

Critical Urbanisms: Introduction

Semester: Fall 2024

Instructors: Prof. Dr. Kenny Cupers, Prof. Dr. Nancy Odendaal, Amanda Haas

Assessor: Prof. Dr. Kenny Cupers

Format: Block Course

Recurrence: Every fall semester

Credit Points: 3CP

Assessment: Pass/Fail

Time: 9:00-12:00 and 13:00-17:00, Monday 16 until Friday 20 September

Place: Urban Studies (Hebelstrasse 3), E016 Hörsaal (unless otherwise indicated)

Language of instruction: English

Prerequisites: This course is for first year Master in Critical Urbanisms students only.

Link to course directory:

<https://vorlesungsverzeichnis.unibas.ch/de/semester-planung?id=286467>

Course Description

This course introduces students to selected current debates in critical urban studies generally, and to themes that frame the Masters in Critical Urbanisms in particular. In order to explain why urban problems persist or how cities change the way they do, observers often rely on unspoken assumptions, theoretical constructs, or inherited perspectives. Their explanations, in turn, are used by a range of actors to legitimize policies or to mobilize forms of intervention. The way a problem is defined shapes the approaches that actors mobilize in response. Critical approaches to urban studies therefore require us not only to account for the complexity of urban realities but also interrogate the various ways in which people make sense of them.

Drawing from the disciplines of geography, architecture, law, political science, history, and anthropology, this course explores the relationship between urban challenges, urban theories, and urban practices. Students will learn to unpack and explicate ways of seeing and making sense of cities and landscapes, and explore how research paradigms bear on specific theories as well as practices and lived experience. Our goal is to explore the “real-world” work of theory and the ways it can help reframe urban challenges and shape alternative modes of engagement.

Structure of the Course:

Orientation: As part of this mandatory introductory course, you will receive detailed information about the curriculum, including the Urbanism from the South/Urbanism across Geographies/Anthropological Fieldwork tracks and the process of registering for one of these.

Four Conceptual Themes: The mornings of the rest of the week are structured by four conceptual themes that undergird the MA in Critical Urbanisms curriculum. The first theme, *Ways of Knowing the City*, explores epistemological contradictions underlying urban studies. We are interested in how disciplinary and methodological perspectives foreground multiple and at times incommensurable ways of knowing the city. The second theme, *In Between Theory and Practice*, examines modes of engagement in urban studies. Our focus will be on the political and ethical tensions arising from doing research in different urban and global settings. The third theme, *The Urban Across Geographies* asks how urban studies is shaped by geographically situated claims of validity. Here, we will interrogate dominant binaries, such as north versus south, east versus west, and urban versus rural. The fourth theme, *The Present of the Past*, focuses on the multiple temporalities that inhabit the city. We ask how an awareness of historical inheritances and colonial afterlives redefines contemporary urban challenges and approaches to urban planning, heritage preservation, migration policy, and so on.

Engagement with Basel: The afternoons of each day offer a physical-sensory and social immersion into the city of Basel. Be it as a newcomer or as long-time resident, it is important to feel well-oriented and embedded in the cityscapes that present themselves as a home during your studies. In a set of workshops, presentations, and urban walks you can equip yourselves with a rich set of knowledge of Basel's publics, emerging spaces, local agents, and urban practices, which will all be resources to draw on as you venture for a challenging Master's program. The afternoon course encourages you to immerse yourself in the rich fabric of the city, to take reflective walks, and develop research questions through careful observation. There is no special preparation needed to attend the afternoon workshops and activities.

Student Work, or How to Pass This Course:

PLEASE NOTE: Successfully completing this course is a prerequisite to participating in the Urbanism from the South/Urbanism across Geographies/Anthropological Fieldwork tracks that are offered only in the Spring semester each year.

1. Critical Reflection Journal

You will read the required texts before class, making notes as you go along. Your notes should reflect on the main arguments of the texts. In addition, we encourage you to make creative use of drawings, collage, and other non-textual ways to illustrate your inspirations, concerns, and questions. The journal is a space to reflect on the readings as well as the afternoon activities, and to record which stories and theories of the week speak to your interest and experience. You are free to structure this as you please (chronologically or thematically), but it should be at least 10 pages long. You should submit your final journal on ADAM, by Friday 27 September at 5pm latest.

2. Presence and Active Participation

Students need to be present for at least 80% of all required class times (including the afternoons), and during this time, participate actively in discussions and activities.

