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Факультет социологии

Программа дисциплины

Cultural Psychology and Sociology of Urban Living

(«Социолого-психологические исследования городской жизни»)

для направления/ специальности 040100.62 «Социология» подготовки бакалавра

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Course Overview

According to the UN Population Fund, since 2007 for the first time in history over half of Earth population lives in cities. But what is a city? And what is the nature of everyday life in it? What, to invert the title of Louis Wirth's famous paper, does 'urbanism' mean as a way of life? In this course we will unfold the nature of urban everyday life from a broadly construed nested ecological/transactional standpoint, that is, looking at multiple levels of organization of life (from a single person going about their routine daily activities; through the interactions between multiple people as they self-organize into various social forms of common living, such as neighborhoods or 'the public'; through the spatial embeddedness of human patterns of common activities in urban spatial and architectural forms; to the broad processes of urban change in context of globalization). We will examine these levels as they all project upon everyday life—that 'common denominator,' as Henri Lefebvre termed it, of the various facets and dimensions of social and economic life.

The main purpose of this class is to understand urbanism as a complex process, and to examine how the various dimensions and domains of urban living arise out of everyday life and, simultaneously, enable, structure, organize, restrict, and project themselves into everyday life. Thus, our point of reference at all times will be the lived experience of a person inhabiting an urban milieu. We will bring in perspectives from urban sociology, urban psychology, and urban geography to explore these complexities.

Course Format

Classroom work consists of eight three-hour seminars using a video conference connection between Aalborg University and Higher School of Economics. Readings are assigned for each meeting after the introductory lecture. Note that our online meetings will require intense interaction and discussion that works best when everybody is on the common ground provided by the reading materials. In addition to classroom work and reading assignments, the course incorporates a small scale visual sociological research project.

Classroom Etiquette in Online Teleconference Setting

Maintaining productive interaction over teleconference presents distinct challenges. Please come to the class on time and turn off your cell phones and other mobile electronic devices or switch them to silent mode. Please be courteous and respectful to other students. Our classroom interaction will be in English. Make sure that you speak loud and clear. Do not be afraid to speak and do not be shy of speaking (and writing!) in English! Also, do not be shy of moving closer to the microphone and camera and speaking loud (tip: try to speak a bit slower and louder than you would in an English class). This is not an English class, and performance in terms of grammar, pronunciation, etc., will not be part of grading.

Assignments and Grading

You are expected to be present and active in class and to prepare for the class by reading the assigned material in advance and by preparing a set of 3-6 photographs of urban environment to discuss in class. Use our discussions in class and the readings as a source of ideas for taking these photographs. In addition, the course involves a short photo-essay project (5-6 pages, or 1000-1500 words, plus photographs) on a topic of your interest. Some sample topics are listed below. You will be asked to take a walk in the city and take photographs that document the topic of your interest. The aim is to produce a grounded interpretation of a certain visible occurrence in the city, in terms of how it reflects the processes we discuss in our classes.

Grading will be based primarily on the photo-essay. Repeated absences (more than 20% of classes missed) will result in deduction of 15% from the final grade. Please make every effort to notify the instructors as soon as possible of any circumstances (religious holidays, illness, emergency, etc.) that may lead to your absence from the class or a delay in submission of the final paper. We will try to reasonably accommodate these circumstances on a case-by-case basis.

Note that utilizing required readings is a necessity for acceptance of the final paper. Moreover, an A (8-10) for the final paper requires additional literature review, in addition to using required readings.

Please use American Psychological Association format (APA Style, 5th or 6th ed.) for formatting your written work and references (you can find guidelines online, and you have plenty of 6th ed. styled reference examples in the syllabus).

Coursework should be written individually in English and submitted to Nikita Kharlamov by email (nikita@hum.aau.dk) by 11:59 PM Aalborg time on the due date.

Course website:
http://people.hum.aau.dk/~nikita/urban_s14.html

Course Plan and Reading Assignments

Topic 1 (January 23, Kharlamov & Pokrovsky)
Human, City, Community, World: Varieties of Settlement Organization

We will discuss the basic idea of urban living and urban everyday life, and what kinds of different systems, processes, domains, and levels of organizations are involved in its organization. We will search for inspiration in the work of Walter Benjamin, Guy Debord, and Georges Perec, who famously recorded their wanderings and perceptions of cities of their time and place.

