Urban Politics and Development  
DVST-3500 (4 credits)  

International Honors Program (IHP)  
Cities in the 21st Century  

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

History, as nearly no one seems to know, is not merely something to be read. And it does not refer merely, or even principally, to the past. On the contrary, the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally present in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations. And it is with great pain and terror that one begins to realize this. In great pain and terror one begins to assess the history which has placed one where one is, and formed one's point of view. In great pain and terror because, thereafter, one enters into battle with that historical creation, Oneself, and attempts to re-create oneself according to a principle more humane and more liberating: one begins the attempt to achieve a level of personal maturity and freedom which robs history of its tyrannical power, and also changes history (James Baldwin, 1965: 722)

Course Description
The Urban Politics and Development (P+D) course is designed to equip you with conceptual and contextual tools to understand how cities have developed as they have, and to critically engage with the challenges they face. In other words, during the course of the semester we will focus on the ‘why’ and ‘how’ cities are spaces of social tensions, multiple forms of violence and dystopian visions, while simultaneously spaces of creativity, aspirations and alternative futures. We will pay particular attention to these interlocking frames:

- **Power** → What **economic, social, and political factors** (local, national, and international) shape the development/organization of unequal cities?
- **People** → How are different **actors** involved (or excluded) in the creation, maintenance, and functioning of urban environments? Whose **knowledge/voices** are considered relevant or worthy in the discussion of what the city could/should be?
- **Place** → What are the specific types of **material outcomes** and particular alternatives that inform and define different territories between/within cities.
In order to understand how global historical processes have shaped cities we will visit, this course will focus on the current expression of (racialized) 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” (and particular expressions of racial capitalism) will be a common thread connecting the cities we will visit. This common thread will provide us with a lens for ‘reading’ the city and critically assessing promises, failures, and possibilities for subverting the current global urban order. 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. 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 OXFAM International (2022), 252 men have more wealth than all 1 billion women and girls in Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, “the wealth of the 10 richest men have doubled, while the incomes of 99% of humanity are worse off” (OXFAM, 2022). This is not limited to the ‘global south’. In the United States, “in 2021, the overall rate of poverty was 11.6%, which represented 37.9 million individuals” (Rank, 2023: 32). However, these figures only represent a broad quantitative image. Behind the numbers there are lives that have to contend on a daily basis with violence, indifference and empty promises. It is in this sense that it can be argued that we live in times in which mainstream political narratives have difficulty explaining the persistence of inequalities, violence, oppression. 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, (liberal) democracy, and the endless opportunities of capitalism (de Sousa Santos, 2017). If we want to build and 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 (and are shaping) them.

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 being practiced around the world: 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 ways of 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 of 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 features that make them unique.

Learning Outcomes
Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

• **build an analytical framework** examining how intellectual currents of analysis 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.
• learn to critically understand how seemingly ‘marginal’, ‘radical’ or “innocuous” practices provide powerful insights into thinking about alternative policy/political frameworks.
• 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.
• **engage with the analytical frames of people, power and place** through discussion, dialogue, and observation in reflective and substantive ways, towards effectively evaluating multiple, often contradictory sources;
• 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.
• **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 drawing lessons about our own social contexts.

Language of Instruction
This course is taught in English, but students will be exposed to vocabulary related to course content through in-country expert lectures and field visits in a wide range of venues and regional locales.

Instructional Methods
The course will use a combination of lecture presentations, seminar discussions, group work, and individual projects. Classroom time 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**. 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
Assignments and Evaluation

Assignment Descriptions and Grading Criteria

1) Paper - ‘Reading the city through a concept’ (15%) Spain
Concepts are devices that aim to make sense of complex processes and situations. In other words, they are devices to ‘read’ the city. For this short paper (1000 words maximum), you will select an image (that you have taken or you downloaded online -- as long as you provide the source of the image) and explore how the image allows you to illustrate a particular concept we have discussed (from BA or BCN). Specifically, you will make an argument about how the image illustrates the concept and discuss aspects of the image (as evidence) that helps you support the argument.

2) Paper - ‘Concepts as devices for comparison’ (30%) South Africa
During the semester we engaged with different concepts that attempted to provide insights into the particularities of cities and a broad framework that allowed for meaningful comparisons. For this final paper, you will select a particular concept (a list will be provided) and reflect on how the concept allows you to make comparisons between at least two of the cities we visited. The paper will include the following: 1) a presentation of the concept and how you interpret it; 2) a central argument in which you take a position in relation to concept and cities; 3) presentation of aspects of each of the cities (at least 2) that evidence how the concept allows you to make meaningful comparison.

