

Urban History of Europe

URST-3000 (4 credits)

Comparative Cities in Europe

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.

Course Description

This course explores the historical evolution of three major cities, focusing on how each city became a significant urban center shaped by economic, political, and cultural forces. Students will examine key themes including historical context, geopolitical factors, economic shifts, and cultural capital. The course will offer a comparative study of these cities, enabling students to understand their roles in shaping national identity and global influence.

Learning Outcomes

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

1. Analyze the historical context of each city, focusing on the factors that contributed to their development as key urban centers.
2. Compare the geopolitical factors that shaped these cities' roles in global trade and political influence over time.
3. Investigate how economic shifts transformed each city, including the impact of industrialization, globalization, and financial power on their modern economies.
4. Trace the evolution of cultural capital in each city in shaping national, regional, and global cultural identities.
5. Assess how each city interrogates its history and legacies of empire and colonization
6. Evaluate the impact of 20th century wars and post-war rebuilding in shaping the modern city.

Language of Instruction

This course is taught in English.

Instructional Methods

SIT's philosophy of education is rooted in experiential learning model, which drives the design of this class. Each module allows for experience, reflection, and application. Experiences range from critical analyses of datasets to site visits and conversations with local experts. These experiences are framed by readings, multimedia texts, and class discussion. Reflection

occurs throughout the learning process in various forms, such as verbal debriefs after learning on location experiences to reflexive components in papers/projects. Through reflection, students are encouraged to become aware of their process of learning, to make sense of their experiences, and connect the learning acquired on the program with previous experiences and information. Application activities reinforce learning by practicing communication skills, experimenting with theories, and preparing to transfer learning to future contexts.

Required Texts

- Mak, G. (2001). *Amsterdam: A brief life of the city* (P. Blom, Trans.). Vintage UK.
- Black, J. (2022). *A Brief History of London: The international city* (Brief Histories). Little, Brown Book Group.
- Book chapters and articles on Course Reserve

Assignments and Evaluation

- **Participation & Professional Engagement (10%)**
Includes attendance, contribution to field discussions, cultural site visits, and group collaboration during workshops.
- **Experiential Learning Journal (15%, 3 entries @ 5%)**
Many forms of experiential learning are embedded into this course (site visits, hands-on learning experiences, simulations, etc.) alongside more traditional methods of teaching (lectures, seminars, readings, etc.). To synthesize the learning from disparate forms of teaching and learning, students will reflect on their learning experiences through reflective journaling. Students will write entries detailing significant learning experiences, focusing on description of the experience, reflection on the experience, connection to existing knowledge or other sources of information, and application of the learning experience.

Because of the cognitive benefits of writing longhand (improved memory, critical thinking, and creativity to name a few), this assignment is low-tech, using manual writing tools and paper. Exceptions are only allowable when a student has an explicit academic accommodation based on a documented learning difference. Illegible entries will receive no credit; if concerned about penmanship, write in all caps (it's not a sign of aggression, it's the way architects write so everyone can read and understand plans).

Note: This assignment is shared with the Urban History of Europe course. For this course, the grade will be based on the entries dedicated to City Life experiences and concepts.

- **Urban History Unconference (60%, 3 @ 20%)**

Students will choose a theme or time period to study across locations, researching its economic, political, cultural, and social impacts as well as key events and sites, developing a level of subject matter expertise or specialization. To share this expertise in intellectually stimulating conversations, students—supported by faculty –will organize and facilitate three Unconferences to explore the systems of power that influenced urban development and social dynamics in Amsterdam, London, and Milan. Special attention should be given to the impacts on different social groups (e.g., elite, middle class, working class, migrants).

An unconference is a flexible, participant-driven conference model where the agenda is created by attendees on the spot based on their interests and expertise. It emphasizes informal conversations and collaborative learning over traditional lecture-style, powerpoint-heavy presentations. Typical unconference activities include:

- [Open Space Technology](#)
 - [Lightning Talks](#)
 - Reverse Panel Discussions (where the audience becomes the experts and the panelists pose questions and seek input from the audience)
 - [Fish Bowl Discussions](#)
 - [Birds of a Feather Sessions](#)
- **Critical Reflection (10%)**
After the Milan Unconference, students will share critical reflections that synthesize insights from the unconference discussions, draw connections and comparisons between the cities' histories, and reflect on how the historical legacies of these events affect modern urban life. The format of the critical reflection is flexible.

Note on Attendance and Participation: Due to the nature of this experiential program, full participation in all classes and program activities is required. Students may not voluntarily opt out of required program activities. Valid reasons for absence – such as illness – must be discussed with the Program Director or other designated staff person. Absences impact academic performance, which may impact grades. Excessive, unexcused absences could result in program dismissal. Alternative work for absences will be expected.

