



Critical Social Sustainability

Lecturer: Dr Miri Lavi-Neeman,

3 hours once a week, 3 academic credits. Under graduate. 113.1.0036

It is argued by some that Sustainability is now the dominant framework for understanding present environmental challenges. And indeed the term is everywhere --in activism, industry conservation ecology, policy circles and popular culture. But the increasing popularity and perhaps overuse of the term presents both scholars and practitioners with some challenges— with such loose and even contradictory definitions and meanings, does the term and its application means anything at all or is it just a trope or a buzzword? A close look at the multiple and at times competing definitions of sustainability, challenges us with no less than our vision of the society we aspire to be-- the culture we prioritize, our values, our understandings of ethics and nature, of our planet . It raises therefore controversial questions about core social and ecological values—what should be sustained? Economic growth? Ecosystems regardless of economic value? Who should benefit? Other species? Future generations? Whose needs should be prioritize or considered? And, in what time frame?

The goal of this course is to move beyond the fuzzy uses of sustainability towards a more rigorous understanding of the concept. It is an attempt to learn the limits and the possibilities of “sustainability” and explore the concept as ecologically sound, socially effective, ethically defensible and/or technologically achievable concept. The course focuses on available definitions and discourses, underlying sustainability practices and regimes and on controversies around the arguably win-win goals of economic growth, environmental integrity, and social equity. The course draws heavily on perspectives developed in geography and urban theory, and takes the urban environment as its main arena of explorations, but it provides ways to evaluate sustainability as concept and as practice beyond the urban setting.

The course is organized in four parts:

In part one: **Theoretical Introduction** - we present prevalent mainstream definitions of sustainability and evaluate in a critical way the central concept used to measuring sustainability: ecological footprint and social capital.

Part two: **Sustainable Politics**-- draws on texts from critical urban geography & urban political ecology, to understand the relationship between sustainability, regimes of economic growth, (development), governance, and community.

Part three : **Sustainable Practice**-- focus on how sustainability might look on the ground, in terms of housing, health, transportation, agriculture and look at different efforts, forms of activism and politics, to create spaces that are both socially just and more sustainable.

In Part four students will present their own research projects and conclusions.

Grading:

- **Attendance and Participation (20%):**
This course is a discussion-driven seminar. Therefore Students are responsible to read materials and come ready to discuss them and submit all assignments in time (listed below. Everyone must join the discussion.
- **Mid semester assignment (20%):**
In -class assignment in teams, summarizing part 1.
- **Reading responses (20%):**
Over the semester each student is responsible to write a short response paper for any 4 of the meetings. The response should be approx. 500 words at length, and include a short description of each reading and some thought insights or questions raised by them. Each meeting, two students will craft 2 discussion questions that engage with the reading.
- **Final project (40%):**
As a final project students will submit a take home exam part of which will be a research paper related to either an aspect of sustainability (housing, health, water, energy gardening etc) or analyzing some on the ground project or plan to apply sustainability. Student will have in either case to address 1) how sustainability is defined and measured in their papers and 2) Address conflicts, controversies and dilemma that arise implementing these projects (or policies). Papers are submitted one week after the end of the semester and a short introduction of the project will be presented in the last two meetings to the entire class for group feedback.

Course themes and schedule:

Part I: Theoretical Introduction

Class 1: The Rise of Sustainability

Course Logistics and Methods

Readings:

- Wheeler, Stephen M., and Timothy Beatley, eds. *Sustainable Urban Development Reader*. Routledge, 2014.. (ch 11: excerpts from the brutland commission report, the rio declaration, Agenda 21, and the millennium development goals. Pp 59-63, 72-79)
- Vos, Robert O. "Defining sustainability: a conceptual orientation." *Journal of Chemical Technology and Biotechnology* 82.4 (2007): 334-339.