For students unable to attend the course, and for those missing 20% or more of class

time: First, you need to validate your absence with a doctor's note or equivalent documentation. Only serious illness, quarantine, or visa issues will be counted as authorized absence. You are still required to submit your reflection journal and poster presentation via email to the instructors by Friday 27 September at 5pm. Additionally, you are required to submit a 1000-word critical analysis essay for each day or part of the day that you missed (Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and/or Friday). Your essay(s) should summarize and critically discuss the arguments of all the readings. If you miss the Monday orientation class, there is no extra work to make up. If you miss the final reflection presentation on Friday, you will submit your three sheets together with a one-paragraph description of each sheet. The submission deadline for all this material is Friday 27 September at 5pm.

Learning Outcomes

This interdisciplinary course pursues three interrelated learning outcomes. The first is to develop an understanding of contemporary debates and approaches in critical urban studies. In doing so, students will also develop an ability to raise and discuss methodological questions. Together, these learning outcomes lay the foundation for developing the ability to discuss and situate urban debates within the variegated global landscape of knowledge production in and about cities and urban territories.

Academic Integrity

Teaching is based on a relation of mutual trust. When we research, we use other people's work to help develop our own: this is an essential part of academia. However, when you use someone else's work, you must cite and reference it correctly. This lets the reader/listener know which parts of the work are your own, and which parts come from other sources. What that means is that anytime you draw from someone's ideas or use their actual words, you must

give the name of the author and the book in proper citation form. You are expected to adhere to the university's regulations on plagiarism and the use of AI tools. All breaches will be acted upon promptly and firmly, resulting at least in a fail for the relevant piece of assessment and possibly in further action being taken by the instructor, depending on the severity of the offense. If in doubt as to what constitutes plagiarism, do not hesitate to contact the instructor.

Academic Freedom and Intellectual Interaction

In this course you will deal with topics that can be controversial. In class discussions, you are free to offer the class any disagreement you may have. You will not be penalized for disagreeing with other students, the readings or the instructors, but your perspective must be based on evidence and fair argument. Freedom of speech and ideas is a basic principle of academic life and every student will have a chance to express their opinion as long as it is voiced in a respectful manner. Respect for others' differences in ability, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender is a prerequisite for us working and thinking together in this course.

Note on Electronic Devices in Class

To enable open and uncensored discussion and protect the privacy of students, there is a zero-tolerance policy on any and all recording/surveillance devices in and around the classroom.

Students Who Are Differently-Abled

If you are differently-abled/have a disability that impacts your studies, please contact the instructor to think of alternative arrangements.

Schedule

Monday 16 September: Orientation Day

9:00-12:00: Program Orientation Session

Led by Kenny Cupers, with faculty participation

Location: Urban Studies, Hebelstrasse 3, E016

In this session, we will cover all the elements of the program, and discuss any questions you may have. Prior to this session, you are expected to have familiarized yourself with the [MA Critical Urbanisms: Study Guidelines](#).

-> Please use this form to sign up for a tour on both days, Tuesday and Wednesday:
<https://forms.gle/LBWdJw6S9wdn4XJw6>

13:30-15:00: Track Information Session

Led by Nancy Odendaal, Laura Nkula-Wenz (zoom), Maren Larsen, and Kenny Cupers

Location: Urban Studies, Hebelstrasse 3, E016

In this session, you will receive detailed information about the two tracks offered by our program. The Urbanism from the South and Urbanism Across Geographies tracks combine theoretical foundations with a form of research practice. They are an opportunity to experiment and learn through two of the key themes that frame our program: ways of knowing the city through 'fieldwork', and ways to build critical research through theory and practice. Both tracks interweave scholarly literature and collaborative forms of engagement in the city, offering a mode of learning built through various forms of methodological experimentation and site immersion. In doing so, students will engage rigorously with the ethics and politics of research practice. We would like you to choose a track not just based on your preferred geographic location, but according to your thematic, substantive, and conceptual interests in urban studies. If you are interested in the Anthropological Fieldwork track, please email Michelle Engeler (michelle.engeler@unibas.ch) to receive more information and apply for this track. Instructors will offer additional office hour meetings in the following week (Week 2), Time TBD.

16:00-18:00: Exploring urban research methodologies: A Multitude of Urban Visions

Led by Amanda Haas

Location: meet at 15:50 Urban Studies, Hebelstrasse 3, E016

In this first explorative class small groups of students will engage with different sites in the city of Basel. Urban life does not consist of a single story. Yet we find that people share a set of habits as if the city acts along an unwritten script. Through observation and conversation, students are invited to think of questions such as: Who feels invited into the space? Who claimed it? In stories, as short as the chorus of a song, every student creates a singular urban

vision from the places they studied. Students are asked to imagine the city from a perspective estranged from their own – through the perspective of the kiosk vendor, the cities' birds, or from a historic character.

