in itself is a significant contrast to normative European and American trends. Meanwhile, even as cities across the US now promote walkability as their overarching agenda, cities in emerging economies like India and China produce and sell close to 20,000 cars per day. This lecture will examine this dichotomy as well as ongoing efforts in both worlds towards balancing the aspirations of a rising middle-class with the making of a liveable city.

*Class Readings: Chapter 5: Axes & Alleyways, pp. 56-65*

#### **Week 7: Mid Term presentations of assignments**

#### **Week 8: Sacred Texts and Sub-texts**

In many cities, particularly in Asia and South America, the two conventional dimensions of urbanity – the public, and the private – are intersected, even superseded at times, by

a dominant sacred dimension. Across India, for instance, innumerable, anonymous wayside shrines illegally encroach the public realm, marking points of solace for the millions of underserved that simply want a stake in the city. These shrines eventually become the centres of micro-communities, and eventually even the centres of entire towns. This lecture will focus on this phenomenon, discussing issues of populism, appropriation and inclusiveness in the practice of landscape design.

*Class Readings: Ch. 1: Anointed Cities – The Incremental Urbanism of Hindu India, pp. 17 - 26*

## **Week 9: Imported Landscapes & their Legacies**

This lecture will examine the legacies of collisions and infusions of Western paradigms in the non-Western urban landscape. The most obvious is Colonialism: Panaji became the first gridded city in India; Galle replicated the bastide town in the tropical landscape of Sri Lanka, and the plan of Manila manifested the Law of the Indies town-making principles laid down by King Phillip II of Spain. The second dimension of this East-West dialectic happened between the 1930s-60s when new sovereign domains became the canvas for the most eminent Modern Western architects and planners, with entire cities – such as Chandigarh and Islamabad - designed to embody the latent desires of these new-born nations. Have these seemingly hegemonic places been assimilated, critiqued, or rejected by the generations that have followed?

*Class Readings: Tensions pp. 95-98*

*Chapter 10: Macau Paradox pp. 110-118*

*Chapter 13: An (almost) all American City, pp. 139-147*

## **Week 10: Parallel Ecologies - Landscapes of Informality**

This lecture will focus on the landscapes of impoverishment, poverty, illegality and informality as alternative cultures to the franchised city. Discussions will include ongoing efforts and interventions and their methods, successes and failures. Places will range from Dharavi - one of Asia's largest slums, spread over 0.67 square miles in Mumbai, with over 600,000 people, with rents as low as four US dollars per month, and Torre David, the 700-family possessed and appropriated skyscraper in Venezuela, to the emerging syndrome of homelessness in Japan.

*Class Readings: Chapter 7 – Nostalgia, Representation & Gentrification in historic Damascus, pp. 75-84*

*Chapter 10: Making Way for a Global Metropolis, pp. 193-202*

## **Week 11: Emerging Notions of the Ecological City**

Numerous emerging post-industrial urban models are now emphasizing prerogatives of sustainability, pedestrian dominance, incrementalism, non-utopian planning and cultural appropriateness. Putrajaya, Malaysia's 11,300-acre built-from-scratch "environment-friendly" administrative capital was developed to both alleviate Kuala Lumpur's congestion as well as become a new-nationalistic manifestation. The American anti-

sprawl movement - New Urbanism – and its interconnected streets grids and figural open spaces are manifested in new towns such as Lavasa in India and Dos Rios in the Philippines. The 700-hectare new city of Masdar in Abu Dhabi's is designed to supposedly achieve Carbon Neutrality and supply all of its energy needs using state-of-the-art renewable technologies. This lecture will discuss the efficacy and promise of such models and ideas.

*Class Readings: Chapter 21: China's Emerging New Town Movement, pp. 225-233  
Chapter 22: Vertical Urbanism, Horizontal Urbanity, pp. 234-243*

## **Week 12: CLASS ASSIGNMENT DISCUSSIONS**

## **Week 13: CLASS ASSIGNMENT DISCUSSIONS**

## **Week 14: PRE-FINAL REVIEWS**

## **Week 14: FINAL REVIEWS & FINAL ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION**

### **ASSIGNMENT DESCRIPTION**

There will be two assignments for this course:

**The Mid Term assignment will be a 3000 word paper** on a topical comparative or cross-cultural issue. The exact topic and paper structure will be decided mutually by the student and instructor in the first two weeks. The intent is to use this topic as an intellectual lens to understand the overlaps and differences across nations and cultures and extract positions and conclusions. Studies can include phenomenological subjects, for eg. "Trans-national Governance Structures and their impact on the Urban Landscape;" formal investigations, for eg. "Street Typology Variations between Europe and East-Asia;" or historical examinations, for eg. "A Comparative Study of the Evolutions of Kyoto and Rome". **This assignment will be due on the Mid-Term date outlined in the Course Calender.**

**The Final assignment will be an analytical comparative mapping exercise.** Students will collect, interpret and represent at a consistent scale and through a consistent representational technique, at least 12 examples of a common theme/element/city across a variety of cultures. The diagrams will be accompanied by caption text, a 500 word abstract on the intention of the study, and a 500 word conclusion on what has been inferred from it. The intent of this exercise is to have students understand the formal elements of the urban landscape and their simultaneous cultural variations – all as prototypes for application in their studios and beyond. Studies can include large scale studies, for eg. "Relationships of City and Ecology;" middle-scale examinations, for eg. "Urban Grids Across Cultures;" or small-scale studies, for eg. "Public Space Typologies in Asia." **This assignment will be due on the Final Assignment date outlined in the Course Calender.**

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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