3) Reading matrix (20%) Argentina, Spain
IHP is an intense program. Things will move fast and information will become a blur as we move along. The reading matrix is intended as a tool to establish a strategy of systematizing the readings we will discuss during the semester (concepts, arguments, evidence) that should be of use for your group research. You are encouraged to write the matrix right after you do the reading, but will submit the complete matrix at the end of each country (i.e. before we leave for the airport). The matrix will contain (at least) the following:
   o Author/ title of reading
   o Main argument of the reading
   o Evidence presented (or how the author(s) support the argument
   o Meaningful quotes (as they relate to your group main research ideas)
   o General reflections on the reading (think of reactions that could be useful in shaping your group research project).

4) Position papers (25%) Argentina, Spain, South Africa. (Sessions 2-10)
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:
   o What is the main argument made by the author(s)?
Discuss the evidence presented in relation to the argument.

Take a position (support – critique) in relation to the argument/ evidence and explain why you take that position.

You will write 4 position papers during the semester (at least 1 in each country). 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 corresponding numbers are next to the session titles). Those that submit a position paper according to their number will lead small group discussion related to the reading comments and (if time allows) to the other readings. You will submit the position paper before 8pm the night before the session (docx format). 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 country.

5) Participation (10%)
Participation should be critically reflective (think about what you have been experiencing), 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). This includes active involvement in lectures, readings, discussions and excursions using the following criteria:

- Attendance - promptness to class and positive presence in class.
- Active Listening - paying attention in class and during field excursions, asking appropriate questions, showing interest and enthusiasm (this includes body language), entertaining contradictory perspectives, taking notes.
- Involvement in Class Discussions - either in small or large groups, sharing knowledge. This means challenging yourself to speak up if you usually don’t, and also means allowing others to speak if you are a person who tends to dominate class discussions.
- Group Accountability – positive participation in the group during field excursions and classes; not keeping others waiting.
- Displaying Respect – culturally appropriate interaction with hosts, SIT program staff, SIT lecturers and communities.

Assessment
Papers - 45%
Reading matrix - 20%
Position Papers - 25%
Participation - 10%

Attendance and Participation
Due to the nature of SIT Study Abroad programs, and the importance of student and instructor contributions in each and every class session, attendance at all classes and for all program excursions is required. Criteria for evaluation of student performance include attendance and participation in program activities. Students must fully participate in all program components and courses. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the academic director or other
designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, may impact grades, and could result in dismissal from the program.

Late Assignments
SIT Study Abroad programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. The curriculum is designed to build on itself and progress to the culmination (projects, ISP, case studies, internship, etc.). It is critical that students complete assignments in a timely manner to continue to benefit from the sequences in assignments, reflections and experiences throughout the program. Example: Students may request a justified extension for one paper/assignment during the semester. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. If reason for request is accepted, an extension of up to one week may be granted at that time. Any further requests for extensions will not be granted. Students who fail to submit the assignment within the extension period will receive an ‘F’ for the assignment.

Grading Scale

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94-100%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>90-93%</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>87-89%</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>84-86%</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>80-83%</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<td>77-79%</td>
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<td>74-76%</td>
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<td>C-</td>
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<tr>
<td>67-69%</td>
<td>D+</td>
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<tr>
<td>64-66%</td>
<td>D</td>
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<tr>
<td>below 64%</td>
<td>F</td>
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Program Expectations

- Show up prepared. Be on time, have your readings completed and points in mind for discussion or clarification. Complying with these elements raises the level of class discussion for everyone.
- Have assignments completed on schedule, printed, and done accordingly to the specified requirements. This will help ensure that your assignments are returned in a timely manner.
- Ask questions in class. Engage the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- Respect differences of opinion (classmates’, lecturers, local constituents engaged with on the visits). You are not expected to agree with everything you hear, but you are expected to listen across difference and consider other perspectives with respect.
• 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. Students are also encouraged to find and share supplementary resources.

**SIT Policies and Resources**

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and the Policies section of the SIT website for all academic and student affairs policies. Students are accountable for complying with all published policies. Of particular relevance to this course are the policies regarding: academic integrity, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), research and ethics in field study and internships, late assignments, academic status, academic appeals, diversity and disability, sexual harassment and misconduct, and the student code of conduct.

Please refer to the SIT Study Abroad Handbook and SIT website for information on important resources and services provided through our central administration in Vermont, such as Library resources and research support, Disability Services, Counseling Services, Title IX information, and Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion resources.

**Course Schedule**

*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*

**New York City: 27 August – 7 September**

**Session 1: Introduction to studying urban inequities: space and racial capitalism**

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 present some of the main guiding ideas that will shape our discussions during the semester: inequalities and inequities; racial capitalism and its relation to urban space, the implications of (post)Fordism (international division of labor) on urban transformations.

Further reading:


** Buenos Aires: 8 September – 6 October**

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 make 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 processes 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?
- How concepts of ‘monopoly rent’ and ‘bordering’ allow us to better read inequities affecting particular bodies/territories?
- How thinking about (and through) the production of borders allow us to see intersectionality of historical, social and materials urban issues?

