Urban Politics and Development (P+D)
Fall 2019, DVST 3500 (4 Credits)

International Honors Program
Cities in the 21st Century

...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 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 or roughly half the world’s population (Byanyima, 2018). About 736 million people live on less than $1.90 per day, considered extreme poverty (World Bank, 2015). This is not limited to the ‘global south’. In the United States, 41.4 million people (12.7% of the population) do not have enough resources to have access to basic necessities according to the 2017 census. We also live in in times in which mainstream political narratives emphasize the stability of the architecture of democracy, but 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 imaginarie 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, Buenos Aires, 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.
SESSIONS AND READINGS

**New York City**

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

*The transformation of the global political and economic infrastructure has had a profound impact on the structure and organization of cities throughout the world. In this session, some of the main 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. We will connect two seemingly disconnected phenomena: 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.*


**Further reading:**

**Buenos Aires**

For generations, Buenos Aires has been seen and represented as the ‘Paris of Latin America’ and in many ways represented what prosperity and modernity could look like in Latin America. However, the legacies of a vicious military dictatorship, a recent (and a current) economic crisis also makes Buenos Aires an ideal city to explore the (re)production of inequalities, and how people live in/through and challenge those inequalities. The questions that will guide the 4 sessions in Buenos Aires are:

- What have been the historical process that shaped the (re)production of inequalities in the global south?
- What have been the spatial/social manifestations of these historical processes in Buenos Aires?
- What have been the strategies of those living with the negative consequences of inequalities to gain better living conditions? How are these living conditions hidden or veiled from public discourse?
- How do those living with the negative aspects of inequality challenge the process and outcomes?
**Session 2:** Cities of the ‘global south’ in context (1-7)

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 on the discussion about 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:** (Re)Producing social/spatial inequality: space and class (8-15)

A common thread 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:**

Session 4: Living with social/spatial inequities (16-24)
Inequalities can be understood through analysis of space and the correlations with bodies, activities, interactions and historical forces. In this session, we will analyze how those people at the folds of the political and economic mainstream negotiate their living conditions. In other words, in this session will provide a different lens through which we can understand “informality”, a common label used to describe those spaces, bodies and activities that operate outside the institutionalized normative order.


Further reading:

Session 5: Challenging social/spatial inequities (25-31)
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 analyze the interplay between (urban) territory and the production of citizenship (rights).


Further reading:

CASE STUDY PRESENTATION

PLEASE NOTE: This syllabus is a 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.
Barcelona

Barcelona became a world-renowned city after hosting the 1992 Olympics and the development of what came to be known as the ‘Barcelona model’ of urban development. This urban governance model became a classic example of urban branding with the intention of attracting investment and improving living conditions for all residents, but which had limited results. Simultaneously, or as a result of the limitations of the branding strategy, the city became an important center of radical practices that have now 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 does urban branding inform governance strategies?
- What is the difference between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’? Why is this difference important in understanding the tension between institutionalized policy and direct/autonomous social action in living up to the emancipatory promises of democracy?
- How social centers became important places in the organization of social actions and new ways of engaging and participating in local politics?

**Session 6: A political economy of urban governance (1-10)**

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:


**Session 7: Of ‘politics’ and ‘the political’: institutions and social action (11-21)**

We live in times in which the “formal architecture of democracy” is still in place, but increasingly those institutions do not seem to work on behalf of the principles of equality and emancipation. In many cases, the institutions of democracy seem to be circumvented or bulldozed by powerful interests, that are presented as fundamental to democracy. In this session we will compare Buenos Aires forms of insurgency with Barcelona’s “insurgent urbanism” as a
way to understand how forms of politization beyond the state are aiming to create the conditions to revive the principles of democratic societies.


**Session 8**: The urban commons: another perspective of governance (22-31)
*Cities are spaces of collective consumption (think of all the things that in principle we could ‘consume’ collectively), and of increasingly privatized access. In this session we will discuss the idea of the commons as a political framework that aims to overcome the inequities of cities by attempting to move beyond the public-private dichotomy.*


Further reading:
Cape Town

Cape Town manifests both the implications of profound historical inequalities and the continued challenges to build more just and equitable cities. The city reflects the challenges of breaking down unjust spatial orders alongside the urban imaginaries that sustained them. In the sessions we will have in this city, we will address some of the challenges faced after political victories.

