In the U.S. we use the terms Urban Planning, Urban Design, Urban Studies, Urban History, Urban Sociology. In Europe and to some extent in the U.K., these separate disciplines are all considered parts of Urbanism, a term becoming more familiar in academic discussions in America. But urbanism as a subject is being fragmented by conflicting ideologies, and different definitions have been proliferating in books, articles, and conferences.

Jason King, a landscape architect and PhD student at Portland State University, posted a long list of urbanisms on his Landscape + Urbanism blog. Some are familiar, like New Urbanism and Landscape Urbanism. Some are formulated by the magazine MONU-magazine on urbanism, published in the Netherlands, or by other journalists, but most are being promoted by supporters as in some way a solution to problems of cities and urban growth, or as identifications for problems of urbanization today.

What are all these urbanisms about? Supplied here is a condensed description of each of those posted by King, plus urbanisms added to the list by Ethan Seltzer, professor of urban studies and planning, and PhD student Allison Duncan, both at Portland State University, and Portland landscape architect Brett Milligan. I added a few more myself.

The list can be organized into a few major categories, relating to urban systems, green issues, traditional city design, equity, and politics. Jason King and his colleagues did not include Modern Urbanism, probably because it is so pervasive. Modernism in city planning and design, as defined by the Congres Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne, is nearly 90 years old, but the city of towers, expressways, superblocks, segregated land uses has become dominant worldwide. It is the adversary against which many other urbanisms are measured.

Systems urbanisms
Many urbanisms resulted from the concept of cities as the product of systems, and cities as problems in systems design. Infrastructural Urbanism is the most familiar, going back to 1960s visions of

Rice University graduate student Viktor Ramos's project, Bypass Urbanism, is a recent example of futuristic cities drawn as bridge-like megastructures. Infrastructural Urbanism can also include more general discussions about the influence of infrastructure on urban form. Parametric Urbanism, as defined by Patrik Schumacher—a partner in Zaha Hadid Architects—is a top-down system, like Infrastructural Urbanism, but with the form of a city determined by a computer-generated script. Schumacher goes so far as to say that parametricism is a new style that will replace modernism and other design concepts for cities.

Other systems-thinking takes the opposite approach: Emergent Urbanism is an expectation that the form of cities should be generated by a system of rules followed by
independent actors, each performing tasks for its own purposes, much as a beehive or ant colony emerges from the actions of its participants. Sim City, the computer game devised by Will Wright, is a simplified example of an emerging city. It has a rule system familiar to planners, as it is comparable to zoning, subdivision, and capital budgeting.

Real cities also come about through actions of the real estate market acting within these constraints—the difficulty being that what emerges is frequently not the most desirable outcome. Market Urbanism, Propagandistic Urbanism, and Behavioral Urbanism are about optimizing bottom-up generation of city form. Braided Urbanism acknowledges the multiplicity of systems at work in generating cities and includes projects where curvilinear urban forms are intertwined.

Digital Urbanism and Disconnected Urbanism, as discussed (but not under these headings) in William Mitchell’s 1999 book E-topia: Urban Life, Firm—But Not as We Know It, concerns the influence of the Internet in relating actual places in ways not possible before. Networked Urbanism sounds like more of the same, but is the title of a 2008 book of essays about social capital in the city edited by Talia Blakland and Mike Savage.

Green urbanisms
Charles Waldheim introduced a 2006 collection of essays, The Landscape Urbanism Reader, by stating that “Landscape Urbanism” describes a disciplinary realignment currently underway in which landscape replaces architecture as the basic building block of contemporary urbanism.” This territorial claim, interesting news for city and regional planners, still informs discussions of Landscape Urbanism; but important designs, research, and discussion also take place under this heading.

Green Urbanism, University of Virginia professor Timothy Beatley’s title for a 1999 book about the ways natural systems are being used in Europe to make cities more sustainable, is a more inclusive term for describing useful mechanisms available in planning and designing cities.

Sustainable Urbanism relates city design and development to stopping the entire planet from becoming uninhabitable for human beings, and outlines major changes to current urban growth patterns that will be required. Environmental Urbanism, the title of a recent conference at the University of Washington, describes attempts to plan cities as integral parts of the natural environment.

Ecological Urbanism is the title of another recent conference, this one at Harvard, with proceedings now collected into a book. Like Landscape Urbanism, it is a territorial claim, but made on behalf of all the disciplines taught at the Harvard School of Design, including planning, as mediators between the need to respect natural ecology and the demands of rapidly increasing population and urbanization.

MONU devoted an issue to Clean Urbanism, or what is sometimes called zero-footprint development: cities where water, energy, and other needs are minimized and waste products are reduced as far as possible. Agricultural Urbanism is about the integration of agriculture into cities. Better described as urban agriculture or urban farming, there is a substantial discussion going on; from Columbia professor Dickson Despommier’s advocacy of vertical farms in specialized urban structures, to community gardens, down to growing food on green roofs, or in front and back yards.

It is also about understanding food production as a system that has always been integrally related to settlement patterns. Perhaps because farms and gardens were parts of the traditional city, Andres Duany has recently become an advocate for Agricultural Urbanism.

Traditional urbanisms
Duany, one of the founders of the Congress for the New Urbanism in 1993, is well known as an advocate for New Urbanism and as a design professional whose work has helped define it. CNU has been a forum for many valuable discussions about the future of cities, and New Urbanism also has become a significant topic within APA, the Urban Land Institute, and the National Association of Home Builders. What was new about New Urbanism, paradoxically, was to rediscover the virtues of the traditional street whose space is defined by buildings, and the value of public spaces that people can relate to and use.

Traditional Urbanism has much in common with New Urbanism, except that its advocates, like architect and urban planner Leon Krier, may go further in deploring not just modernist architecture and planning, but also automobiles, elevators, and steel construction.

