Urban Politics and Development (P+D)
Spring 2016, DVST 3500 (4 Credits)
Juan Manuel Arbona - juan.arbona@ihp.edu

International Honors Program
Cities in the 21st Century

PLEASE NOTE: Please be aware that topics and excursions may vary to take advantage of any emerging events, to accommodate changes in our lecturers’ availability, and to respect any changes that would affect student safety. Students will be notified if this occurs.

“Men [and women] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx, [1869] 1994).

“...we have to take very seriously the notion... that space and time are not simply constituted by but are also constitutive of social processes” (Harvey, 1997).

Course Description
Urban spaces, and the social relations that shape them, are a material expression of histories of colonialism, the promises of independence and the current manifestation (in terms of expectations, requirements and realities) of global capitalism. Cities are as physical and social expressions of the (unfulfilled) promises and tensions that continue to shape and respond to a global capitalist system of production. Moreover, the capitalist mode of production has been fundamental in a continuous process of construction, reproduction, and destruction of urban spaces. In this process –that has had distinct expressions– different forms of governance and of social integration and exclusion take shape and give the dynamic (if not chaotic) composition of cities. As such, cities are not only important sites for discussing social and economic dynamics across the planet, but also sites from which residents challenge the current political and economic order: the demands for truly inclusive and democratic forms of citizenship and the actions that aim to construct alternative urban spaces. It is in this sense that we can locate cities
such as New York, Ahmedabad, São Paulo, and Cape Town, both in terms of issues that connect and make them unique.

In order to frame this learning experience, we will focus on the current expression of global capitalism (i.e. the neoliberal project): the types of intellectual and political arguments that shaped a ‘common sense’ on the role of the economy in our daily lives; the forms of governance that justify actions and perpetuate outcomes; and the type of responses emanating from those who are deemed dispensable. Neoliberalism is a philosophical tradition, an economic and political policy framework, and a set of cultural practices that have shaped global society since the 1970s and 1980s. At its core, there is a belief that individual freedom to participate in the market place (individual tenacity) is the only viable way to organize societies and cities. Supporters of this project consider any other alternative that aims to promote basic welfare as an attack on individual liberties, and thus, labeled totalitarianism, socialism, or fascism. The neoliberal project has become ‘common sense’ in the political and economic organization of cities throughout the world. Thus, while we will discuss a variety of issues during the semester (social and spatial inequality, gentrification, citizenship, governance, etc.), the neoliberal project will be a common thread that will unite the cities we will visit and provide us with a lens for ‘reading’ the city and critically assessing promises, failures, and possibilities. In this sense, this course will provide broad frames of analysis that will help us ask questions and understand that these are not natural occurrences but deeply contested processes that we hope will permit you to ‘read’ beyond the surface.

This course explores the intersection of politics and development in cities by examining how related institutions, policies, and processes shape the transformation of the city. Similarly, we will discuss the role of contentious politics as a way to frame how people engage with and challenge systems of inequality. In the course of the semester, we will pay particular attention to these guiding questions: What economic, social, and political factors (local, national, and international) shape the development/organization of cities? How are different actors involved (or excluded) in the creation, maintenance, and functioning of urban environments? Whose knowledge/voices are considered relevant in the discussion of what the city could be? How are people constructing alternatives that aim to re-define the terms of the type of city we want?

Course Methodology
The course will use a combination of lecture presentations, seminar discussions, group work, and individual projects. The intention is to create a learning community where students actively contribute ideas and questions, and everyone helps everyone else learn. The readings are designed as a springboard to frame in-class discussions and what we will see and hear. The course aims to make the most of the richness and variety of the classroom and experiential learning opportunities. The assignments involve looking at particular political and developmental issues in the cities visited as a way for gathering and analyzing primary data from field sources.

Learning Outcomes
The Urban Politics and Development course comprises 16.5 classroom hours of instruction (4 credits). The total amount of classroom hours will be complemented with neighborhood and site visits, debriefings, and synthesis sessions that will allow us to connect formal classroom
discussions with your own experiences. This is what we call **experiential learning**. Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

- **To build an analytical framework** in order to discuss how intellectual current of analysis that become a political project, and how political projects that become common sense have material implications in the spatial/social organization of cities --or the normative ideals of what cities should be and do.
- **To experience, observe, understand, and respond to the multi-scalar impacts and manifestations** of government policy, citizen action, and regional and global forces on the development of the city.
- **To engage with people and places** through discussion, dialogue, and observation in reflective and substantive ways, towards effectively evaluating multiple, often contradictory sources;
- **To develop critical assessment and analytical skills to connect theory to practice to outcomes** in order to formulate one’s own position on course-related concepts, including development, democracy, and citizenship.
SESSIONS AND READINGS

New York City: 10-23 January 2016

**Session 1:** Neoliberalism as a political and urban project

The global transformation of the political and economic infrastructure of the last decades has had a profound impact on the structure and organization of cities throughout the world. In this session, we will discuss some of the intellectual and political foundations of these transformations as a basic framework that will inform our conversations during the semester.


Further reading:


AHMEDABAD: 25 January – 21 February 2016

**Session 2:** Cities of the ‘global south’ in context

As you will experience during the semester, cities of the ‘global south’ share many similarities with US and European cities. However, there are also (colonial, developmental) historical particularities that define each city. In this session, we will discuss some of the common trends (policies, actors, etc.) that have shaped cities in the so-called global south or third world.