Reading:

- Lucius Burckhardt. "Of Small Steps and Great Effects." In *Who Plans the Planning?: Architecture, Politics, and Mankind*. (Birkhäuser, 2019).

Tuesday 17 September

9:00-12:30: Seminar: Ways of Knowing the City

Led by Kenny Cupers and Nancy Odendaal

Location: Urban Studies, Hebelstrasse 3, E016

Readings:

- "Ways of Knowing the City," "The State at Home," and "Lubricating Logistics," and from: Kenny Cupers, Sophie Oldfield, Manuel Herz, Laura Nkula-Wenz, Emilio Distretti, Myriam Perret, eds. *What is Critical Urbanism?* (Park Books, 2022)
- Michele Lancione and Colin McFarlane, eds. "Introduction" *Global Urbanism: Knowledge, Power, and the City* (Routledge, 2021)

In this session, we will also discuss our disciplinary backgrounds and the knowledge cultures in which they are embedded. This will help us to understand epistemology from a personal perspective. The goal of this is to become more aware of different research traditions and disciplines in which we were trained, and how this shapes the way we use evidence and build arguments in urban studies.

Option 1: 14:00-15:45: Entangled Histories I: Chemical Work and Migration

Led by Hans-Georg Heimann

Meeting Place: Ciba (tram stop) on tram line 8

Contact during the tour: Student Assistant Lion Tautz, (+41 77 236 11 49, lion.tautz@unibas.ch)

We will study the industrial history of the city and link it to the larger political economy in which it is situated until the present. Hans-Georg Heimann, a former chemical worker, will walk us through abandoned production facilities and report about workers' experiences in the city to which many of them had arrived as young migrants.

Option 2: 14:00-15:45: Entangled Histories II: Migration Without Papers

Led by the Sans-Papiers Collective Basel and Amanda Haas (+41 78 225 00 31, amanda.haas@stud.unibas.ch)

Meeting Place: Claraplatz (tram stop)

In this second option we will visit the Sans-Papier Collective Basel. A self-organized group of migrants supporting each other in the struggle to find a place of home and safety in the continuity of control and expulsion.

16:15-17:00: Sharing Experiences Across Both Tours

Led by Amanda Haas (+41 78 225 00 31, amanda.haas@stud.unibas.ch)

Location: Urban Studies, Hebelstrasse 3, E014

We will meet back in the classroom to share our experiences of both tours.

Wednesday 18 September

9:00-11:45: Seminar: In and Between Theory and Practice

Led by Kenny Cupers and Nancy Odendaal

Location: Urban Studies, Hebelstrasse 3, E016

Readings:

- “In and Between Theory and Practice,” and “Rooted in the City,” from: Kenny Cupers, Sophie Oldfield, Manuel Herz, Laura Nkula-Wenz, Emilio Distretti, Myriam Perret, eds. *What is Critical Urbanism?* (Park Books, 2022)
- Eyal Weizman, “Introduction: Forensis.” In *Forensis, The Architecture of Public Truth* (Sternberg Press)
- Edgar Pieterse, “Reconceptualizing the Political.” In *City Futures: Confronting the Crisis of Urban Development* (Zed Books, 2008)

Option 1: 12:45-14:45:

Surviving on the Streets – A Guided Tour on Homelessness in Basel

Led by Tito Ries (Surprise NGO)

Meeting Place: Elisabethenkirche (at the portal of the church)

Contact during the tour: Student Assistant Lion Tautz, (lion.tautz@unibas.ch)

When parks, streets, and bridges become one’s home the perspective on the city inevitably changes. Few people know the city and its unwritten rules so well – they are experts of the street. Walking us through the city they speak about their experiences and show us where to find places of support and solidarity in Basel. It will be facilitated by the local NGO Surprise, an association supporting people affected by poverty and homelessness.

Option 2: 13:00-14:30

Cooling a City One Street at a Time

Led by Emma Thomas (Mein Baum dein Baum) and Amanda Haas (+41 78 225 00 31, amanda.haas@stud.unibas.ch)

Meeting Place: Mein Baum dein Baum, Ahornstrasse 21, 4055 Basel (in front of the building)

In a warming climate, cities heat up more than suburban or rural green spaces. By planting trees, the “Mein Baum dein Baum” (translates to: my tree your tree) initiative makes it possible to intervene on a small scale at the local level, with an impact for the greater good. We will look at the motivation of the founders and get to understand the urban topology of the city front gardens. In particular, we will visit one such street that will be replanted in the coming months. We will hear more about the project’s goal of planting trees to cool the streets and make the city more livable for years to come.

