

Urban Sociology
SOCI2208 – Spring 2023
Prof. Mark COHEN

Lecture: Fridays 9:30 - 11:15 am, YIA LT8 **Link for this outline:** bit.ly/3W5s8Cx

Email: mark.cohen@cuhk.edu.hk

Office hours: Wednesdays 3 - 5 pm, SB420

Tutors: Charle FUNG

NG Yeuk-Nam

Charlesfung@cuhk.edu.hk

Yeuknamng@cuhk.edu.hk

Sino Building Room 411A, office hours by appointment

Course Description

Sociology has always had an intimate relationship with cities. Urbanization — the increase of the share of the population living in cities — was one of the developments that early sociologists sought to study and explain. Since then, the global urban population has only continued to increase. Today, over half of humanity lives in cities and towns. Understanding urban society is no less essential than it was in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Urban sociology has many sides, but in this course you will learn about four main sets of questions and the answers urban sociologists have given to them.

The first set considers the “urban experience.” What is it *like* to live in a city? How do people interact with each other in cities? How is it different from life and social interactions in rural areas or smaller towns? The size and density of cities turn out to make for distinctive ways of living and interacting.

The second set of questions concerns the wider role of cities within society and how that role has changed over time. Why do particular industries cluster together in cities or neighborhoods? How is globalization and financialization changing cities? What are the challenges faced by cities in the Global South today?

The third set of questions deals with the dynamics of investment in urban land and the construction of the “built environment” in cities. What are the consequences of the fact that cities are *both* spaces where people live and work *and* investment markets for profit-seeking developers? This will touch on phenomena including gentrification and property bubbles.

The final part of the course looks at some major social problems facing urban areas today. How is increasing inequality impacting urban life? How can crises surrounding housing availability, control of public space, and climate change be dealt with? Cities are as much sites of struggle as they are of industry and commerce.

Through all of these topics, the readings and lectures will focus on international examples and trends. The assignments will then require you to reflect on your own experience of city life and to undertake observation and analysis of Hong Kong.

Lectures

The lectures will elaborate on the major themes and arguments of the required and recommended readings as well as provide illustrations and examples. PDFs of the lecture slides will be posted on Blackboard under Course Content before each class meeting.

You are expected to attend lecture every week. Attendance will not be checked formally to start, but I reserve the right to institute penalties for non-attendance if this proves to be a major problem during the semester.

If you are unable to attend the lecture due to illness, please email me and I will make arrangements for streaming and recording the lectures.

Tutorials

In addition to lectures, the course includes an interactive tutorial. The tutorials will serve as workshops for the assignments. Together with your tutor and classmates, you will brainstorm, share your work, and give each other feedback.

Information about signing up for tutorial and the exact tutorial schedule will be posted on Blackboard under the Course Information section. The specific agenda will be described by your tutor in the first session, but the tutorials will follow this rough schedule:

Session	Topics
1 and 2	The urban experience
3 and 4	Industrial and post-industrial cities; use and exchange of urban space; and the second assignment
5 and 6	Urban problems

Assignments

This course has no exams and no traditional term paper. The primary goals of this course are not to test your ability to recall terms and definitions or to analyze texts. Instead, the point is to get you thinking critically about the urban society around you.

In addition to the summaries below, the assignments will be discussed in lecture and the tutorials. As noted above, you will discuss and make presentations about your work on the assignments in the tutorials.

A note about word counts: they are rough guides. If your essay is significantly below the guideline, you should worry that you are not providing enough detail and analysis. If your essay is significantly longer, then you should ask yourself whether you can be more concise and thus sharper.

Reflections on Your Urban Experience

The first assignment asks you to reflect on your own experience growing up in a city in light of the theories of the urban experience discussed in the first part of the course. (If you grew up in a non-urban area, then the task will be to contrast your experience with those theories' image of urban life. You should consult with your tutor or me for further guidance in this situation.)

You should choose and respond to two of the following three prompts:

1. In what ways have you experienced the anonymity and individualism of urban life described by Simmel and Wirth? You can, following Goffman, also think about how you have performed (or observed others' performance of) urban anonymity in public.
2. In what ways has your own experience of urban life diverged from Simmel's and Wirth's descriptions of urban life? Have you experienced "sustaining environments" within the ostensible "disorder" of the city (akin the Duneier's account)?
3. Using Fischer's definition of subculture, what is an example of a subculture that you have participated in? Is your experience consistent with Fischer's account of how cities enable the accumulation of a "critical mass" of individuals for subcultures to form? Discuss the ways in which this subculture with which you are familiar is differentiated from "mainstream" culture and has influenced, or been influenced by, other groups in the city.