Note on Late Assignments: IHP programs integrate traditional classroom lectures and discussion with field-based experiences, site visits and debriefs. 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. Extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis with approval from the Program Director or other designated staff person. Requests must be made in writing and at least 12 hours before the posted due date and time. Students who do not submit their work within the extension period will receive a failing grade.

Grading Scale

94-100%	A	74-76%	C
90-93%	A-	70-73%	C-
87-89%	B+	67-69%	D+
84-86%	B	64-66%	D
80-83%	B-	below 64	F
77-79%	C+		

Program Expectations

In order to make the most of the opportunities presented in program, communicate respectfully, prepare for student success, and demonstrate best possible engagement, SIT has the following expectations of students:

- **Content Considerations:** The texts and activities you will encounter in this course delve into sensitive topics that may be emotionally and intellectually challenging. Our classroom is a space where we can engage with challenging ideas, question assumptions, and navigate difficult topics with respect and maturity. As possible, I will flag content and activities that are especially graphic or intense, so we are prepared to address them soberly and sensitively. If you are struggling to keep up with the work or participate in the course because of the nature of the content and activities, you should speak with me and/or seek help from counseling services.
- **Learning Community:** 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 differences and consider other perspectives with respect.
- **Presence.** 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.
- **Engage.** Ask questions in class. Interact with the lecturer. These are often very busy professionals who are doing us an honor by coming to speak.
- **Be Honest.** Comply with academic integrity policies (no plagiarism or cheating, nothing unethical).
- **Store Your Work:** Keep several copies of your work as back up and keep one copy accessible to you through an online forum, such as an attachment in your email, the course learning management system, or cloud-based storage. This way your work will

always be available despite technical issues. Lost files, deleted drives, or computer crashes are not excuses for late, missing work.

- **Personal Technology Use:** Cell phones and other personal electronics can be used for taking notes and other class activities. Off-task usage is not acceptable, especially during a guest lecture or presentation from a peer. You may be marked as absent for habitually using them for something other than classroom activities.
- **Course Communication:** Course documents and assignments will be posted on the learning management system, Canvas. Although the course calendar provides a broad overview and the general sequence of work and assignments for the course, what we accomplish in class will vary, and revisions to the calendar will be posted at the course site. You will need to check the course site regularly. You are responsible for letting me know about any network-related problems that prevent you from accessing or submitting assignments.
- **Recording Policy:** To ensure the free and open discussion of ideas, students may not record classroom lectures, discussion and/or activities without the advance written permission of the instructor, and any such recording properly approved in advance can be used solely for the student's own private use. Documented academic accommodations may supersede this policy.

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](#), [Accessibility 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*

NOTE: This syllabus is a suggested sequence of modules, topics, texts, and experiential learning opportunities where each location offers parallel learning cycles with a comparative focus. Lead and local faculty should appropriately adapt how these topics are taught and select texts, case studies, guest speakers, and site visits that are relevant to the context and course themes.

LOCATION #1: AMSTERDAM (weeks 1–5)

Module #1: Framing Urban History in the European Context

Topics: Introduction to how cities have shaped European power through trade, culture, and empire, and how Amsterdam, London, and Milan contributed to the rise of Europe as a global power. Overview of the course themes within this context.

Readings:

- Hohenberg, P. M. (2004). The historical geography of European cities: An interpretive essay. In *Handbook of Regional and Urban Economics* (Vol. 4, pp. 3021–3052). [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0080\(04\)80024-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1574-0080(04)80024-5)
- Voigtländer, N., & Voth, H.-J. (2013). The three horsemen of riches: Plague, war, and urbanization in early modern Europe. *The Review of Economic Studies*, 80(2), 774–811. <https://doi.org/10.1093/restud/rds034>
- Budd, A., Dinkel, H., Corpas, M., Fuller, J. C., Rubinat, L., Devos, D. P., Khoueiry, P. H., Förstner, K. U., Georgatos, F., Rowland, F., Sharan, M., Binder, J. X., Grace, T., Traphagen, K., Gristwood, A., & Wood, N. T. (2015). Ten simple rules for organizing an unconference. *PLoS Computational Biology*, 11(1), e1003905. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pcbi.1003905>

Module #2: Amsterdam in the Dutch “Golden Age”

Topics:

- Politics: The rise of Amsterdam as a center of Dutch political power during the Dutch “Golden Age.”
- Economics: Amsterdam’s emergence as a global trade hub, particularly through the Dutch East India Company, its role in finance and global slave trade.
- Cultural Capital: The flourishing of art, science, and intellectual exchange, including the contributions of artists like Rembrandt and the development of Dutch “Golden Age” culture.

