PRINCIPLES OF URBAN DESIGN: TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE CITIES

Course Architecture 435/535
Term Fall 2008
Instructor Mark L. Gillem, PhD, AIA, AICP
Credits 4
Time Tuesdays 2:00-4:50 pm

LeCorbusier's Voisin Plan for Paris

Course Objectives. Designers are not a humble lot. Throughout history, prominent architects and planners have not been afraid to publish their proposals for urban design. Oftentimes, these proposals take the form of "Charters" or "principles" that have a significant impact on built form. This course is an introduction to these theories and to the practice of urban design. In this course, under four broad categories, students will analyze key theories of urban form that shape the study and design of cities. In the Analytical City, academics and practitioners have carefully analyzed existing conditions as a precursor to proposing detailed urban design principles. In the Circulation City, scholars have privileged streets and public ways as primary attributes of city form. In the Modernist City, functional efficiency and aesthetic clarity have been the priorities. More recently, in the Sustainable City, theorists and practitioners have been using smart growth principles and new urbanism to minimize the impacts of urban life. Underlying each of these theoretical positions are economic, political, and cultural forces that largely determine success and failure. The objective of this course is for students to develop an awareness of these theories, an understanding of how they have developed over time in response to socio-political forces, and an ability to use these theories in the critique of existing urban form.

Course Assignments. The main project will be the analysis of an urban setting built following one of the theoretical approaches presented in the course. This will include a discussion of the theory, presentation of its strengths and weaknesses, and a detailed critique of the actual setting. Students must also prepare weekly reading responses. These three page papers address issues raised by the week's readings (available as a course reader from the UO Bookstore). However, they are not simple summaries, rather they are critical reflections on the material presented and will serve as guides for in-class discussion. Students will also be expected to prepare for and participate in class debates about each theory. A final paper (15 pages minimum) will be required and will be on a subject related to the course material. There will be no final exam.

Course Structure. The course will meet once a week, so regular attendance is of paramount importance. Class sessions will consist of several parts that may include instructor-led presentations of the theory under review; student-led critical discussions of the theory and its application; and analyses of the applicability of the respective theory using debates and field exercises. Students will also be required to attend a one-day field trip to Portland and Vancouver, Washington on October 18, 2008 and attend a required City Design lecture.