Description and Goals

This seminar is a core part of the hub of urban studies activities being developed under the guidance of Interim GC President Joy Connolly. It is designed to equip advanced doctoral students in the humanities, social sciences, and urban-oriented sciences with the theoretical perspectives that will help them situate and conceptualize their research questions and the research methods they can use to investigate and begin to answer those questions. To structure the study of theory and method, we will apply them to the case study of neighborhood change in Queens along Vernon Boulevard and the surrounding Hunters Point neighborhood slated to become HQ2 for Amazon. We treat this neighborhood ecology of places of work, consumption, recreation, and residence both as constituent elements in forming local communities (and a sense of belonging) and as reflections of larger national and transnational processes in the urban economy, society, culture, environment, and polity. Each seminar session will devote two hours to discussing theory, method, and their application to the case study, with an additional hour devoted to workshopping student research projects (related both to your own projects and to the case study).

Although cities date back thousands of years, we begin our journey with the rise of the industrial, migrant and immigrant city in the 19th century in Western Europe and North America and extend that journey to include how these cities have evolved in the 21st century and what links them with the rest of the world. Cities are places that people make, in which men, women and children live, work, play, socialize, and engage civic life. They create architectural settings and physical artifacts that intersect with topography, geography, climate, and region. They also form, and are formed by, institutions and organizations of all kinds. The seminar will consider many perspectives on cities and their metropolitan regions: as political jurisdictions, as sites of production and construction, as sites of consumption, as places of residence and social reproduction, as seed-beds for the creation of political and cultural movements, as complex webs of movement from home to work to shopping and play, as nodes in global flows, as sites of inclusion and exclusion and home to competing racial and ethnic groups, as hubs of communication, and as sites of knowledge creation and value and norm definition (and rejection). In more mundane institutional terms, we can think of city as the state writ small (whether as city hall, welfare office, or police precinct), as factory or office building, as rail yard or airport or internet switching center, as real estate market, cathedral, university, theater district, street life, night life – as life both on center stage and in the shadows. We have chosen to focus on one commercial-industrial-residential neighborhood as a case study because it illustrates the importance of these many contexts.

The first semester of the seminar will focus on basic theoretical understandings of how to analyze the urban processes at play in the case study and individual student projects. The second semester will focus on the variety of methods deployed in urban studies research and the various policy actors which seek to influence urban dynamics. A limited number of small grants to support summer research will be available to some students continuing through the second semester or joining the seminar in the second semester.

Each student will be expected i) to master the theoretical and methodological material presented in the seminar, ii) to contribute to the field work and archival research on the case study (with the goal of producing public-facing research results), and iii) to use the theoretical and substantive material in the course to advance your own urban studies research project.
All the seminar meetings pay attention to how we address displacement, migration, internationalism, nationalism, diaspora, and cosmopolitanism. Who lives and works in the shadows of formal systems? How do we find them? Understand their lives? Grapple with, and record, their hopes and dreams?

Requirements and Assignments

Students will document and analyze one aspect of the case study, applying theoretical or methodological perspectives and tools appropriate to your background and your own research agenda. You will report periodically to the seminar on your progress and findings. This may culminate in a collective report from the seminar, but you should also feel free to use this assignment to develop a conference paper, dissertation chapter, exhibition, etc. of your own.

Each student is also expected to come to seminar prepared to discuss all of the assigned texts unless we specifically adopt a “divide and conquer” strategy for the week in question. To assist you in preparing comments, you are required to participate in the class blog. This means that every week you will post short responses to the readings and your classmates’ comments. You should write these entries as a first-person narrative in which you reflect upon what the readings mean for you. You should feel free to post supplemental materials including drawings, photos, articles, etc.

As you read, discuss, and blog, keep these questions in mind: “what it says?” referring to the text; “what I say?” referring to how you analyze and interpret the texts, and “so what?” referring to why this reading matters. These questions also apply to your description, analysis, and interpretation of your aspect of the case study. Your weekly post is due 9:00 am Monday morning.

Grading

- 25% class participation including the blog
- 25% seminar presentation of your progress on investigating the case study
- 50% final term report on your findings and/or progress on your aspect of the or your own project

Please Take Heed: Courtesy and Respect!

Attendance is required. You will fail this course if you have more than two unexcused absences. Be on time: you will be marked absent if more than 10 minutes late for class.

No incompletes will be granted except in the case of an extreme medical or family emergency, supported by a doctor’s note or other written proof of the seriousness of the situation at hand.

Academic integrity. All assignments and contributions must be your original work, produced for this class and no other. You will fail this course if you: 1) submit work used for another course; 2) copy material and submit it as your own, without using quotations and citing your source, or in any other way represent the work of another person as your own; 3) cheat, meaning ask for, receive, or share information with another student or from unauthorized source, including your cell phone, during an exam or assignment. Plagiarized work will be reported to the GC / CCNY Academic Integrity Committee, as per the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity.

Seminar Outline and Assignments

Class 1. January 28. Introduction to the goals and procedures of the class.
Class 2. February 4. **Scale, Density, and Complexity: Sociologists Frame the Modern City**

**Theory**


**Approaches to the Case Study**

Come prepared to select an aspect of the case study which you would like to research.

Explore the neighborhood fabric of New York City and the LIC case study in the 1940s at


and

http://www.1940snewyork.com/

**Workshop**

We will demonstrate how to use [http://www.oasisnyc.net/map.aspx](http://www.oasisnyc.net/map.aspx) to investigate building-block-lot detailed information on properties in New York City.


