AN URBANISING WORLD: THE FUTURE OF GLOBAL CITIES (IR203)

Course duration: 54 hours lecture and class time (Over three weeks)

Summer School Programme Area: International Relations, Government and Society

LSE Teaching Department: Department of Geography and Environment

Lead Faculty: Dr Hyun Bang Shin and Dr Austin Zeiderman (Dept. of Geography & Environment)

Pre-requisites: At least one introductory course in the social sciences (politics, sociology, economics, geography, anthropology, history).

Course Outline

Urbanisation is one of the most crucial processes of change in the world today. It is also one of the most hotly debated topics across the social sciences.

The course begins with exploring the concept of the ‘urban’ in urban studies literature by examining what urbanisation means to the governments, businesses and people whose lives are affected by changes to the built environment of cities and to the ecosystems that support them. It moves on to consider urban contestations over policy, planning and development among a wide range of stakeholders, from real estate developers to social movements to international NGOs.

This interactive course will draw on examples of urban policy and planning practices from both the global North and the South, with emphasis on Asia, Latin America and the North Atlantic. One of the highlights of this course is a field trip to East London led by course professors, experiencing London on foot and using public transport and thinking about how themes discussed in the classroom are reflected in the city’s built form.

Key topics to be covered are as follows:

Session 1: Introduction – An Urbanising World and Comparative Perspectives

Session 2: The Political Economy of Urbanisation

Session 3: The Politics of Land

Session 4: Financial Capitalism and Urban Crises

Session 5: The Politics of Displacement

Session 6: Planetary Gentrification
Session 7: Urban Infrastructure

Session 8: (a) Urban Ecologies and Climate Change; (b) Security, Threat, and the City

Session 9: Field Trip in East London (led by course professors)

Session 10: Cities and Citizenship

Session 11: Cities and Spectacles – Mega-Projects and Mega-Events

Session 12: Urban Contestations and Struggle for Progressive Cities

Course outcomes

At the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Critically understand key contemporary debates on urbanisation and urban development;
- Display comparative knowledge of urban transformations in different parts of the world;
- Evaluate the social implications of urbanisation processes;
- Respond to the future challenges of an urbanising world.

Course Structure:
- Lectures: 36 hours
- Classes: 18 hours

Formative course work:
- An essay plan submitted to the class teacher.
- This assessment does not count towards the final mark, but is suggested to help students to gauge their academic progress during the session.
- Submission by Friday of Week 1.

Summative assessment:

The summative assessment consists of:
- An essay of 1,500 words (bibliography does not count). The essay will count for 25% of the final mark. Students must choose a question from among a list distributed at the end of the first week of the course. Submission by Friday of Week 2.
- A two-hour written exam at the end of the programme (Friday of Week 3). The exam counts for 75% of the final mark. The precise time and location of the exam will be circulated during the programme.
General guide to reading:

**Required reading:** all students are expected to read these texts in preparation for each session.

**Additional reading:** students are advised to read these as background reading for each session or in preparation for their essay writing.

There is no single textbook for this course, but you may want to consult one or more of the following books alongside the course reading:


---

**Session 1: Introduction – An Urbanising World and Comparative Perspectives**

The first session includes an overview of the course contents and the key perspectives that will be used throughout the course. The session is also to allow a space for participating students to get to know each other and with the instructor.

**Required reading**


**Additional reading**


**Session 2: The Political Economy of Urbanisation**

In post-industrial cities of the West, property development has gained an increasing degree of significance in urban renewal. In East Asian cities where real estate investment has been one of the main drivers behind their rapid economic growth, urban renewal involving demolition and reconstruction of existing buildings has been at the centre of urban policy-making processes for many years. Underlying these processes is the government-developer nexus that brings together property-based interests that aim to maximise gains from property development. In particular, the issue of land ownership and property rights is critical to our understanding of the differences between cities in the global East/South and those in other capitalist countries.

**Required reading**


**Additional reading**


**Session 3: The Politics of Land**

Given the importance of the Chinese economy in the world, this session aims to understand the process of urbanisation in mainland China, focusing on the concept of the “urbanisation of the local state”. Here, the land and housing question becomes a key entry point, as it has become an integral component of China’s speculative urban accumulation.

**Required reading**


**Additional reading**


Session 4: Financial Capitalism and Urban Crises
This session examines the increasing degree of financialisation of daily life, focusing on the ways in which contemporary urban accumulation hinges on creating indebted citizens. A particular attention is paid to the rise of asset-based welfarism, and its counterpart in East Asian productivist welfarism that places a heavy emphasis on the roles of families and individuals as well as on property investment and homeownership.

Required reading


Additional reading


Session 5: The Politics of Displacement
This session examines the socio-spatial consequences of spatial restructuring propelled by various investments in the built environment (e.g. urban regeneration, infrastructure development). What are the experiences of local residents who can be grouped in a number of ways based on their level of income, tenure or ownership of property rights? To what extent are the benefits of property (re)development disproportionately shared among local residents? One issue that may come to mind readily is the displacement of poor residents. What happens to the displacees? How do their experiences vary across countries?

