

City Life: Representations and Realities

URST-3060 (3 credits)

Switzerland: Choose Your Track—Wildlife, Food Systems, Cities OR French Culture

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 (part of the Cities Track) examines how representations of European cities and their cultural institutions popularized across the mediascape perpetuate dominant discourses of inclusion and exclusion in urban life. By contrasting idealized and commercialized narratives with the lived experiences of residents in the center and on the outskirts, students will explore how perceptions of the city and its denizens are constructed and challenged. Special attention will be paid to the role of underground cultural movements, marginalized communities, and gentrification. Through field visits, readings, and media analysis, students will contrast competing narratives of the city and its people, exploring how alternative stories challenge mainstream portrayals and reshape the identity of urban metropolises.

Learning Outcomes

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

1. **Analyze** perceptions of European cities and their inhabitants based on media representations, including official tourist publications and social media influencers.
2. **Articulate** the role of cultural heritage and institutions in reinforcing and challenging dominant city narratives.
3. **Compare** commercialized narratives with the lived experiences of residents within the center and periphery of European cities.
4. **Examine** the role of underground cultural movements and marginalized communities in presenting counter-narratives that reshape urban identities.
5. **Compare** the gentrification and urban development projects and their impacts on neighborhoods and city branding.
6. **Reflect** on positionality and ethical considerations when participating in city life, engaging with community members, and representing city stories.

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.

Course Readings

**These are sample readings. Individual instructors may adapt as necessary.*

- Boy, J. D., & Uitermark, J. (2016). How to study the city on Instagram. *PLoS ONE*, 11(6), e0158161. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0158161>
- Gamba, F., & Cattacin, S. (2021). Urbans rituals as spaces of memory and belonging: A Geneva case study. *City, culture and society*, 24, 100385.
- Halbert, D. (2008). A political geography of Geneva: mapping globalization and its discontents. *Borderlands*, 7(1), NA-NA.
- Hollands, R., Berthet, M. A., Nada, E., & Bjertnes, V. (2017). Urban cultural movements and the night: struggling for the 'right to the creative (party) city' in Geneva. In *The SAGE handbook of new urban studies* (pp. 295-310). SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Kaufmann, D., & Strebel, D. (2021). Urbanising migration policy-making: Urban policies in support of irregular migrants in Geneva and Zürich. *Urban Studies*, 58(14), 2991-3008.
- Monnot, C. (2020). The city as a continuous laboratory for diversity: The case of Geneva. *Social Inclusion*, 8(3), 262-272.
- Richards, G. (2022). Urban tourism as a special type of cultural tourism. In *A research agenda for urban tourism* (pp. 31–50). Edward Elgar Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781789907407.00009>
- Slim, H. (2007). Geneva's future: reflections on the role of a values-based city. *International Affairs*, 83(1), 109-125.
- Vinyals-Mirabent, S. (2019). European urban destinations' attractors at the frontier between competitiveness and a unique destination image: A benchmark study of

communication practices. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 12, 37–45.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.idmm.2019.02.006>

- Vietti, F. (2022). The Tourist, the Migrant, and the Anthropologist: A Problematic Encounter within European Cities. In *Intersections of Tourism, Migration, and Exile* (pp. 170-186). Routledge.

Course Assignments

Class Participation (10%)

Students are expected to be physically and mentally present for all classes. To prepare for class, students should critically read the assigned texts prior to each class and come prepared with relevant questions and insights.

Field Journal (30%)

Students will write weekly field journals, making connections between the course readings and the field visits. Journal entries are expected to be 250-500 words in length. Students are allowed to miss 2 weeks.

Counter-Narratives Multimedia Project (35%)

Students will create a multimedia counter-narrative that challenges mainstream portrayals of their host city by engaging with marginalized communities, alternative spaces, and overlooked stories. Students can include photography, video, audio, written text, drawings, maps, etc. Through this project, students will juxtapose the mainstream narrative with a counternarrative that adds a new perspective.

Multimedia Project Presentations (10%)

Students will present their counternarrative project to the class through a 10 minute presentation.

Critical Reflection (15%)

Students will write a final 5-6 page reflection, focusing specifically on the multimedia project (both their process and product and their experience learning about their classmate's projects), and integrating course readings for a critical analysis focusing on the following questions:

- a. How does mainstream tourism media shape public perceptions of each city?
- b. How did your own positionality (identity, background, assumptions) shape the way you saw and represented the city?
- c. How can digital storytelling be used responsibly and ethically?
- d. In what ways did your work challenge or reinforce the "tourist gaze"?

- e. How did the process of engaging with local voices or hidden spaces shift your understanding of urban life in Europe?

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](#), [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*

Note: This is a suggested sequence of modules and topics where each location explores parallel modules with a comparative focus. Local faculty should appropriately adapt how these topics are taught and select local texts, case studies, guest speakers, and site visits that are relevant to the context and course themes.

Week 1: Course Overview & Key Concepts

- How are European cities romanticized, sanitized, sensationalized, and commercialized?
- How do media, literature, tourism, and social media create idealized versions of cities?

Week 2: Ethical Storytelling & Positionality in the City

- Critically reflect on the positionality when engaging with communities and acting as observer and storyteller

Week 3: Historical Layers & Official Narratives

- Trace Geneva's historical evolution from Reformation hub to international city, focusing on periods that shape its current image and examine how cultural heritage sites reinforce historical narratives

Week 4: The Diplomatic Playground: Commercialized vs. Lived Internationalism

- Investigate Geneva's global branding: As a center for diplomacy, humanitarianism, and finance

Week 5: Architecture, Public Space & Symbolic Power

- Examine Geneva's urban design, architectural expressions, and public use of space

Week 6: City Margins: Spatial & Social

- Explore diverse neighborhoods and lived realities beyond the central tourist/diplomatic zones

Week 7: Gentrification & Urban Transformation

- Investigate current urban development projects, the processes of gentrification in Geneva, and the impact on social life

Week 8: Migration, Identity & Integration

- Explore the multicultural fabric of Geneva, shaped by historical and contemporary migration, focusing on the lived experiences of migrant communities

Week 9: Counter-Narratives: Underground Movements & Marginalized Voices

- Focus on grassroots initiatives, street art, alternative media, and other underground cultural movements

Week 10: Counter-narratives project presentations

- See details in assignment description

Week 11: Course Reflections