No readings assigned.

Topic 2 (January 30, Kharlamov & Pokrovsky)
Person-Environment Transactions and the Nested Ecology of Urban Living

This class is dedicated to basic concepts and models that we will use in our study of the city. In particular, we will explore what is known as 'transactional' approach in person-environment-behavior research, and discuss Urie Bronfenbrenner's nested ecological model of human development.

- 🕮 Simmel, G. (1997). The metropolis and mental life (H. Gerth, Trans.). In D. Frisby & M. Featherstone (Eds.), *Simmel on culture: Selected writings* (pp. 174-185). London, England: Sage. (Original work published in 1903).
- 🕮 Werner, C. M., & Altman, I. (2000). Humans and nature: Insights from a transactional view. In S. Wapner, J. Demick, T. Yamamoto, & H. Minami (Eds.), *Theoretical perspectives in environment-behavior research: Underlying assumptions, research problems, and methodologies* (pp. 21-37). New York, NY: Kluwer Academic / Plenum Publishers.

Topic 3 (February 6, Kharlamov & Pokrovsky)
Perceiving, Remembering, and Going About the City

What does it mean to perceive environment? How do we receive, process, organize, and make sense of environmental information and stimuli? Is our role that of passive receivers or active explorers of environment? How do we plan our actions in, and find our way about, the city? We will discuss the basics of cognitive information processing, storage, and retrieval, the active nature of our perception, and the troubles of remembering where things are and how to get to them.

- 🕮 Milgram, S. (2010). The experience of living in cities. In Blass, T. (Ed.), *Stanley Milgram. The individual in a social world: Essays and experiments* (3rd expanded ed., pp. 11-28). London, England: Pinter & Martin. (Original work published in 1970).
- 🕮 Tversky, B. (1992). Distortions in cognitive maps. *Geoforum, 23*, 131-138.

Topic 4 (February 13, Kharlamov & Pokrovsky)
City Plan: Concentric Circles, Grids, Complex Patterns (and Rivers and Mountains Too)

How is the city organized physically? What are the basic elements that comprise 'urban environment'? How are they connected between or separated from each other? We will discuss some of the basic ideas and models of urban planning, including the Burgess concentric circles model from the Chicago School, the idea of modernity in urban planning, and the purported collapse of this idea in late twentieth century. We will also discuss the different actors and factors that influence the city plan on various levels, and the ways in which human everyday life ultimately is embedded in this physical structure.

- 🕮 Golubchikov, O., & Phelps, N. A. (2011). The political economy of place at the post-socialist urban periphery: Governing growth on the edge of Moscow. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers (New Series), 36*, 425-440.

Topic 5 (February 20, Pokrovsky)
Orders of Public Interaction

What does it mean to be 'in the public'? How does one interact with others in public space? We will discuss the basic tension between public and private behavior, and attempt to unfold it into a complex dimension with multiple degrees and possible regimes of 'public-ness'. We will draw on the work of symbolic interactionists and on the focus theory of normative conduct to explore the ways in which complex social behaviors in public settings are ordered, and how individuals navigate these situations.

- 🕮 Keizer, K, Lindenberg, S., & Steg, L. (2008). The spreading of disorder. *Science, 322*, 1681-1685.
- 🕮 Kharlamov, N. A. (2013). On hearing an organ in a weird place. *Lo squaderno, 28*, 9-11.
- 🕮 Valsiner, J. (2006). The street. *Khora II (Mind, Land & Society), 5*, 69-84.

Topic 6 (February 27, Kharlamov & Pokrovsky)
Culture, Community, and Class: Courtyard, Neighborhood, District

What are the larger social units into which humans self-organize in their settlements? Who are the 'Muscovites' and how can we know one when we see one? Can we infer the

social and spatial structuring of the city just by looking at the physical environment? How do different people culturally mark the city? We will discuss the social and cultural structure of the city, particularly focusing on the culturally and historically specific phenomena of 'courtyard' and of 'creative class' as potentially discernible in the environment of Moscow. We will explore the notions of identity and belonging, the ways in which they are anchored in urban environment. Our methodological anchor will be Jerry Krase's idea of 'vernacular landscape' and his visual sociological approach to it.