**Session 2: Cities of the ‘global south’ in context (1-5)**

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, material outcomes, etc.) that have shaped cities in the so-called global south or third world.


**Further reading:**


Session 3: (Re)Producing social/spatial inequality: selling and consuming (in) the city (6-10)
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, in terms of the types of social imaginations (political actions and practices) that inform how we see the city as something ‘natural’ or what it should be / do. 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. The purpose is to provide a broad framework that could be used to explain the social / material differences between/ within cities.

Further reading:

Session 4: Living with social/spatial inequities: bordering (11-14)
Inequalities can be understood through analysis of space and the correlations with bodies, activities/ practices, interactions and historical forces. In this session, we will analyze how those people at the margins of the political and economic mainstream negotiate their living
conditions. In other words, we will focus on the production of borders as a method to think about how historical forces (discussed the previous session) have implications on particular groups of people and territories. Concomitantly, borders are another way of talking about citizenship and theme we will explore in subsequent sessions.


Further reading:


**Session 5: Living with and challenging social/spatial inequities: intersectional perspectives on ‘work’ and social reproduction (15-18)**

To think about labor/work issues, is to reflect not only on how people make a living, but also about differences in relation to access to housing and services, environmental conditions, social reproduction, and the practices aimed at improving material and social conditions (or “lives deemed worth living”). In this session, we will discuss the increasing precarization of work, the implications of precarization to social reproduction, and the practices at the folds of the global/urban economy.


Further reading:
Barcelona: 7 October – 5 November

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 reference to other cities in the world in relation to urban marketing and attracting investment. Simultaneously, the city has been 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 (in response to an ideal of entrepreneurial governance) and what have been the outcomes of these practices? How historical legacies (memories) of radical political practices inform present efforts?
- How the “performative practices of staging equality” becomes a means to challenge the “order of the sensible”?
- Given the tension between the normative ideal of the ‘Barcelona model’ and radical practices, where to racialized migrant fit in?

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

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’: institutional formations and promises of citizenship (7-12)
We live in times in which the ‘formal architecture of liberal democracy’ is still in place, but increasingly those institutions do not seem to work on behalf of the principles (promises) of equality and emancipation. In many cases, the institutions of liberal democracy seem to be circumvented or bulldozed by powerful interests, that are presented as fundamental to democracy. In this session we will discuss the legacies and practices of Barcelona’s “insurgent urbanism” as a way to understand how forms of politicization beyond the state are aiming to create the conditions to revive the principles and ideals of democratic societies.


Further reading:

Session 08: Othering in the radical city: citizenship, race and migrants in the city (13-18)
In spite of the accolades of the ‘Barcelona model’, many of the residents of the city -- particularly immigrants from African and Latin America-- continue to struggle. Senegalese and Bangladeshi ‘manteros’ or Ecuadorean domestic workers are part of the thousands of migrants who struggle to make a living and define what it means to be ‘integrated’ in their own terms. Can you be ‘integrated’ in ‘exclusionary’ ways? In this session we will discuss the promises of migration, the social and material realities of living in a ‘new’ society’ and the ways racialized and excluded subjects create political spaces.


Further reading:

‘Reading the city through a concept’ paper – DUE

Cape Town: 6 November – 9 December
Cape Town manifests both the long-term implications of state-sanctioned inequalities and the continued challenges of building more just and equitable cities. Like other cities in South Africa, Cape Town evidences how the abrogation of a legal system (apartheid) is not
necessarily enough to dismantle the (social and physical) infrastructure that informed the daily practices of apartheid. In Cape Town the sessions will address the following questions:

- What are the social and material legacies of state-sanctioned discrimination and racism?
- How does infrastructure become a contemporary expression of the long history of exclusion and discrimination?
- What are the potentials/limits of state actions and citizens practices in building more just and equitable cities?
- What could be our roles in these processes?

**Session 9: Promises, hopes, and deceptions of post-Apartheid urbanism: citizenship and infrastructure (1-9)**

*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 racialize oppression better living conditions would ensue. However, the promise of a more just country (and cities) are still to materialize extensively, giving way to disappointments and frustrations. The readings for this session explore different aspects of daily life that have perpetuated forms of segregation and oppression of the majorities of South Africans: from ‘waiting for the State to deliver on its constitutional promises, the ‘techno-politics of infrastructure’ and the obstacles to ‘dignified or fulfilling’ employment.*


**Further reading:**


Session 10: Fear of the ‘other’: criminalization and violence in the persistently segregated city (10-18)
In spite of all the efforts and struggle to build just and equitable cities, the manufacturing of fear of ‘the other’ becomes a political means to avoid confronting inequities. Thus, in this session we will discuss the tension that connects 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
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:

‘Concepts as devices for comparison’ paper - DUE → week 3 in CT