

Anthropology of the City: Exploring Modern Athens



ANTH 315 *Anthropology of the City: Exploring Modern Athens*
Winter Term 2022

Professor: Dr. Aimee Placas

Course Description

Do a Google image search for Athens, Greece. What do you see? When I did it today, I got a long page of dramatic images of the ancient Acropolis above the city, with a few pictures of recent political protests scattered in between. What is this modern city, the representation of which is dominated (well, at least in the images of the Google-able) by a glorious ancient past? Or, for those who follow international news, perhaps this view is complicated by a knowledge about recent political and economic upheavals over the past decade in Greece's capital city. Or further, for those who enjoy travel Instagram accounts, maybe you've come across an even more recent renaissance in Athens in the local food scene, or street art scene, or emergent hip neighborhoods. Those collectively are the expectations most students, most travelers, are bringing to this city.

How can we come to understand an Athens that contains all these things, but so very much exceeds them? How can we understand Athens from the perspective of an anthropologist, getting underneath these surface images and exploring the everyday life of the city, as well as the history that shaped that life, and the practices of Athenians who currently experience it, make it, and transform it? That is the goal of this course: to understand all of the different ways there are to be an Athenian, and to try to wrestle with the impossibility of knowing a place so big, so plural, so dynamic, so difficult, and so wonderful.

Course Approach

This course has a three-pronged approach to exploring Athens. The first is general: we will study the "city" as both a concept and a material reality, and the theories and issues anthropologists bring to the study of the city. The second takes us to the specific: how can we apply those ideas to the city we will be located in, to Athens? The third brings us the tools necessary to collect the data for that exploration: the qualitative methodologies used in the social sciences to study the spaces, people, practices, sounds, tastes, ideas, fields of power, and more that make up everyday life in this incredible city you'll be making your temporary home.

We will be systematically studying Athens in its material reality, in the experiences it shapes, and in the experiences people shape it with. We will be engaging with how the city intersects with gender and sexuality, inequality, migration, sustainability, consumption, capitalism, politics, activism, state power, housing and homelessness, art, pleasure, and more. This course will require you to be brave and open-minded, in interacting with strangers and new places. You will try new things you end up loving and other new things you end up greatly disliking. By learning to live in and understand another culture, you will also learn more about yourself and your own prejudices and predispositions.

Learning objectives

- You will become knowledgeable about how urban environments have been studied in the social sciences (with a particular focus on sociology, anthropology, and multi-disciplinary approaches like urban studies, the themes and issues specific to cities and city life, and the problems with treating the "urban" and "rural" (and other such categories) as strictly distinct from each other.
- You will be able to critically discuss the global and local forces behind urbanization and growth of cities.
- You will be able to apply this general knowledge about city formations to Athens and its specific history.
- You will become intimately familiar with the experiences of everyday life in Athens, through a variety of neighborhoods and social settings.
- You will gain a relational understanding of Athens in context with the rest of Greece and its neighbors.
- You will learn and practice a number of ethnographic research methodologies for gathering and analyzing data about life in Athens, and have a solid grounding in the ethics of participant observation.
- You will develop, through all of your senses (the five you know you have and several more you weren't necessarily yet aware of), your own subjective, positional, visceral, thoughtful, and analytical understanding of life in Athens.

Course Requirements

Students will be expected to do the assigned daily readings and apply them to our activities through participation and discussion. In-class lectures will be connected to on-site visits. Research methodologies will be taught through lectures and readings, and will be put into practice through the course assignments. Assignments will include an ongoing fieldnotes journal (with prompts) and four research reports based on independent research projects.

Grading and Evaluation

80% of grade: **Research reports.** Students will produce four research reports, following detailed guidelines, based on ethnographic methodologies covered in the class.

10% of grade: **Reading responses.** Specific questions will be posed with some of the readings, and students will need to answer those questions.

10% of grade: **Participation.** Students will need to do the readings before class, come to class with notes on the readings that include discussion questions and critical engagements, and participate in discussion.

Evaluation Criteria (descriptions and evaluation criteria are at the links)

Research reports

1. ["Thinking with Concepts"](#)
2. ["Proxemics"](#)
3. ["Sensory Maps"](#)
4. ["Photographs"](#)

[Reading responses rubric](#)

[Class participation rubric](#)

Attendance

Students are expected to be present and on time for all classes and for all arranged activities.

Electronic devices

Desktop computers are available in Athens at CYA for student use. In this course students may use their own laptops or tablets in class for note taking or to refer to the readings. While we are outside of the classroom, students are expected to take notes in a physical notebook or on their phone/tablet.

Accommodations for students with disabilities

If you are a registered (with your home institution) student with a disability and you are entitled to accommodations, please inform the Director of Academic Affairs and make sure that your school forwards the necessary documentation. Additionally, this course requires a daily walking in the city; if you have mobility issues, please contact CYA to discuss further.

Course Materials

Course readings will be available through CYA's online course management software, Moodle.

Class Schedule

[The course schedule is found at this link.](#)

The course schedule, in terms of subjects and readings, may be subject to change to benefit student learning and interest, and in keeping up to date with current research and current events. This list will also be supplemented with recent journalistic reports and video, and short selections of more theoretical pieces will be read and analyzed collectively during class time.

Course Bibliography

[The course bibliography is found at this link.](#)

The bibliography contains texts to be read for class, as well as texts that inform class lectures or referred to in class.