Session 3: Producing social/spatial inequality: space and class

*One of the common threads that unite all cities we are visiting is the ways in which the built environment expresses social inequalities. In this session we will discuss how the logic of capital (accumulation) produce and perpetuate social inequality not only socially but also spatially.*


Further reading:

**Session 4**: Promises and realities: smart and informal urban development

*In the ‘global south’ there have been innumerable attempts to address the dire living conditions of those living/working in precarious settlements; to “integrate” those at the political and economic ‘margins’ of a society. In this session, we will discuss two ways of narrating urban development: what we do not want and what we need.*


Further reading:


**Session 5**: Negotiating spatial inequality: urban political ecology

*The concentration of population in urban spaces represent a potential to efficiently provide basic services and integrate cities into ecological systems. At another level, given the mechanisms that (re)produce inequalities cities are becoming epicenter of environmental nightmares. In this session we will focus on the issue of water as a way to discuss how the transition to entrepreneurial governance have had profound implications on how water is distributed in cities.*

Further reading:


**SAO PAULO: 23 February – 28 March 2016**

Session 6: A political economy of urban governance

*Urban spaces are material expressions of political and economic forces. The desire to build competitive/global/world-class cities requires particular forms of governance (i.e. logic and scope of institutional organization and action) that express a ‘common sense’ of the expectations of what the city should be, should do, and for whom. In this session we will establish a political economy lens through which we can begin to understand São Paulo, by locating the city in a broader context of state power and governance.*


Further reading:

Session 7: Urban tensions: governance requirements and citizenship expectations

In many ways, the promise of the city is expressed through the claims of citizenship. In other words, cities inherently express the possibility, the promise of better material conditions. However, the recent structural transformations have highlighted the tension between the perceive role of what cities “should be” and the desires of the type of city “we want”.


Further reading:


Session 8: Challenging/visibilizing social/spatial inequality: contentious politics

People are not simply hapless victims of economic and political forces. In this session, we will discuss how residents of marginalized neighborhoods (and their allies) are crafting strategies not only to improve immediate living conditions, but also challenge the process that made their predicament a ‘common occurrence’ or a ‘natural’ by-product of urban life.


Further reading:

Session 9: Fear and loathing in the neoliberal city

There is a long history of attempts to “manage” (or erase) the deep-seated forms and structures of inequality. However, as inequality continues make the built environment criminalization of the excluded and policing of desirable spaces is taking center stage as a way of diverting our attention. In South Africa, the legacy of Apartheid adds a layer to the inequalities that shape daily life. This is what Patrick Bond described as the transformation from “racial to class Apartheid”.


Further reading:
**Session 10**: Everyday life and the right to the city

We have been discussing broad ideas and big processes, but the real work of understanding the city lies in how we conceive of daily life (or the everyday). In this session, we will begin thinking about the ‘right to the city’ as a conceptual and political framework for and how daily life issues provide us with particular insights for action.


**Further reading:**


**Session 11**: The struggle and the promise of democratic cities (where do we stand?)

After 4 months and 4 cities, the question remains, what can we do with all that we’ve learned and experienced? Are we more hopeful or pessimistic about the role of cities in shaping the kind of society we want? What kind of cities do we want? The city we want may or may not share the principles, processes and/or outcomes of the people you met during the semester. How do we negotiate that? And, probably most important, where do we stand/fit in these processes?


**Further reading:**

**Course Materials**

Required readings are available to students via digital download. Thematic readings, listed at the end of the syllabus, are for further reference and for individual exploration in greater depth. Students are expected to complete the specified readings by each Politics and Development faculty session and to reference readings in discussions as well as essays. In addition, students are encouraged to make use of thematic readings and IHP in-country libraries and to investigate local resources, including news media. Reading newspapers regularly in each city offers a valuable resource for understanding current issues and debates. Students are also encouraged to find supplementary resources.

**Evaluation and Grading Criteria**

**Assignments**

**Ahmedabad → mapping social actors** (25%). As you are beginning to focus and fine-tune your CA research topic, one issue that you will need to consider in most research project is to reflect on the connections between processes – actors – material/spatial outcomes. In this group project, you will take the case study and explore how an analysis of the principal actors involved begins to explain the material outcomes you observed.

**São Paulo → Citizenship and contentious politics** (30%). In this short paper you will explore how people, collectively, attempt to create inclusive spaces (or challenge the mechanisms of exclusion/discrimination) in the city. In this sense, your group will grapple with the concept of contentious politics (or how “people struggle with each other”) to analyze a particular collective action/institution aimed to build the type of city they want. For this project, you will explore the strategies they deploy, the type of city they envision, and their role in this city.

**Cape Town → the city we/they want** (35%) As we have seen in the cities we have visited thus far, to talk about the city is to engage with multiple perspectives of what is wrong with the city, what are the causes of the problems, and what needs to be done. This is an exercise in listening to the residents and understanding the type of city they want. You will draw from site visits, neighborhood day, homestays, and guest lecturers to address the questions: what shapes the visions of the city we want? And what are the factors that differentiate those visions?

**Class participation** (10%): Assessment of participation is based on the level of engagement during course activities. Students are expected to attend all class meetings. Showing up receives the minimum passing participation grade. Missing or being late to class will negatively affect your participation assessment. What qualifies as “good” participation? The short answer is intellectual engagement. This means active participation: critically reflective (think about what you have been experiencing), be intellectually present (listen to the comments of others and help in the production of a collective dialogue), and dynamically interactive (comments that relate to the readings and experiences).

**Expectations and Policies**

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad handbook for policies on academic integrity, ethics, warning and probation, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and the academic appeals process. Also, refer to the specific information available in the Student Handbook and the Program Dossier given to you at Orientation.