

Cultures of Cities

Course Manual

Spring

4 Credits

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This course is designed to provide a systematic introduction to urban sociology from a contemporary cultural studies perspective. It should be of interest to students of sociology, anthropology, architecture and urban planning in particular, but is interdisciplinary and has no specific pre-requisites. It will be a seminar style class in which active participation is required. The course will cover the following topics:

1. An introduction to the study of urban settlements. What is the sociological and cultural approach?
2. Reading and mapping the city. Spatial factors and interpretation of space, movement, dwelling and navigation.
3. City histories. How did cities arise and what are the historical and geographical factors that have influenced their siting and development, and in many cases, their decline?
4. The sociology of architecture: how does the built environment shape social interaction, status, creativity and social functions?
5. Heritage and Public Art: how cities build on their history. How they decorate themselves. Post-colonial cities and their spatial and social histories.
6. The city in film and Literature: how have cities been represented cinematically? “Metropolis” to “Bladerunner” and beyond. The city as literary setting and as protagonist.
7. The Utopian and Dystopian City: the city as dream or nightmare?
8. The cultural economy of cities: culture in cities/cities of culture.
9. Consumption, leisure and urban and spatial changes. The Mall and the re-shaping of public space. The car and its effects and other means of transportation.
10. Ethnicity, class and gender in the city. Patterns of social exclusion. The history of the Ghetto. Contemporary neighborhoods and spatial segregation.
11. The future of cities: are they sustainable? Ecological footprints, waste, energy and water. Housing issues. Can cities really be planned?

12. Redesigning the city: what have we learnt and how can we apply it to better patterns of urban living.

The course will be highly comparative and you will be expected to research films, novels and other cultural resources that reference the city, and to acquaint yourself with a large variety of city forms, from ancient to contemporary, planned and spontaneous, heritage and functional. While we will reference Indian cities, the course will be very much concerned with urban settlements globally.

Assessment will be in the form of two papers based on your in-class presentations (30% each), attendance and participation (10%) and final exam (30%).

There are many texts on urban sociology and specific readings and examples for you to research will be assigned as the course develops.

The University wide rules about plagiarism and attendance apply, as do all other rules, including any special needs or disabilities that may require extra time or facilities.