- 🕮 Krase, J. (2012). *Seeing cities change: Local culture and class*. Aldershot, England: Ashgate. Introduction (pp. 1-30), Ch. 5 (pp. 139-158).

Topic 7 (March 6, Kharlamov? & Pokrovsky)
Globalization, Mobility, and Splintering Urbanism

What are the consequences of globalization for urban environment and urban living? How does the increased mobility (of humans, of commodities, of signs, of information, of corporations) change the constitution of urbanism? What attracts people to Moscow and what makes them move on (or out)? We will discuss the idea of 'global city' and the push and pull factors that influence urban populations. We will also explore the changing practices of consumption, and the ways in which these are reflected in the environment.

- 🕮 Sassen, S. (2002). Cities in a world economy. In S. S. Fainstein & S. Campbell (Eds.), *Readings in urban theory* (Second ed., pp. 32-56). Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Topic 8 (March 13, Pokrovsky)
Urban Futures: Concentration or De-Urbanization

What is the future of urban living? Are people going to continue to flock to highly urbanized and highly concentrated urban agglomerations? What are the ecological repercussions of concentration and de-concentration? Does 'downshifting' have potential to become a mass social process? We will discuss the potential future of urban everyday life in light of ecological, cultural, economic, and psychological challenges for urbanism as a way of life. We will also try and pull the different strings together, and to gather a general sense of what we can understand through the lens of person-environment-behavior transactions when these are mobilized at different levels of organization.

- 🕮 Pokrovsky, N., & Guseva, U. (2012, April 9). Alternative to urbanization life after the city. *livebetter Magazine*. Retrieved from http://livebettermagazine.com/article/alternative-to-urbanization-life-after-the-city/
- 🕮 Urry, J. (2008). Climate change, travel and complex futures. *British Journal of Sociology, 59*, 261-279.

Academic Honesty Policy

We expect you to abide by the norms of academic ethics and integrity. In particular, we urge you to be careful with preparation of your project and final term paper and to avoid plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and alteration or fabrication of data, as defined by the Higher School of Economics policy on academic integrity (http://www.hse.ru/org/hse/antiplagiat_info/plagiat). Note that sometimes minor violations of these policies can occur due to negligence (e.g. accidentally failing to properly identify a

quotation). This is not an excuse, and therefore we suggest that you carefully prepare and proofread your work before submission.

Potential Themes for In-Class Photo-Based Discussions and the Photo-Essay

These are just some suggestions, in no particular order (alphabetically listed), for your photographic expeditions into urban environments. You are welcome to narrow them down or to pick your own theme that is relevant to the themes of this course. The only requirement is that you take photographs yourself. You could also mix photographs that you will have taken during the course with photographs that you have taken in the past (during travels, or just snapped in your daily life), as long as all of them are made by you.

- ‘Is it really the same city on all these photographs?!’
- Abandoned and derelict spaces
- Children, adults, and elderly, and their spaces and places in the city
- Downshifting and alternative lifestyles
- Gentrification and urban redevelopment
- Living in a satellite town
- Loci of social interactions and non-interactions
- Patterns of pedestrianism
- Pollution and ecological damage
- Public and semi-public art
- Public identity displays
- Public transit vs. automobility: Who shall survive?
- Selfie and instant self-communication
- Spaces of consumerism
- Suburbanism, Moscow Style
- The hidden urban infrastructures: Sewers, water and heating, power lines, communication networks
- The smallest, minutest, most inconsequential activity in urban environment that you could possibly think of
- Trash, litter, cleanup, and maintenance
- Urbanism in the wild: Can you find markers urban living outside the city?
- Varieties of urban commerce
- Visible markers of ethnic and religious communities and neighborhoods
- Waterways and waterfronts
- Wayfinding and navigation aids: Signage, maps, plans, directions