In total, your responses should be about 1,500 words (excluding headings, notes, and references), but you need to use this space carefully. You will NOT have space to summarize the readings and concepts referenced in the prompt. Instead, you need to demonstrate your understanding by how effectively you describe and analyze specific examples.

This first assignment will be due, uploaded to **both** Veriguide and Blackboard, on Wednesday 22 February by the end of the day.

Themes in Urban Economy and Society

The second assignment, which corresponds to the second and third parts of the course, will involve considering one of the themes raised in the course readings. The assignment centers on first-hand observation of a chosen neighborhood in Hong Kong.¹ For the purposes of this assignment, the definition of "neighborhood" is loose, meaning you may focus on any size of area of the city from a few blocks to an entire district. The assignment involves writing about **one** of the following themes, as they relate to the chosen neighborhood. No two students in one tutorial group should write about the same theme for the same neighborhood.

1. Clusters of particular industries or specialized shops and their interrelations made possible by their proximity in urban space (Uzzi and Scott)
2. Which account of urban economic prosperity is a better fit: "financial globalization"

¹ If you are not in Hong Kong for the semester, you can and should complete this assignment based on wherever you are currently staying. If you are in this situation, you should consult with your tutor as soon as possible to confirm how you will complete the assignment.

- (Sassen) or “creativity” (Florida)?
3. The “ecological” model of “concentric zones”: how well or how poorly the model works as an explanation for the neighborhood’s characteristics (Burgess)
 4. The dynamics of investment in urban space and the conflicts of interest it generates: private real estate versus public service (Harvey) and endless growth versus quality of life (Logan and Molotch)

Each theme notes in parentheses the relevant readings, and your essay should include a brief summary of the ideas presented in the reading. In addition, the analysis of the theme should draw on a **minimum of six** sources. These sources can include:

- Personal observation of the neighborhood, which can count for one source in total.
- A maximum of three short interviews with individuals who live, work, or visit the neighborhood. You should prepare questions in advance, focused on the theme of your essay. Each interview counts as one source.
- Academic articles that include empirical evidence on Hong Kong. It might be impossible to find articles focused on some (most) specific neighborhoods in the city. You may use articles that do not focus on your chosen neighborhood, but you should give reasons for thinking they are still relevant.
- Evidence from government statistics (e.g. the Census and Statistics Department). All such data can collectively count as one source.
- A collection of journalism, reports from non-governmental organizations, or online media about a particular issue or event. Note that a *single* article or short report is inadequate to count as a source, for the purposes of this assignment.

Responsibility for the assignment rests entirely with each individual student. However, it is permitted for students in the same tutorial group working on the same neighborhood to work together on their in-person data collection (i.e. the first two bullet points above). Again, although first-hand observation and interviews are recommended, they are not required for the assignment. In addition, if you have strong reasons — based on your circumstances or the topic you wish to write about — for not focusing your analysis on one particular neighborhood, you may seek permission from your tutor **in advance**.

The essay should be around 1,800 words (before headings, notes, and references). It will be due on Tuesday, 4 April, by the end of the day. The document should again be uploaded to **both** Veriguide and Blackboard.

Urban Problems

The third assignment will require you to think about how one of the urban problems discussed in the final part of the course impacts Hong Kong and how it is being, or might be, responded to. You are strongly encouraged to use as your starting point one of the four themes covered in the readings and lectures: affordability, poverty, safety, or climate change. Nonetheless you may write about any problem you choose, though for other topics you should discuss with your tutor or me first.

The essay should begin with a description of the problem. Drawing on evidence from

journalism, government documents, and first-hand observation, in what ways is this problem manifesting itself? Then, applying arguments from the readings and lectures, what social processes can be identified as contributing to the problem? Finally, you will need to find one or two proposals for or attempts at solutions to the problem, from government agencies, politicians, non-governmental organizations, academics, etc. Which groups' interests does each proposal most closely follow? What other groups would be relatively disadvantaged by each? It is recommended that you consider two alternative solutions, because it will be easier to answer these questions by contrasting them.

This essay should be around 1,800 words (before headings, notes, and references). It will be due on Friday, 5 May, uploaded to **both** Veriguide and Blackboard.

