

# Course Syllabus

This seminar excavates a series of episodes in the complex history of architecture and planning's encounter with conditions of extreme poverty. Case studies and class discussions will reframe the history of citizen participation in design and planning projects intended to address such conditions. The course will familiarize students with a variety of historical perspectives on activating the agency of end-users in efforts to address these conditions and will interrogate how such specific projects constrain, empower, and influence design and planning strategies more generally for disinvested communities. We will also explore vanguard techniques to present and display complex, archival research projects on these topics — including digital information architecture, exhibit design, audio/video production, and visual journalism. See the full syllabus [here](#)



Architects and planners never operate in a vacuum. Efforts by activist groups, community-based organizations, and other local institutions have significant impacts on the urban conditions within which designers and planners intervene. Understanding these efforts and their impacts — especially those that are not primarily conceived or analyzed within the design disciplines — is essential for architects, designers, and planners to offer design solutions in severely resource-constrained environments. In particular, this understanding can inform design-based strategies that enable the capabilities of community members to adapt, customize, renovate, or maintain community development projects over time.

Therefore, the seminar will investigate a series of case studies in multiple urban contexts, including examples from rapidly changing neighborhoods in Northern cities such as New York City and Berlin as well as informal settlements surrounding Southern cities such as Karachi and Mexico City. Readings, discussions, presentations, and papers will interrogate three crosscutting themes in urbanism — housing, infrastructure, and public space — through the lens of historical, theoretical, and practice-based interpretations of incrementalism, informality, and equity. These cases will emphasize moments in urban development history where trends and precedents in the Global South influenced urban theory and practice in the Global North, rather than the reverse.

The final project for this course is an original piece of research on a community development project (realized or speculative, historical or contemporary, from anywhere in the world) that either:

- + Demonstrates an innovation in the Global South that has influenced approaches in the Global North
- + Seeks to empower citizens to guide redevelopment efforts and is rooted in the active agency of the projects' end-users

This is a history / theory seminar with an emphasis of creative, visual modes of representing original research, of interest to students in all GSAPP programs. Each student will leave the course with a deeper understanding of the evolution of key terms and ideas about citizen participation in the built environment. Additionally, each student will have the opportunity to develop an original and creative format for the final research project — including the possibility for curatorial, journalistic, or artistic work — and class discussions will explore the challenges and opportunities of these distinct modes of representation.