

CORNELL UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARCHITECTURE, ARTS, AND PLANNING
CITY AND REGIONAL PLANNING DEPARTMENT

**CRP 6890: Cultural traverse
to sustainable development
Fortnightly Thu-Fri 6-8 pm**

**Fall 2009
Prof. Vietorisz
2 or 3 credits**

OBJECTIVE

This course continues in a more formal setting the lecture/discussion series that has been offered on the same topic during the last three semesters for individual signup under the title of Independent Study CRP 7970. According to the students who have attended, many courses are being offered at Cornell about specialized topics on sustainability. They found this one useful because it focused, rather, on the general cultural (including social and political) resistances to the unavoidable changes that make the prospective transition into a hazardous traverse.

By student request the series had evolved from an early version of mostly lectures, toward more intensive discussion about individual themes, with significant areas of agreement but also areas of sharp disagreement. This semester the course will involve, beside a few key readings, also a broader backup of optional literature sources which may be brought into the class exchanges by interested students. I am also asking those of you intending to participate to select a specific sustainability issue most relevant to your main professional planning or policy interest that brought you to Cornell. This main interest of yours will often not be a sustainability topic *per se*, but surely you can find a relevant sustainability aspect to it in order to focus the effort you put into the course. This will then keep you busy thinking about how the more general discussion translates into the details of your particular topic. Points of interest brought up concerning such details offer a welcome counterpoint to the general discussion.

An important, continuing theme involves the enormous, self-organized political support that the Net Generation of 15-30 year olds has poured into the Obama campaign of 2008 and which is likely to re-surface again in some form. Can we tap into this huge potential energy for supporting a self-organized process of transition to sustainable development which moves beyond pious lip service and aims at a real breakthrough, and if so, how? Last semester this was the most contentious issue.

ORGANIZATION

The course may be taken for 2 or 3 credits. The primary assignment for all participants is active and informed participation in class discussion. At the end of the semester, each student is asked to circulate to the entire class conclusions/comments on the discussions and their individual detailed topics of interest, of max 3 pages (otherwise they will not be read). Those registering for 3 credits are asked to submit term papers of about 8-12 pages centered on their specific sustainability topic.

CORE READINGS

- ** Donella Meadows, Jorgen Randers, Dennis L. Meadows (2004) *Limits to Growth: The 30-Year Update*. Chelsea Green Publishing Company. Highly controversial and hotly denied by special interests, this sets up the core issue of the course.
- ** T. Vietorisz *Traverse: The Cultural Transition to Sustainable Development* (draft). All statements in this rough draft are subject to debate, the more critical the more welcome.
- ** Brundtland Commission Report (1987) *Our Common Future*. New York, Oxford University Press. After a quarter century, the problems identified by this report have only gotten worse, and recommended measures are praised but not seriously implemented.
- ** H. E. Daly and J.B. Cobb (1994) *For the Common Good*, Boston, Beacon Press (esp. Ch. 12-14, 16-17). Notable for its focus on communities and for its correction of the U.S. national income series to reflect capital depletion falsely accounted for as income. This correction finds almost no growth over the long run; we have been living off capital.

OPENING OVERVIEW

- * Meadows *et al* (2004)
- * Porus Olpadwala and W. W. Goldsmith (1992) *The Sustainability of Privilege: Reflections on the Environment, the Third World City, and Poverty*. *World Development* (Pergamon) Vol. 20 No. 4, 627-640, April. Argues that sustainability became a problem when it hit the well-off; there has never been sustainability for the poor.

THEME 1 THE CHALLENGE: HUMANITY AT THE CROSSROADS

Population and overcrowding
Resource limits with energy as a key resource, and global warming
Growth at the top
Major inequalities within and between societies
The migration trap
Increasing worldwide access to nuclear menace
Decreasing resilience of highly interconnected systems
The mirage of technological solutions; Malthus re-nascent
** UN Brundtland Report (1987)
Optional: Donella Meadows (1991) *The Global Citizen*. Washington, DC, Island Press

THEME 2 DIAGNOSIS: EVOLUTIONARY PATH TO THE LOOMING SUSTAINABILITY CRISIS

Neolithic agricultural revolution as a key evolutionary divide
Lapse of limits on group size
Loss of voluntarily cooperative social relations with mutually respected autonomy
Advantage of large groups held together by hierarchy
Main opponent no longer nature but other humans: "modern society organized on the paradigm of war" (Sir Patrick Geddes)
* Dunbar, Robin (1996) *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Ch. 4, 6.
* Diamond, Stanley (1989) *In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization*. Transaction Pub. (Esp. chapters 1, 4, 8.)
Optional: Leonard Shlain (2004) *Sex Time and Power*, New York, Penguin Books.
Optional: Alison Jolly.(1999) *Lucy's Legacy: Sex and Intelligence in Human Evolution*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press. Superb, highly readable summary on evolution with emphasis on purpose, cooperation, sociality, and the evolution of intellect.

