



Course Name -Urbanity and Infrastructure

Course Code – ARCH-URBD-COMD-7006

Credits- 3

Faculty Name – Ritam Sengupta

Faculty Biography (maximum three to four sentences) –

Ritam Sengupta is Assistant Professor, Jindal School of Art and Architecture, O.P. Jindal Global University. He specializes in the study of infrastructure, energy, the environment and digital media through the lens of history, media studies, and anthropology. His PhD thesis that he is developing now as a monograph focuses on the ways in which colonial and postcolonial rule impacted the development of electricity in Indian cities. His post-doctoral research, initiated as part of a European Research Council project, revisits the history of seasonality and agriculture in the Indian subcontinent. He has otherwise studied digital infrastructure like data centres and laws of data protection through a political economic and ethnographic lens. Some of this work has come out in the form of a volume he co-edited, titled, *Data Centres as Infrastructure: Frontiers of Digital Governance in Contemporary India* (Orient Blackswan, 2022).

Course Description-

This course will explore how questions of urbanity and infrastructure intersect. It will develop a qualitative research agenda that will centre the question of the formation of society and culture in relation to the design and functioning of material forms. Readings will be broadly interdisciplinary in nature, borrowing from history, sociology, urban studies, anthropology, public policy, literary studies and philosophy. The course will also build upon visual material like photographs and film.

The course will begin with a brief introduction to how infrastructure and urbanity have been studied till date. Infrastructure has been a term of mediation that has had tremendous influence in the social sciences and the humanities in the last couple of decades. We will study texts that have tried to define and historicise this slippery term and make it available for the analyses of society, economy, and culture. We will try to understand what possible (productive) differences exist between the analytical usage of the infrastructure term as against other allied terminology like technology or media.

The study of urbanity has of course been one of the core concerns of the built environment and the humanities and social sciences. Existing approaches to decoding the urban, its social genesis and expanding scope have followed varied frameworks ranging between an early focus on questions of material and moral density and industrialisation, to questions of the reorganisation of capitalist surplus-making to the cultural dimension of regimes of wonders, spectacles, and alienation. What does the infrastructural turn present to this panoply of approaches of decoding the urban? Why is a new approach to comprehending the social and cultural life of urbanity being formed through the study of infrastructure?

The course will open up these questions with an eye towards two points of distinction: the essential role of cities and related forms of life in the global south in the reconceptualization of studies of urbanity and the explosion of urbanity in the recent past that is drawing more and more people from around the world into the folds of social existence resembling some form of urbanity. On the latter trail the course will also urge a move away from metropolitan forms of urbanity to think of peri-urban, semi-urban, suburban, 'rurban', small towns, census towns and the like, that describe various intermediary and peripheral (but not secondary) forms of 'planetary urbanisation'. A new concern will also be to think through militarised forms of urban inhabitation and the infrastructural constitution of such forms of inhabitation.

Finally, the course will deal with a range of specific examples of infrastructural forms related to water, waste, ecology, energy, transport, digital and data technologies, but also political and social assemblies of people and nature. Through these examples we will particularly try to grasp what inheres in the infrastructural question as related to urban forms. Are there particular political outcomes that emerge from the being and becoming of infrastructure? How do indices of inequality, like class, caste and gender present themselves when thought through the intersection of urbanity and infrastructure? Finally, what is 'smartness' and/or 'artificial intelligence' doing to and proposing to do with our extant forms of urbanity. Some of these questions will be dealt with specifically in relation issues of urban design (taken broadly) extending beyond singular built structures to encompass wider ecologies and systems and built environments.

The final assignment of the course can be submitted as a paper or a video production.

Prerequisites- An interest in urban and infrastructural issues is a must for students subscribing to this course. The course will also entail regular and close reading of texts and students should be prepared for that. It is also essential to make regular contributions to class discussions.

Scheme of Evaluation and Grading –

30% class participation and presentation + 30% first assignment + 40% final assignment.

Presentations: As assigned individually in class

Assignment I: ... (1000-1500 words)

Final Paper/Video production: ... (2500 words/5 mins max.)