Urban Politics and Development (P+D)
DVST 3500 (4 Credits)
International Honors Program
Cities in the 21st Century

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus is representative of a typical term. Because courses develop and change over time to take advantage of unique learning opportunities, actual course content varies from semester to semester.

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.

...it takes a lot of things to change the world:
Anger and tenacity. Science and indignation,
The quick initiative, the long reflection,
The cold patience and the infinite perseverance,
The understanding of the particular case and the understanding of the ensemble:
Only the lesson of reality can teach us to transform reality
Bertolt Brecht

Course Description
The Urban Politics and Development course is designed to equip you to understand how the cities we study have developed as they have, and to critically engage with the challenges which they face. 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 unequal 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/should be?
- How are people constructing alternatives in their daily practices that aim to re-define the terms of the type of city they/we want?

In order to understand how global historical processes have been shaping the cities we will visit, this course will focus on the current expression of global capitalism. Particularly, we will emphasize the types of political frameworks deployed to naturalize and justify current notions of (urban) development. While we will discuss a variety of issues during the semester (social and
spatial inequalities, governance, insurgency, citizenship, 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 forms of
social inequality and barriers for people to improve the basic living conditions are not natural
occurrences but deeply contested processes that we hope will permit you to ‘read’ beyond the
surface. Similarly, we will explore the motivations and implications of insurgent actions in
efforts to build more just and equitable cities. The goal is not necessarily ‘finding the solution’,
but to understand the historical complexity of the problems and the strategies and practices
people deploy.

Understanding Urban/ Global Inequality and Insurgency
We live in times of astounding wealth production and grotesque social and economic
inequities. According to the director of OXFAM International, 42 individuals control the same
amount of wealth as 3.7 billion people (Byanyima, 2018). About 22% of the world population
live on less than $1.90 per day, considered extreme poverty (World Bank, 2014). This is not
limited to the ‘global south’. In the United States, 43.1 million people (13.5% of the population)
do not have enough resources to have access to basic necessities according to the 2015 census.
We also live in times in which mainstream political narratives have difficulty explaining the
 persistence of inequalities. In spite of the evidence of a political economy that benefits and
privileges certain sectors of society, we still believe on the imaginaries of benevolent
globalization, responsive institutions, participatory (liberal) democracy, and the endless
opportunities of capitalism (de Sousa Santos, 2017). If we want to live in more just and equitable
cities, we need to better understand the historical and structural causes (and material outcomes)
of global inequities, and the underlying logic that informs the reproduction of narratives and
political institutions that insist there are no alternatives. In order to understand why and how this
has been happening we cannot rely simply on the current ‘façade’ of cities, but need to
understand the historical processes and forces that shaped cities.

In addition to the analysis of the social/spatial (re)production of inequalities, this course aims to
highlight and explore the variety of political and economic alternatives which are being practiced
around the world. These range from broad bold ideas to build a different world, institutional
reconfigurations, and radical practices. These practices –ranging from holding government
accountable to their constitutional mandates to challenging the status quo through occupation of
abandoned buildings– come from people that because of their situation or condition have been
forced to develop creative alternative practices for managing their resources, spaces and
communities. (Simone & Pieterse, 2017). 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; the inherent promise of cities to access to collective
consumption goods/services; and the everyday practices that inform alternative urban spaces.
These are some of the basic frameworks that allow us to locate cities such as New York, São
Paulo, Barcelona, and Cape Town both in terms of issues that connect them and those that make
them unique.
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 and challenges everyone else to learn. The readings are designed as a springboard to frame in-class discussions about what we experience in a particular city. 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 social 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 learn to critically understand how seemingly ‘marginal’, ‘radical’ or “innocuous” practices provide powerful insights into thinking about alternative policy/political frameworks.
- 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.
- To interrogate our political positionality as we learn about the choices and challenges other actors face in their particular historical contexts. This means that while we are learning about “others” we are aiming to draw lessons about our own social contexts.

Course Materials
Required readings are available to students via Moodle. 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 (available upon request) and IHP in-country libraries and to investigate local resources, including news media. Reading newspapers (English-language resources included in CUI syllabus) regularly in each city offers a valuable resource for understanding current issues and
debates. Students are also encouraged to find supplementary resources.

Assignments

São Paulo \( \rightarrow \) the (re)production of inequities (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 projects is the connections between processes – actors – material/spatial outcomes. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the (re)production of inequalities in São Paulo in relation to a particular issue in the particular sites we visited.

Barcelona \( \rightarrow \) between radical practices and democratic governance (30%). Some of the interesting things about Barcelona has been the history of insurgency, radical practices and cultural centers in the process that lead to current municipal arrangement. On this case study you will reflect on the type of urban governance taking shape in Barcelona, and the implications of radical practices.

Cape Town \( \rightarrow \) inequalities and insurgencies (35%). In São Paulo, Barcelona and Cape Town we have witnessed how specific histories of each city reflect particular forms of inequities. Similarly, forms of insurgency reflect particularities of each city in terms of narratives, practices, views of institutions, political tensions and outcomes. In this comprehensive exam you will address a series of questions that aim to connect what we read with what you witnessed/experience during the semester.