THEME 3 GOALS: WHERE THE TRAVERSE MUST ARRIVE FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Recovery of good social relations, at high levels of knowledge, technology, and complexity
No material growth at the top; only catch-up growth and a rising quality of living
Resource security: basic resources (food, water, energy); high-level resources (health education, information); and their necessary infrastructures
Resilience: region-by-region, near balance between population and most essential survival needs procurable from regional sources
Social issues underlying cooperation; main opponent once again to be nature, with its limited resources on a finite Earth
* Hawken, Paul, Lovins, Amory, and Lovins, L. Hunter (1999) *Natural Capitalism*. Boston, Little Brown. Ch. 3-8. (We can do far better with existing technologies)
* Thomas Homer-Dickson (2006) *The Upside of the Down*. Ch.
Optional: *European Sustainable Cities* (1996) available for download; for updates, see <http://sustainable-cities.eu/>
Optional: UNDP, UNEP, WRI (2000) *World Resources 2000-2001: People and ecosystems: The fraying web of life*. Download from and see periodic updates: <http://www.wri.org/>
Optional: IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) (2001) IPCC Special Report on The Regional Impacts of Climate Change http://www.grida.no/publications/other/ipcc_sr/. Download *Summary for Policymakers* and (for maps of ocean high level lines by region) *Annex E: Color plates*. For updates see same website.

THEME 4 OUTLOOK AT THE START OF THE TRAVERSE

- Power and the ambivalent nature of property
- Problems and strengths of high-market, socialist, and Third World societies
- U.S.-Cuba comparison: not just opposites
- India, China, Brazil: follow-the-leader vs. Brundtland
 - ** Daly and Cobb (1994)
 - Optional: Leonard Shlain (1998) *The Alphabet Versus the Goddess*. New York, Penguin Books. Literacy, left/right brain, fertility goddesses to warlord gods.
 - Optional: Cuba's Agricultural Revolution: A Return to Oxen and Organics, Ch 3, pp. 159-162 in UNDP, UNEP, WRI (2000) *World Resources 2000-2001: People and ecosystems: The fraying web of life*. Download from: http://pubs.wri.org/pubs_description.cfm?PubID=3027
 - Optional: North and Cameron (2003) *Rural Progress, Rural Decay*, Kumarian Press. Ch. 2- Louis Lefebvre, *Problems of Contemporary Development: Neoliberalism and its Consequences*; and Ch. 4 Louis Lefebvre, *Agriculture and Rural Development: a Critique of Establishmentarian Policies in Ecuador*.

THEME 5 WILD CARDS FOR GAMING THE TRAVERSE

- Women
- The Net Generation
- The knowledge society: interweaving of science and education
- Third World telecenters and global society as a network of communities
- Medical paradigm shift: changing the focus of healing
 - * Don Tapscott (2009) *Grown Up Digital: How the Net Generation is Changing Your World*. New York, McGraw-Hill York, McGraw-Hill
 - Optional: T. Wormald and M. Gaspar(2003) *Hungarian Telecottages*. In UNDP Information And Communication Technology Task Force, *Connected For Development—Information Kiosks and Sustainability*. Department Of Economic And Social Affairs, Ict Task Force Series 4, pp.191-198. Download from <http://www.unicttaskforce.org/wsis/books.asp>
 - Optional: Lewis Mehl-Madrona (2005) *Narrative Medicine*. Bear & Co, Rochester, VT.

THEME 6 WHAT TO DO: HOW WE CAN GET GOING

- Evolution cannot be planned in the usual sense: policy perspectives
- "Dancing with systems" as a synthesis
- Bottom-up progress: a sequential approach, driven by the example of successes
- Renewable-energy progress and largely middle-class society as precursors to growth control
- The U.S. financial crash and the growth compulsion of recovery policies
- The Third World urban problem of global sustainability
- Top-down synthesis: UN and the need for global coordination of semi-autonomous parts
 - * Meadows (2001) *Dancing with Systems*, *Whole Earth Magazine*, Winter. Download from <http://www.sustainer.org/pubs/Dancing.html>.

THEME 7 SUMMING UP: DYNAMICS OF A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

- Social relations of enablement
- Not nirvana but ever continued adaptation on an unstable planet
- Back to the future: the Big Brain
- Humanity within life's evolving daisy chain