Also explore maps of redlining circa 1935-1940 in U.S. cities from [Mapping Inequality: Redlining in New Deal America](https://dsl.richmond.edu/panorama/redlining/#loc=4/36.71/-96.93&opacity=0.8); [MappingSegregationDC.org](http://www.1940snewyork.com/)

Class 3. February 11. **The End of the City? Place, Space, and Urbanization in the 21st Century**

**Theory**


Suggested for background


Approaches to the Case Study


Explore the street studies reported at Hall’s Superdiverse streets project: https://lsecities.net/research/data/cr/phase-1-super-diverse-streets-survey-comparisons-2015/en-gb#/.

Workshop

We will discuss how national and international backgrounds of ownership, workforce, supply sources, and customer base of neighborhood firms helps to shape places along the lines suggested by Hall’s work.

NO CLASS FEBRUARY 18. President’s Day

Class 4. February 25. City as Polity and State: Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Power and Fragmentation

Theory


University Press.

Suggested for background:


Approaches to the Case Study


Workshop

We will discuss how neighborhoods fit into the larger borough, city, regional, state, and national political jurisdictions and regulatory frameworks.

Class 5. March 4. City as Market: Production, Distribution, Consumption in the “New” Economy

Theory


Approaches to the Case Study


Workshop

We will discuss how the hierarchy of retail and wholesale consumption of products and services helps to
shape places and the quality of neighborhood life and the extent to which economic development policies (often in the form of real estate development) have influenced the evolution of Long Island City and your own research sites or topics.


*Theory*


*Approaches to the Case Study*


*Workshop*

We will discuss official plans and how they have affected Hunters Point/LIC.

https://longislandcityqueens.com/licplan/
https://www.nycedc.com/program/long-island-city
https://www1.nyc.gov/site/planning/plans/long-island-city-core/long-island-city-core.page
https://issuu.com/designtrustforpublicspace/docs/long_island_city_connecting_the_arts

Class 7. March 18. **City as Community: Neighborhoods, Streets, Sidewalks, Commerce**

*Theory*


Approaches to the Case Study


Maura McGee on Starbucks on Franklin Street.


Workshop

We will discuss actually how to study neighborhood social life in Hunters Point/LIC or your research site by taking an ethnographic approach to interactions in stores, cafes, nonprofit organizations, and other gathering places.

Some additional thoughts may be found in:


Class 8. March 25. Race and the Spatial Dimensions of Inequality in U.S. Cities

Theory


Approaches to the Case Study


**Workshop**

We will discuss the impact of racial segregation and structural racism (including its intersectional aspects with gender, sexuality, and class) on Hunters Point/LIC and your research sites or topics.

**Class 9. April 1. Form, Finance, and Commercial Architecture**

**Theory**


**Suggested for background**


**Approaches to the Case Study**


**Workshop**

We will discuss how commercial real estate finance affects Hunters Point/LIC and your research site.
Class 10. April 8. Space, Power, and Identity: Women, Children, and the City

Theory


Approaches to the Case Study


Workshop

We will discuss how sexuality, gender, family, and reproduction shape neighborhood dynamics in Hunters Point/LIC and your research site.

Methodological help may be found in:


Class 11. April 15. Everyday Life

Theory:


Approaches to the Case Study


Workshop

We will discuss how everyday life unfolds in Hunters Point/LIC and your research site.

**NO CLASS APRIL 22 Spring Break**

Class 12. April 29. *Gentrification and Other Forms of Neighborhood Change*

**Theory**


**Comparisons for background**


Approaches to the Case Study


**Workshop**

We will discuss how to define, measure, and study ‘gentrification’ in Hunters Point/LIC and your study site considering both its residential and commercial dimensions.


**Theory**


**Approach to Case Study**

Potential topics: green gentrification, the urban lead crisis, air pollution (e.g. Juliana Maantay), brownfields, coastal cities and climate change, cities and wildfires


**Workshop**

We will discuss trends in climate change, their present and potential impact, and ways to respond in Hunters Point/LIC and your research site.

Class 14. May 13. **The City and the Grassroots**

**Theory**


**Background**

March 2006 special issue on 25th anniversary of Castells’ *City and the Grass Roots, International*
Approaches to Case Study


Workshop

We will discuss the role of protest, social movements, and other forms of activism on the evolution of Hunters Point/LIC and your research site.
METHODS INVENTORY (Partial)

1. Archival research

   Sanborn maps, reverse directories, business directories, manuscript census

2. Field work

   Recording physical city (visual, auditory)
   Ethnography (participant observation) – field notes, coding
   In-depth interviewing – qualitative coding
   Oral history
   Experiments

3. Metrics

   Census and related data on resident demographics, family form, education, income, work, migration, births, deaths, health
   Employment and small business data and tax payments
   Administrative data on public service consumption, benefits
   Crime data
   Voting behavior, elected officials, civic engagement
   GIS visual display of data

4. Land use and building (empirics and regulations)

   Zoning and building codes and violations
   Tenure, residential versus commercial, investment, uses
   Real estate economics, markets, capital sources, profits, taxation
   Who is in the shadows of the formal systems? (Question applied to all methods)
   Industry and occupations structure of economy, maker economies, entrepreneurialism
   Trade, supply chains, demand chains
   Movement of goods and services in and out of points of transaction
   Commuting and daily mobility patterns for work, residence, shopping, recreation
   Infrastructure: roads, mass transit, airports, rail, communications, water, sewage, garbage

5. Language and understanding and meaning

   Languages and other forms of communication – translation
   Mass media
   Stories and folklore

6. Ecological influences

   Climate change
   Human-animal-earth interactions