Readings and Videos:

- Magnificent Three: Cities that Shaped History (Director: Frédéric Wilner). (2017). *A Golden Century (1585–1656)* [YouTube video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG19LftWuIA>
- Magnificent Three: Cities that Shaped History (Director: Frédéric Wilner). (2017). *Clashes (1650-1800)* [YouTube video].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG19LftWuIA> Note: The specific segment referenced begins at **53:03** in the video.

- *Amsterdam*, Prologue and select chapters
- Jones, G. (2020). The shadows of (public) recognition: Transatlantic slavery and Indian Ocean slavery in Dutch historiography and public culture. In A. Schrikker & N. Wickramasinghe (Eds.), *Being a slave: Histories and legacies of European slavery in the Indian Ocean* (pp. 269–294). Leiden University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.24415/9789400603769-015>

Learning on Location: Guided visit to cultural institutions that document the remnants and legacies of colonialism and trade.

Assignments:

- Experiential Learning Journal Entry #1
- Study comparative urban history themes in preparation for Amsterdam Unconference

Module# 3: Growth and Global Influence in the 17th Century

Topics:

- Politics: Role in the Dutch Republic and its political independence.
- Economics: Dominance of trade and the establishment of global commercial networks, driving economic prosperity.
- Cultural Capital: Continued rise of Amsterdam as a center for cultural innovation and artistic expression.

Readings:

- *Amsterdam*, select chapters

Learning on Location: Dutch Masters tour of Amsterdam

Assignment: Study comparative urban history themes in preparation for Amsterdam Unconference

Module #4: Industrialization in the 18th and 19th Century

Topics:

- Politics: Impact of Napoleonic rule and the shifting political landscape on Dutch governance.
- Economics: Transition from a trade-based economy to an industrial economy, including the development of key industries like shipping and banking.
- Cultural Capital: Influence of 19th-century urbanization on Amsterdam's cultural institutions.

Readings:

- *Amsterdam*, select chapters

- Carlos, A. M., & Neal, L. (2011). Amsterdam and London as financial centers in the eighteenth century. *Financial History Review*, 18(1), 21–46. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0968565010000338>

Learning on Location: guided industrial history tour of Amsterdam-Noord

Assignment: Study comparative urban history themes in preparation for Amsterdam Unconference

Module #5: Postwar Amsterdam and Urban Transformation

Topics:

- Politics: The role of post-war reconstruction and the impact of European integration.
- Economics: Amsterdam's recovery from World War II and the shift towards a modern economy.
- Postwar Reconstruction: How urban planning and modern architecture reshaped the city's infrastructure.
- Cultural Capital: The growth of artistic and cultural institutions as part of the city's postwar revival.

Readings:

- *Amsterdam*, select chapters

Assignment: Amsterdam Unconference

LOCATION #2: LONDON (weeks 6–10)

Module #6: From Medieval Foundations to Renaissance Flourishing

Topics:

- Politics: Norman Conquest, royal power, and the feudal system in Medieval London, laying the groundwork for urban governance.
- Economics: growth as a Medieval mercantile center, rise of markets, guilds, and early banking systems, while Renaissance London flourished as a global trading hub.
- Cultural Capital: religious institutions and public festivals in Medieval London, while Renaissance London became a center of artistic and intellectual capital, notably through Elizabethan theater.

Reading and Podcasts:

- *A Brief History of London*, select chapters
- Keene, D. (2012). Medieval London and its supply hinterlands. *Regional Environmental Change*, 12(2), 263–281. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-011-0243-8>

- Barron, C. M. (2016). What did medieval London merchants read? In C. M. Barron & J. L. Bolton (Eds.), *Medieval merchants and money: Essays in honour of James L. Bolton* (pp. 43–70). Institute of Historical Research. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv5132xh.9>

Learning on Location: cultural heritage tour of monuments, museums, and monarchy to see the legacies of historical events and systems

Assignments:

- Experiential Learning Journal Entry #2;
- Study comparative urban history themes in preparation for London Unconference

Module #7: Age of Enlightenment and Colonial Expansion

Topics:

- Politics: evolution of political thought with thinkers like John Locke shaping British governance
- Economics: colonial expansion enriching merchant classes and strengthening London's global influence.
- Cultural Capital: center for intellectual thought, with the rise of scientific societies and cultural institutions during the Enlightenment.