- What are the potentials/limits of state actions and citizens practices in building more just and equitable cities given the material and social residues of history?
- How do the construction of order and fear become tools for perpetuating inequities and limit the possibilities of building socially just cities?
- During the semester we learned about the (re)production of inequalities and how those affected by these processes create spaces of action and emancipatory possibilities. What could be our roles in these processes? Where do we fit in?

Session 9: Promises, hopes, and deceptions: post-Apartheid urbanism (1-10)

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: Fear: the search for order and the persistence of inequalities (11-21)
In spite of all the efforts and struggle to build just and equitable cities, the manufacturing of fear of ‘the other’ becomes a means to avoid confronting inequities. Thus, in this session we will discuss the tension that connect all the cities we have visited: the mechanisms to vilify and/or criminalize certain actors and their quiet (and at times not so quiet) strategies to gain some access to the fundamental promise of the city of living a dignified life.


Further reading:

Session 11: Thinking and acting for/in the future (22-31)
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 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
CASE STUDY Buenos Aires → analyzing inequities (30%). 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 the connections between processes – actors – material/spatial outcomes. The purpose of this case study is to analyze the (re)production of inequalities in Buenos Aires in relation to a particular issue in a particular site.

Position papers (25%) See next page for full details.

Cape Town → inequalities and insurgencies (35%). In Buenos Aires, 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).
Position paper

One of the biggest rewards of the IHP semester is to be able to interact with people and spaces, and to witness the type of conceptual/critical reflections we are readings about. This will have many dimensions during the semester: from discussion between students and with the people you meet (from how homestay families to residents); reflections on your CA research project, to discussion and debates in the classroom. Similarly, one of the biggest challenges of the semester will be to craft an argument based on the data/evidence you collect during the semester. The position paper will provide elements to accomplish two goals: 1) to provide the conditions to have a lively and meaningful discussion/debate during the P+D sessions; 2) to visualize and understand how authors from different academic disciplines craft arguments and present evidence to support it. This will be crucial for your CA research project.

The position paper will be a short (no more than one page) paper in which you take a stance in relation to the argument presented in one of the readings for a session. The basic elements of the position paper will be:

- What is the main argument made by the author(s)?
- Discuss the evidence presented in relation to the argument.
- Take a position (support – critique) the argument and explain why you take that position.

You will write 4 position papers during the semester (at least 1 in each city: Buenos Aires, Barcelona, and Cape Town). In order to avoid everyone submitting the paper for the same session, you will submit the position paper according to your number in the group. (The range of the numbers are next to the title of the session.) The total of these papers will be 25% of the final grade. While you will submit 4 papers, only 2 will be graded. Thus, the final grade of this assignment will be composed of handing in the 4 papers (on time) and the evaluation of 2 (of the 4) papers.

Everyone, regardless whether you posted a position paper or not, will read over all the other position papers prior to class. This will be the basis for the discussion and debate: the different positions in relation to the arguments presented by the authors we read, and the type of experiences (site visits, guest lectures, your own CA research, etc.) we have been having in the particular city.
COURSE POLICIES

Attendance and Participation: All students are expected to be present at every class session, with the only exception being illness (written note required from a non-IHP adult, e.g. homestay parent, or preferably, health care professional). Unexcused absences and habitual lateness will result in penalties reflected in your participation grade. Please inform the instructor if tardiness is anticipated. All students are expected to come to class on time.

Late work: In keeping with IHP policy, papers handed in late will drop one point per day, unless permission is granted otherwise. Course assignments are due at the beginning of the day.

Plagiarism: All students are responsible for having read the IHP statement on plagiarism, which is available in the IHP Student Handbook. Students are advised that the penalty on IHP for plagiarism may be “…expulsion from the program or such other penalty as may be recommended by the Program Director, subject to approval by the Executive Director.”

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.

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