Submission and Formatting

All assignments are expected to be completed in English. The assignments should be submitted online through the appropriate entry on the Blackboard site under Course Information/Assignments. If you might miss a deadline, you should contact your tutor as soon as possible. Unexcused late submissions will be penalized one fraction of a letter grade (e.g. B+ → B) per day. However, regardless of when it is submitted, satisfactorily completed assignment will never receive a grade below a D.

Please keep in mind the university's policy on academic honesty (bit.ly/2vRlsyb). Plagiarism in the assignments will not be tolerated. The ideas and language should be your own, and any outside sources must be clearly and properly cited. To this end, all final versions of the assignments should also be submitted to VeriGuide (bit.ly/2Mrt6Zh).

Please follow these formatting guidelines:

- Microsoft Word (.docx) or OpenOffice (.odt).
- A4 size, 2.5 cm margins, body text in 12 pt, Times New Roman or Cambria font, double spaced. To confirm your formatting is correct, see the sample document posted here: bit.ly/2Q8oKUY.
- Name and a title at the top of the first page, and please include your full name in the filename.
- Include page numbers.
- For the second and third assignments: citations in parenthetical format with a works cited list at the end, following the ASA style guide (see here: bit.ly/2KTAvB9). You do not need to include URLs or access dates for readings downloaded from the course website.

Grading

The final grade of the course will be the average of the three assignments and performance in the tutorial. The grading criteria are presented in a separate document, which is accessible online at bit.ly/3BHGIbe. The four components will be weighted equally.

Questions

I will always leave time in my lectures for questions. It is a good rule of thumb that if there was something you found difficult to follow in the readings or lecture, there will be other students who will benefit from hearing the answer to your question. You can also bring your questions to tutorial, or feel free to email me with questions or to schedule a video chat.

Schedule and Reading List

The schedule below lists the readings for each week. The required readings should be completed *before* that week's lecture.

The schedule also includes recommended readings for each week. These additional texts elaborate on themes introduced in lecture. They can provide more depth and other perspectives in addition to what you get in the required readings. Although you are not expected to read all of the recommended readings, you are *strongly encouraged* to look at a few that address topics that interest you or are relevant to your assignments.

All required readings will be scanned and uploaded to the Blackboard site, under "Course Content," except for entries marked with a *, which can be downloaded on the University network from journal websites at the links given. When you are not on the campus wired network, you will need to use the CUHK VPN. ITSC instructions are available at bit.ly/2DEuXb1. Most of the recommended readings that are not available online will also be uploaded to Blackboard, with the exception of the additional sections of *Sidewalk*. The book will be on reserve at CC library, but if you are interested in urban ethnography, you can consider purchasing it: bit.ly/3jai7Wi.

13 January Introduction

Part I – The Urban Experience

20 January City and "Community"

Required

- *Georg SIMMEL, "The Metropolis and The Life of the Spirit," translated and introduced by John D. Boy in *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 21(2): 188-202. doi.org/10.1177/1468795X20980638
- Erving GOFFMAN, *Behavior in Public Places*, Ch. 6 section 1 and Ch. 8 section 3

Recommended

- Louis WIRTH, "Urbanism as a Way of Life"
- Mark GOTTDIENER and Ron HUTCHINSON, *The New Urban Sociology 4th Edition*, pp. 49-58
- Herbert GANS, "Urbanism and Suburbanism as Ways of Life"

27 January NO CLASS: Lunar New Year Break

3 February Social Order on the Street

Required

- Mitchell DUNEIER, *Sidewalk*, “Introduction,” “The Book Vendor,” and “The Magazine Vendors”

Recommended

- Mitchell DUNEIER, *Sidewalk*, “Men without Accounts” and “How 6th Avenue Became a Sustaining Habitat”

10 February Subcultural Diversity

Required

- *Claude S. FISCHER. 1975. “Toward a Subcultural Theory of Urbanism.” *American Journal of Sociology* 80(6):1319-1341. www.jstor.org/stable/2777297

Recommended

- George CHAUNCEY, “Building Gay Neighborhood Enclaves: The Village and Harlem”
- Sy ADLER and Johanna BRENNER, “Gender and Space: Lesbians and Gay Men in the City”
- Paul STOLLER and Jasmin Tahmaseb MCCONATHA, “City Life: West African Communities in New York”
- Jan LIN, “Globalization and the Revalorizing of Ethnic Places in Immigration Gateway Cities”

Part II – Industrial and Post-Industrial Cities

17 February The Logic of Urban Industrial Clusters

Required

- Allen J. SCOTT, “Metropolis: From the Division of Labor to Urban Form”
- *Brian UZZI. 1996. “The Sources and Consequences of Embeddedness for the Economic Performance of Organizations: The Network Effect.” *American Sociological Review* 61(4):674–698. www.jstor.org/stable/2096399
— **Read only up to p. 685** —