Readings, Videos, and Podcasts:

- Chapters from *A Brief History of London*
- Cain, P. J., & Hopkins, A. G. (2017). Gentlemanly capitalism and British expansion overseas: I. The old colonial system, 1688–1850. In *The Rise and Fall of Modern Empires, Volume III* (pp. 23-48). Routledge.
- London Guided Walks. (2023, December 1). *Episode 126: Transatlantic slave trade and London* [Audio podcast episode]. In *London history podcast*. <https://londonguidedwalks.co.uk/podcast/episode-126-transatlantic-slave-trade/>

Learning on Location: fieldtrip to London Museum Docklands with emphasis on colonial history and legacies

Assignment: Study comparative urban history themes in preparation for London Unconference

Module #8: Industrial Revolution and Urbanization

Topics:

- Politics: impact of industrialization and parliamentary reforms on London's political landscape, including labor reforms and urban governance.
- Economics: transition into an industrial capital, evolving into a financial hub with the rise of global financial institutions.
- Cultural Capital: Victorian era flourishing of art, theater, and science

Readings:

- Chapters from *A Brief History of London*
- Magnificent Three: Cities that Shaped History (Director: Frédéric Wilner). (2017). *Metropolis (1800–1880)* [YouTube video]. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dG19LftWuIA>
- Barnaby, A. (2014). London: from conflict to conviviality: nineteenth-century illuminated street events. In *Cities of Light* (pp. 20-27). Routledge.

Learning on Location: guided tour of Covent Garden

Assignment: Study comparative urban history themes in preparation for London Unconference

Module #9: 20th Century and Postwar Reconstruction

Topics:

- Politics: Role in post-World War I and World War II recovery, including its influence on global diplomacy.
- Economics: Challenges of deindustrialization, economic restructuring, and the rise of finance in London's economy.
- Postwar Reconstruction: The Blitz and rebuilding efforts in the city's infrastructure and housing.
- Cultural Capital: interwar and postwar influence on music, fashion, and youth culture.

Readings and Podcasts:

- Chapters from *A Brief History of London*
- London Guided Walks. (2021, February ?). *Episode 111: London nightclubs in the interwar years* [Audio podcast episode]. In *London History Podcast*. <https://londonguidedwalks.co.uk/podcast/episode-111-1920s-london-nightclubs/>
- Mile End Institute. (2022, July 20). *Waterloo Sunrise: London from the Sixties to Thatcher* [Audio podcast episode]. *Mile End Institute podcast*. Note: available on Apple and Spotify

Learning on Location: neighborhood visit to Hackney to learn about postwar rebuilding and contemporary gentrification projects

Assignment: London Unconference

LOCATION #3: MILAN (weeks 11–15)

Module #10: Milan's Role in the Renaissance

Topics:

- Politics: Major political center during the Renaissance, under the rule of figures like Ludovico Sforza.
- Economics: Economic prosperity during the Renaissance, focusing on banking, commerce, and manufacturing.
- Cultural Capital: hub for art, architecture, and intellectual development, with artists like Leonardo da Vinci.

Readings and Videos:

- Accetturo, A., & Mocetti, S. (2019). Historical origins and developments of Italian cities. *Italian Economic Journal*, 5(2), 205–222. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40797-019-00097-w>
- Gamberini, A. (2015). Milan and Lombardy in the era of the Visconti and the Sforza. In *A companion to late medieval and early modern Milan* (pp. 19–45). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004284128_003
- Mainoni, P. (2014). The economy of Renaissance Milan. In A. Gamberini (Ed.), *A companion to late medieval and early modern Milan: The distinctive features of an Italian state* (pp. 118–141). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004284128_007
- Gritti, J. (2024). Ceremonies performed in public spaces: Ephemeral architecture and urban itineraries in Sforza Milan. *Architectural Histories*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.16995/ah.9162>
- Fernandez-Vivancos González, E. (2016). Geometry of transformation: Leonardo da Vinci's urban proposal for Milan. *EGA Revista de Expresión Gráfica Arquitectónica*, 21(28), 160–169. <https://doi.org/10.4995/ega.2016.4736>

Learning on Location: cultural heritage tour of monuments, museums, and fashion houses to see the legacies of historical events and systems

Assignments:

- Experiential Learning Journal Entry #3
- Study comparative urban history themes in preparation for Milan Unconference

Module #11: Under Habsburg Rule

Topics:

- Politics: Incorporation into the Habsburgs empire, period of centralized governance and administrative reforms.
- Economics: Positioned as a significant economic center within the Austrian Empire, driven by textile manufacturing, trade, and the establishment of financial systems.
- Cultural Capital: Construction of key cultural landmarks such as La Scala Opera House and the Sforza Castle, concurrent with the development of art and classical architecture.