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.
SESSIONS AND READINGS

**New York City**

**Session 1:** NYC: introduction to studying urban inequities.

*The global transformation of the political and economic infrastructure has had a profound impact in the structure and organization of cities throughout the world. In this session, we will connect two seemingly disconnected processes: the transformation of many areas of NYC into attractive centers of consumption and entertainment, and the implications for those left outside of the imaginary of leisure urban consumption. In this session, we will present some of the main guiding ideas that will guide our discussions during the semester will be presented: inequalities and inequities; capitalism and its relation to urban space, the implications of (post)Fordism on urban transformations.*


**Further reading:**


**São Paulo**

São Paulo is the largest city and financial capital of one of the most unequal countries on the planet. The sessions in São Paulo address the following questions:

- What have been the historical process that shaped the (re)production of inequalities on the global south?
- What have been the spatial/social manifestations of these historical processes in São Paulo?
- What have been the strategies of those living with the negative consequences of inequalities to gain better living conditions?

**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 historical particularities that define each city. In this session, we will build from the discussion on the transformation to a post-fordist (1970s) system of production as a way to establish some of the common trends (policies, actors, etc.) that have shaped cities in the so-called global south or third world.*


Further reading:

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

*One of the common threads that unites all cities we are visiting is the ways in which the built environment expresses and (re)produces social inequalities. While in the previous sessions we discussed macro processes, in this session we will focus on how social/spatial inequalities are produced. Specifically, we will look through the lens of monopoly rent to discuss how the logic of capital (accumulation) produces and perpetuates social and spatial inequities.*


Further reading:
• Não repara a bagunça ➔ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D3Zwjs7WqIQ

**Session 4**: Challenging social/spatial inequities

*People are not simply hapless victims of economic and political forces. Residents of marginalized and impoverished 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. In this session, we will discuss how these actors deploy narratives of citizenship as a strategy to justify their actions, but also force government institutions to live up to their mandates.*

Further reading:


**PAPER DUE**

**Barcelona**

Barcelona became a world-renowned city after hosting the 1992 Olympics and the development of what became the ‘Barcelona model’ of urban development. This urban governance model became a benchmark urban marketing and attracting investment. Simultaneously, the city became an important center of radical practices that have permeated how the municipal government functions. In the Barcelona sessions we will address the following questions:

- What was/is the ‘Barcelona model’ about and how it relates to a particular form of urban governance?
- How radical/insurgent practices came about and what have been the outcomes of these practices?
- How social centers became important places in the organization of social actions and new ways of engaging and participating in local politics?
- What have been the relation between forms of governance and radical practices?

**Session 5: A political economy of urban governance**

The perceived need 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 explore elements of the “Barcelona model” of urban regeneration and competitiveness focusing on the underlying logic of the model and the material outcomes.


Further reading:

- Charnock, Greig, Thomas Purcell, & Ramon Ribera-Fumaz. 2014. “City of rents: The limits


**Session 6**: Challenging underlying logic of governance through radical practices

*Often, forms of urban governance do not respond to or even go against the needs and interests of the majority of residents even as it is presented as the only realistic strategy to organize democratic processes. In this session we will compare São Paulo forms of insurgency with Barcelona’s “insurgent urbanism” as a way to understand types and implications of political action.*


**Further reading:**


**Session 7**: Social centers as a territorialization of politics

*With the advent of entrepreneurial governance and (post)fordist forms of labor flexibilization trade unions are no longer the principal (or sole) reference of social mobilization and organization. It is argued that territorial forms of organization transcend narrowly defined forms of identity politics and open the possibilities for new forms of solidarities. In this session, we will explore the role of social centers in the conformation of new forms of governance and the organization of political spaces.*


**Further reading:**

- Islar, Mine & Ezgi Irgil. 2018. “Grassroots practices of citizenship and politicization in the...


### Session 8: Municipalism: rethinking governance through radical practices

*We tend to think that the way to influence decision-makers is through voting or lobbying. In the US there is a generalized notion that social movements and protests do not really accomplish much. But, what if, those people who have been deploying radical practices become the decision makers? In this session, we will discuss what happens when actors involved in radical practices enter government as a potential new way for thinking and framing governance.*


### Further reading:


### CASE STUDY PRESENTATION

**Cape Town**

Cape Town manifests both the implications of inequalities and the continued challenges of building more just and equitable cities.

- What are the potentials/limits of state actions and citizens practices in building more just and equitable cities?
- How does infrastructure become a
- What could be our roles in these processes?

### Session 9: Promises, hopes, and deceptions: post-Apartheid urbanism

*With the formal end of Apartheid (or the start of democracy) in 1994, many South Africans hoped and expected that with the abrogation of institutionalized discrimination better living conditions would ensue. However, the promise of a more just country (and cities) are still to materialize, giving way to deceptions. In this session we will discuss the tensions and contradictions between the expectations of an inclusive and just city, and the so called “realities” of building an efficient and competitive Cape Town.*


**Further reading:**


**Session 10: Context matters: citizenship, infrastructure and insurgency**

*Why in certain contexts acts of insurgency or radical practices can create conditions for better urban living, but in other contexts this seems impossible? In this session, we will explore how infrastructure is not a neutral dispositive for service delivery, but a crucial point of analysis of how practices of citizenship (above and beyond formal rights bestowed by the state) demand forms of insurgent action that aim to gain access to already existing legal rights and/or claim rights that have been historically negated.*


**Further reading:**


**Session 11: Thinking and acting for/in the future**

*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:


EXAM DUE