Another related concept is Walkable Urbanism, central to New Urbanism and familiar as the basis for transit-oriented design. Christopher Leinberger in his recent book, The Option of Urbanism, says there is a strong potential market for places where people can walk from home to work or transit, and from both homes and workplaces to retail and entertainment. According to Leinberger, such development is often prevented by regulations and market practices that institutionalize sprawl.

The New Suburbanism, on the other hand, represents a backlash against calls for more concentrated development leading to environmental preservation or efficient land use, as there is still plenty of land out there. So it is traditional, but in a different sense. Anti-Urbanism in general is a dislike or prejudice against cities, but as defined by Emily Talen in her book, New Urbanism and American Planning, anti-urbanism is the primacy of expressways and other monolithic elements over diversity, human scale, the public realm—in other words, the basic principles of modernist city design are defined as anti-urbanism, as opposed to those of traditional urbanism.

Second-Rate Urbanism is obviously the enemy of first-rate urbanism, and has been used rhetorically by advocates of traditional urbanism.
Community urbanisms

Another major category of urbanisms advocates power for decision making by communities, as in a town meeting. Participatory Urbanism is the product of civic engagement. Consumer-Based Urbanism, Do It Yourself Urbanism, Informal Urbanism, Open Source Urbanism, and Opportunistic Urbanism all describe urban initiatives originating with the public. Guerilla Urbanism and Gypsy Urbanism are moves to settle or take over an urban location. Instant Urbanism is about implementing community participation by direct action, often using prefabricated construction modules. Pop-Up Urbanism and Temporary Urbanism refer to the use of temporary urban infill projects. Everyday Urbanism recognizes the value of the informal economy and community-based efforts like a local market. It is also a nod in the direction of French philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefebvre, who wrote extensively about la vie quotidienne. Exotic Urbanism, a headline used by MONU, condemns what is not local and authentic. Radical Urbanism, exploring ways for ordinary citizens to take power in cities, was the title of a conference at the Graduate School of the City University of New York in 2008.

Bricole Urbanism is putting together something new from the materials at hand. Bricolage was a term applied to urban design by Colin Rowe and Fred Koetter in their 1979 book, College City, to oppose the modernist assumption that existing cities should be demolished and their established communities displaced. Do It Yourself Urbanism could also be called Bricole Urbanism, as bricolage can mean the work of a handyman, a bricoleur, in French. There is a current blog called Bricoleurbanism.

Magical Urbanism is a book title by Mike Davis describing the juxtaposition of First World and Third World Latino culture in cities as almost like magical realism in literature. Slum Urbanism recognizes that slums have a parallel structure to the official city and their different values might sometimes have their own worthwhile qualities.

Sociopolitical urbanisms

Dialectical Urbanism describes contradictions in cities, the political nature of cities. Political Urbanism is about the give-and-take of politics as related to urban form. Beautiful Urbanism is the title of an article in MONU by Los Angeles architect Pierre de Angelis arguing that the City Beautiful movement in U.S. cities was a social control device and definitions of urban beauty need to be opened up and allied to progressive thinking. Real Urbanism is also a statement of opposition to ideal cities because they distort development in favor of a small group.

Denied Urbanism, another MONU title, refers to forgotten, excluded, and repressed forms of urban life, such as the communities of whip fetishists, department store buyers, and elderly socialites encountered by sociologist Richard Sennett in a walk from Greenwich Village to Midtown as described in his 1991 book, The Conscience of the Eye. Irresponsible Urbanism is what the other guys are doing, but it also was elevated to a principle by Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas, who interprets modern urban growth as evidence of successive failures to control it. "Since we are not responsible, we have to become irresponsible," he asserts in an essay, "What Ever Happened to Urbanism?" in his 1995 book, S.M.L.XL.

Recombinant Urbanism is the title of a book by David Grahame Shane in which he argues that what Koolhaas saw as the dissolution of all urbanism is really a transition to new patterns. Unitary Urbanism foresees integrating art into cities while transcending functional problems and political compartmentalization.

Headline urbanisms

Some of the urbanisms on the list are really headlines describing a situation, not a particular position or point of view. Big Urbanism was a headline used by the New York Times in 2006 to describe the trend towards larger scale urban projects. Holy Urbanism is a MONU coinage about the large amounts of urban property owned by religious organizations. Brutal Urbanism, another MONU title, introduced articles about violence and antisocial behavior in cities. Paid Urbanism is a headline for the effect of subsidies on cities.

Border Urbanism, or Trans-Border Urbanism, are tags for urban areas that span national or state borders. Nuclear Urbanism refers to simulations of damage to cities from atomic bombs, while Micro Urbanism relates to cities of fewer than 250,000 inhabitants. It can be applied as a term for studying subsets of the city.

Middle Class Urbanism, from MONU again, identifies the middle class as the most powerful influence on urban form. Stereoscopic Urbanism turns out to be a headline for the importance of sound to understanding cities. Post-Traumatic Urbanism is the headline for rebuilding after war or natural disaster.

Why so many urbanisms?

Sixty urbanisms, and in the process of writing this article I found I could have added even more. If every discernible characteristic of cities is given its own category, the process negates itself. Most urbanisms are actually about preserving the environment, traditional city design, urban systems, community participation, or the politics of urban change. But these larger categories are not mutually exclusive.

A study with a strong base in community participation could make use of traditional design elements and principles of environmental conservation to obtain political acceptance of a new code, transit network, or other urban system. As readers of Planning know, these combinations take place all the time.

- Jonathan Barnett, Ph.D., is a professor of city and regional planning and the director of the Urban Design Program at the University of Pennsylvania. His most recent book, City Design: Modern, Traditional, Green, and Systems Perspectives, was published this March by Routledge.