Readings:

- Connelly, John. (2023). Was the Habsburg empire an empire. *Austrian History Yearbook*, 54, pp. 1–14. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge->

[core/content/view/BF49ACF01998A8F11A5F002F05DB884A/S0067237823000395a.pdf/was-the-habsburg-empire-an-empire.pdf](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000038)

- Tucci, M., Giordano, A., & Ronza, R. W. (2010). Using spatial analysis and geovisualization to reveal urban changes: Milan, Italy, 1737–2005. *Cartographica: The International Journal for Geographic Information and Geovisualization*, 45(1), 47–63. <https://doi.org/10.3138/carto.45.1.47>
- Cassen, F. (2014). The last Spanish expulsion in Europe: Milan 1565–1597. *AJS Review*, 38(1), 59–88. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0364009414000038>
- Tonelli, G. (2019). Urban network and economic policy: The Milanese case during the Spanish and Austrian ages. In G. Favero, M. W. Serruys, & M. Sugiura (Eds.), *The urban logistic network* (pp. 157–178). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-27599-0_7
- Getz, C. (2020). Milan: Imperial City and ‘Theatre of the World’. In *A Companion to Music at the Habsburg Courts in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (pp. 499–533). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004435032_016

Learning on Location: guided tour of Pinacoteca di Brera, museum with deep connections to the Habsburg dynasty through the patronage of Empress Maria Theresa

Assignment: Study comparative urban history themes in preparation for Milan Unconference

Module #12: Napoleonic Era through Italian Unification

- Politics: Key city in Napoleon’s Kingdom of Italy, reinforcing its importance in the European political landscape during the early 19th century through Italian unification
- Economics: 19th century industrial growth, particularly in the textile and engineering sectors, solidifying its role as an economic powerhouse in Northern Italy.
- Cultural Capital: Napoleonic reforms influence education and public works, contributing to Milan's growing role as a cultural hub in Europe.

Readings:

- Carnino, C., Lucrezio Monticelli, C., Mannucci, E. J., Castagnino, A., Dendena, F., Girardi, G., & Omes, M. E. (2024). Translation, political culture, and governance: The Napoleonic experience and its legacy in the Italian Restoration. *Contemporanea: Rivista di storia dell'800 e del '900*, 4, 635–662. <https://doi.org/10.1409/115258>
- Grab, A. (1998). The politics of finance in Napoleonic Italy (1802-1814). *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 3(2), 127–143. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13545719808454972>
- Licini, S. (2011). Assessing female wealth in nineteenth century Milan, Italy. *Accounting History*, 16(1), 35-54. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1032373210389591>
- Senici, E. (2015). Delirious hopes: Napoleonic Milan and the rise of modern Italian operatic criticism. *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 27(2), 97–127. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0954586715000026>

Learning on Location: Guest speaker on Napoleonic influence and Italian unification

Assignment: Study comparative urban history themes in preparation for Milan Unconference

Week 13: Urban Transformation and Postwar Reconstruction

Topics:

- Politics: Milan's role in shaping postwar Italy, with a focus on urban policies and economic recovery.
- Economics: Shift from insutrial economy to finance and design
- Postwar Reconstruction: Role of urban planning and architecture to modernize Milan
- Cultural Capital: Emergence as a global fashion capital and center of contemporary culture.

Readings:

- Foot, J. (2001). *Milan since the miracle: City, culture and identity*. Berg. Chapter 1: Milan, City of Fragments (pp. 1–18). <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350151444.ch-001>
- Gill, E. (1986). Economic Reconstruction in Italy in the period following the Second World War. *The Italianist*, 6(1), 107–138. <https://doi.org/10.1179/ita.1986.6.1.107>
- Bigatti, G. (2022). Milan, the Story of an Urban Metamorphosis. In: Berger, S., Musso, S., Wicke, C. (eds) *Deindustrialisation in Twentieth-Century Europe*. Palgrave Studies in the History of Social Movements. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89631-7_11
- Loach, J. (2005). QT8: a neglected chapter in the history of modern town planning. In *Modern City Revisited* (pp. 137–161). Taylor & Francis.
- Reinach, S. S. (2014). The Italian fashion revolution in Milan. In *Italian style: Fashion since 1945* (pp. 58–75). Bloomsbury Academic.

Learning on Location: neighborhood visit to NoLo

Assignment:

- Prepare for Milan Unconference
- Work on Critical Reflections

Module #14: Comparative Urban Histories

Topics: comparative synthesis of course themes across locations and broad implications for Europe.

Assignments:

- Milan Unconference
- Critical Reflections