Recommended

- Mark GOTTDIENER and Ron HUTCHINSON, *The New Urban Sociology 4th ed.*, pp. 23-41
- *Michel FERRARY. 2003. “Trust and Social Capital in the Regulation of Lending Activities.” *Journal of Socio-Economics* 31:673-99.
[doi.org/10.1016/S1053-5357\(02\)00145-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1053-5357(02)00145-2)

22 February Due Date for First Assignment

24 February The Creative Economy or Financial Globalization?

Required

- Saskia SASSEN, *Cities in a World Economy 2nd ed.*, Ch. 1
- Richard FLORIDA, *Cities and the Creative Class*, Ch. 2

- Michael DEAR and Hector Manuel LUCERO, “Postborder Cities, Postborder World”
Recommended
- Manuel CASTELLS, “An Introduction to the Information Age”
- Saskia SASSEN, *Cities in a World Economy 2nd ed.*, pp. 34-42
- John FRIEDMANN, “China’s Urban Transition: Backward into the Future”

Part III – Use and Exchange of Urban Space

3 March Human Ecology or the Growth Machine?

Required

- Ernest W. BURGESS, “The Growth of the City”
- John R. LOGAN and Harvey L. MOLOTCH, selections from *Urban Fortunes*

Recommended

- Mark GOTTDIENER and Ron HUTCHISON, *The New Urban Sociology 4th ed.*, pp. 58-68
- *Robert E. PARK. 1936. “Human Ecology.” *American Journal of Sociology* 42:1-15.
www.jstor.org/stable/2768859

10 March NO CLASS: Reading Week

17 March Capital, Labour, and the City

Required

- *David HARVEY. 1978. “The Urban Process under Capitalism.” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 2(1-3):101-31.
doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2427.1978.tb00738.x

Recommended

- David HARVEY, *The Urban Experience*, Ch. 1

Part IV – Urban Problems; Whose Solutions?

24 March The Divided City

Required

- Saskia SASSEN, *Cities in a World Economy 2nd ed.*, Ch. 6

Recommended

- *Jacobin* issue 15/16 (Fall 2014)

31 March Gentrification as Problem and Solution

Required

- *Neil SMITH. 1979. “Toward a Theory of Gentrification A Back to the City Movement by Capital, Not People.” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 45(4):538–48. doi.org/10.1080/01944367908977002
- Neil SMITH, “After Tompkins Square Park”

Recommended

- *Sharon ZUKIN. 2016. “Gentrification in Three Paradoxes.” *City & Community*

15(3):202-7. doi.org/10.1111/cico.12184

- Christopher MELE, “Globalization, Culture, and Neighborhood Change”

4 April **Due Date for Second Assignment**

7 April NO CLASS: Public Holiday for Easter

14 April Defining Order and Ensuring Safety

Required

- Jane JACOBS, selections from *The Life and Death of American Cities*, “The Use of Sidewalks”
- Mitchell DUNEIER, *Sidewalk*, “Talking to Women” and “A Christmas on Sixth Avenue”
- Teresa P. R. CALDEIRA, “Fortified Enclaves”

Recommended

- Loic J. D. WACQUANT, “Urban Outcasts: Stigma and Division in the Black American Ghetto and the French Urban Periphery”
- *Douglas S. Massey. 1990. “American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass.” *American Journal of Sociology* 96(2):329-57
www.jstor.org/stable/2781105
- Mitchell DUNEIER, *Sidewalk*, “Sidewalk Sleeping,” “Accusations: Caveat Vendor?,” and “The Space Wars: Competing Legalities”

21 April Climate Change and Global Urban Problems

Required

- Daniel Aldana COHEN, “Urban Policy Planning for Climate Change” (you can skip the box on “Canadian Cities and Climate Change” on pp. 164-6)
- Mike DAVIS. 2010. “Who Will Build the Ark?” *New Left Review* 61

Recommended

- Erving GOFFMAN, *Behavior in Public Places*, Ch. 8 section 4
- *Laura S. LOGAN. 2015. “Street Harassment: Current and Promising Avenues for Researchers and Activists.” *Sociology Compass* 9(3):196-211.
doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12248
- The following websites provide useful resources: www.stopstreetharassment.org and www.ihollaback.org

5 May **Due Date for Urban Third Assignment**