Required reading


Additional reading

Session 6: Planetary Gentrification
Gentrification is first coined by Ruth Glass in the early 1960s, referring to the displacement of poor tenants in inner-city London. Born out of the experiences of post-industrial cities in the West, it is also a term that has been heavily contested over the years, its definition and applicability to various emerging urban phenomena challenged. This session aims to review key arguments in the gentrification literature, and explore the extent to which the concept can be applicable to urban processes in the global South and East.

Required reading


Additional reading


Session 7: Urban Infrastructure

This session will explore the critical infrastructures that enable and sustain cities and urban life. With a focus on water, we will discuss infrastructures as complex social and technological systems for distributing essential services to urban populations, though rarely in equal measure. Comparing water infrastructures across three cities—Mumbai, Johannesburg, and London—will allow us to appreciate the different ways people and technology come together to manage the flow of this vital resource. Our primary concerns will be 1) to understand how urban infrastructures shape (and are shaped by) the social, cultural, and political life of cities; and 2) to consider future challenges in the context of urban and ecological transformations on a global scale.

Required reading


**Additional reading**


**Session 8A: Urban Ecologies and Climate Change**

This session will expand our vision of urbanization to take into account the biological, physical, and ecological processes that make up cities and on which cities depend. From the scale of the local to the global, we will learn to understand the city as a hybrid assemblage of humans and non-humans, at once natural and social, composed of complex relations between living and non-living things. We will pay attention to the role of the environment across multiple domains of urban life, as well as how urban natures are inseparable from highly unequal processes of urban development. Special consideration will be given to how urban “natures” are defined, both as resources and threats, central to both the production and destruction of cities. This will lead us to consider how climate change is reconfiguring urban space, politics, and everyday life, and how cities around the world are responding to the imperative of adaptation.

**Required reading**


Course content is subject to change. Last updated: December 2017


**Additional reading**


**Session 8B: Security, Threat, and the City**

This session will focus on the city as a strategic site that must be secured. We will begin by discussing the shift toward understanding cities as spaces of convergence for multiple threats, such as natural disaster, disease outbreaks, political violence, and criminal activity. We will examine how these future threats, both real and imagined, shape cities and urban life and critically examine the various strategies that are devised and deployed in response. Our goal will be to understand how security concerns both enable and constrain visions of the urban future.

**Required reading**


Additional reading


Session 9: Field Trip to East London (led by course professors)

In this walk that lasts about 4.5 hours, students are led by course professors to visit various sites of interest, moving between sites using London public transport and on foot. We will stop for a brief while at each site for short discussions around key questions as follows:

(a) Can you find themes we’ve discussed so far reflected in the city’s built form?
(b) What traces of history remain visible in the present configuration of East London?
(c) What processes of urbanization are evident in the physical spaces of the city?

Session 10: Cities and Citizenship

This session will explore the city as a terrain of political contestation. We will discuss how the political significance of the city has changed over time and developed in divergent ways in different parts of the world. We will also consider what makes the city distinctive as a scale of popular politics (relative to other scales, such as the nation). Emphasis will be placed on urbanization as a political process, and in particular what it means to think about the spatial dimension of struggles for political recognition, belonging, and entitlement. Examining demands for urban citizenship and the right to the city will
enable us to appreciate why and how cities become strategic sites for collective and individual mobilization.

**Required reading**


**Additional reading**


**Session 11: Cities and Spectacles: Mega-Projects and Mega-Events**

With the rise of local entrepreneurialism, cities have come to employ various strategies in order to compete for increasingly footloose capital and people, reconstructing their image to raise city profile and reputation. Event-led development as part of hosting sporting events such as the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup is one of the various policy tools that have been increasingly adopted in this
respect. This session examines the pros and cons of this strategy, and also explores its socio-spatial footprints.

**Required reading**


**Additional reading**


Session 12: Urban Contestations and Struggle for Progressive Cities

In previous sessions, we have focused on how market agents and governments with vested interests in real estate development come about to promote property-based, profit-led urban spatial changes. This process inevitably threatens (some of) those existing residents whose ‘legitimate’ rights to their housing and land are violated. While many people would agree on building ‘cities for people, not for profit’, how to realise this in different urban contexts is hard to be defined.

**Required reading**


**Additional reading**


Marcuse, P. (2009) From critical urban theory to the right to the city. City 13(2-3): 185-197


**Credit Transfer:** If you are hoping to earn credit by taking this course, please ensure that you confirm it is eligible for credit transfer well in advance of the start date. Please discuss this directly with your home institution or Study Abroad Advisor.

As a guide, our LSE Summer School courses are typically eligible for three or four credits within the US system and 7.5ECTS in Europe. Different institutions and countries can, and will, vary. You will receive a digital transcript and a printed certificate following your successful completion of the course in order to make arrangements for transfer of credit.

If you have any queries, please direct them to summer.school@lse.ac.uk