15:15-16:00: Sharing Experiences Across Both Tours

Led by Amanda Haas

Location: Urban Studies, Hebelstrasse 3, E014

We will meet back in the classroom to share our experiences of both tours.

Thursday 19 September

9:00-12:00: Seminar: The Urban Beyond North and South

Led by Kenny Cupers and Nancy Odendaal

Location: Urban Studies, Hebelstrasse 3, E016

Readings:

- “The Urban Beyond North and South,” “Madgermans,” and “Worlding Goma” from: Kenny Cupers, Sophie Oldfield, Manuel Herz, Laura Nkula-Wenz, Emilio Distretti, Myriam Perret, eds. *What is Critical Urbanism?* (Park Books, 2022)
- Neil Brenner and Nikos Katsikis, “Hinterlands of the Capitalocene,” and Jennifer Robinson, “Comparative urbanism and global urban studies: Theorizing the Urban” Michele Lancione and Colin McFarlane, eds. “Introduction” *Global Urbanism: Knowledge, Power, and the City* (Routledge, 2021)

14:00-16:00

Freidorf: A Workers’ Retreat, Social Experiment, and Cooperative Movement

Led by Philipp Potocki, Amanda Haas (+41 78 225 00 31, amanda.haas@stud.unibas.ch)

Meeting Place: in front of the building, Siedlungsgenossenschaft Freidorf (next to the market place/playground). Address: Freidorf 151, 4132 MuttENZ

Together with the cooperatives' archivist, Philipp Potocki, we will walk through the village that sought to realize the vision for a new society in which all activities are collectivized: Integrating producer cooperative, consumer cooperative, labor cooperative and cooperative living into one single estate. Questions we will engage with are: How has the theory of cooperative housing been realized in practice? How did the organization and communal life in the village transform over time? The tour seeks to look into the powerful history of workers' self-organization without turning a blind eye to the rigidity of order and morality expected from its members. The tour locates Basel as a vibrant node in the international movement of cooperative housing development from the 19th century till today.

Friday 20 September

9:00-12:00: Seminar: The Presence of the Past

Led by Kenny Cupers and Nancy Odendaal

Location: Urban Studies, Hebelstrasse 3, E016

Reading:

- "The Presence of the Past," "On the Coloniality of Infrastructure," and "Notes on Heritage (Re)making," from: Kenny Cupers, Sophie Oldfield, Manuel Herz, Laura Nkula-Wenz, Emilio Distretti, Myriam Perret, eds. *What is Critical Urbanism?* (Park Books, 2022)
- Saidiya Hartman, "Prologue: the Path of Strangers", *Lose your Mother: a Journey along the Slave Trade Route* (MacMillan, 2007)

-> Course evaluation (15 min): Please fill out this [form](#) (password will be provided in class)

13:30-15:00 Basel Colonial

Led by Karl Johannes Rechsteiner (Cooperaxion) and Amanda Haas (+41 78 225 00 31, amanda.haas@stud.unibas.ch)

Location: Weisses Haus, Rheinsprung 16/18, Basel

This tour will examine the historical relationship between Switzerland and the colonies, exploring the impact of this relationship up to the present day. Despite Switzerland not having formal ownership of land in the colonies, the import of inexpensive goods from the colonies enabled Switzerland to benefit from a trade surplus.

15:00-17:00: Final Reflection Session

Led by Amanda Haas

Location: Urban Studies, Hebelstrasse 3, E014

Preparation:

- a) Note down a quote from the week (from an article, a person you met, a fellow student) that inspired you. Every student will briefly present the quote they chose and describe how it is connected to an ethos, a theory, or a method that could guide them as urban researchers.
- b) Students will be organized into small groups for the purpose of reflecting and discussing what they have learned from all of this week's topics. Each student will share their takeaways and outlook. The goal is for each participant to explore and articulate their own interests, curiosities, and topics of interest.

Consider some of the following questions: What are the most pressing topics and questions for you personally? Is there a particular urban concept, theory, or issue that you feel excited or motivated to explore further – even if it was not part of the week's program? What areas of research or practice do you hope to explore during your studies in Critical Urbanisms?

17:00: Apéro riche with Critical Urbanisms students and faculty

Location: Inner courtyard at the Urban Studies main building