Class 2: Defining Sustainability

Readings: (choose 3)

- Rees, William E. "Is 'sustainable city' an oxymoron?." *Local environment* 2.3 (1997): 303-310.
- Marcuse, Peter. "Sustainability is not enough." *Environment and Urbanization* 10.2 (1998): 103-112.
- Sneddon, Chris, Richard B. Howarth, and Richard B. Norgaard. "Sustainable development in a post-Brundtland world." *Ecological economics* 57.2 (2006): 253-268.
- Redclift, Michael. "Sustainable development (1987-2005): an oxymoron comes of age." *SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT-BRADFORD-* 13.4 (2005): 212.

Class 3: Critical look at measuring sustainability: carrying capacity

Movie: The Zero Impact Man

Readings:

- Bond, Alan, Angus Morrison-Saunders, and Jenny Pope. "Sustainability assessment: the state of the art." *Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal* 30.1 (2012): 53-62.
- Rees, William, and Mathis Wackernagel. "Urban ecological footprints: why cities cannot be sustainable—and why they are a key to sustainability." *Urban Ecology*. Springer US, 2008. 537-555.
- Sayre, Nathan F. "The genesis, history, and limits of carrying capacity." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 98.1 (2008): 120-134.

Class 4: Critical look at measuring sustainability: social capital

Readings:

- Evans, Bob, et al. *Governing sustainable cities*. Taylor & Francis, 2013. Chapter 2: p. 11-34.
- DeFilippis, James. "The myth of social capital in community development." *Housing policy debate* 12.4 (2001): 781-806.
- And, 1 of the following--
- Fine, Ben. "They f** k you up those social capitalists." *Antipode* 34.4 (2002): 796-799.
- Bebbington, Anthony. "Sharp knives and blunt instruments: Social capital in development studies." *Antipode* 34.4 (2002): 800-803.
- Williamson, Thad. "The usefulness—and limitations—of social capital as an analytical tool for progressives." *Antipode* 34.4 (2002): 809-811.

Class 5: In class Mid- term assignment in teams

Part II: Politics, Sustainability and Urban space **regimes of economic growth and development**

Class 6: Sustainability as utopia

Readings:

- Harvey, David. *Spaces of hope*. Vol. 7. Univ of California Press, 2000. Ch 8: the spaces of utopia, chapter 9: dialectical utopianism. Pp133-196.
- Recommended:
Callanbach, Ernest, and Anthony Vidler. "Ecotopia." *Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery/Southern Alberta Art Gallery* (1975).379-384

Class 7: Sustainability and environmental and social justice

Readings:

- Walker, Gordon. "Beyond distribution and proximity: exploring the multiple spatialities of environmental justice." *Antipode* 41.4 (2009): 614-636.
- Krueger, Rob, and Lydia Savage. "City-Regions and Social Reproduction: A 'Place' for Sustainable Development?." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 31.1 (2007): 215-223.

Class 8: Social sustainability

Movie: occupy the farm

Readings:

- Krueger, Rob, and Julian Agyeman. "Sustainability schizophrenia or "actually existing sustainabilities?" toward a broader understanding of the politics and promise of local sustainability in the US." *Geoforum* 36.4 (2005): 410-417.
- Vallance, Suzanne, Harvey C. Perkins, and Jennifer E. Dixon. "What is social sustainability? A clarification of concepts." *Geoforum* 42.3 (2011): 342-348.
- Davidson, Mark. "Social sustainability: a potential for politics?." *Local Environment* 14.7 (2009): 607-619.

Part III: Sustainability on the Ground

Guest speaker: Tomer Yaffe

Community development and sustainability in an Israeli city

Sustainability, technology

Readings:TBA

Class 11: Economic redevelopment: local Perspective

Readings:

Tal, Alon. "To make a desert bloom: The Israeli agricultural adventure and the quest for sustainability." *Agricultural History* (2007): 228-257.

websites:

<http://www.sustainabilitylabs.org/wadiattir/about/>

<http://english.shatil.org.il/issue-areas/social-justice/local-sustainable-economic-development/>

class 12: Students presentations

class 13: Students presentations