SEMINAR SERIES

The Many Urbanisms of the Global South: Policy Nuances and Particularities

Celebrating 50 years of excellence, the Department of Urban Planning and Policy (UPP) at the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs (CUPPA) is excited to organize a seminar series featuring cutting-edge, campuswide urban scholarship and research on the Global South. The seminar seeks to bring together and strengthen the community of UIC scholars with a shared interest in Global South urbanisms by offering a supportive environment to share their work and receive feedback from the larger campus community.

Academic year 2023-2024.

10:00 - 11:30am
Great Cities Institute's Seminar Room 418, CUPPA Hall.

September 28 | Brenda Parker, Martín Álvarez and Magdalena Rivera
Bodies Holding up Communities: Uncaring Infrastructures in Santiago, Chile and Beyond

October 18 | Sergio Montero
Comparing cities, a posteriori

November 2 | Andrés Urcuqui-Bustamente
Moving Beyond Mainstream Economic Valuation in Natural Resource Management: Non-economic values associated with payment for hydrological services programs

November 16 | David López-García
Urban Growth Machines with Latin American characteristics: ad hoc coalitions and the governance of urban spatial structure in Guadalajara, Mexico

January 25 | Soledad Álvarez Velasco
From small border towns to global connecting hubs in the Americas: the socio-spatial impacts of transit migration through Meteti and Necocli

February 21 | Kareem Rabie
Shifting Priorities, and how private development is transforming aid, governance, and daily life in the West Bank

March 14 | Alejandra Marin-Buitrago
Rebuilding Community and Post-Conflict Urbanization: A Study of Social Housing Neighborhoods in Colombia

April 4 | Patrisia Macías-Rojas
"They’ll take your house, your car, your papers": A historical and ethnographic (re)investigation of systemic barriers to economic mobility and access to justice on the US-Mexico Border

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September 28 | Brenda Parker, Martín Alvarez and Magdalena Rivera

Bodies holding up communities: Uncaring infrastructures in Santiago, Chile and beyond

This research explores the role of bodies, housing, and mobility as infrastructures of care for low-income women living in peripheral neighborhoods in Santiago, Chile. Drawing from feminist political economists and urbanists, we describe the way that bodies act as infrastructures, often compensating for inadequate built and social environments. Even as the caring of these women sustains life, livelihoods, and communities, they suffer slow infrastructural violence amplified by immobility, isolation, and insufficient support. This reinforces and occurs within a broader context of gendered inequality and gendered violence, in a city where socioeconomic segregation is very pronounced. While there are geographic particularities to this case, the lack of infrastructures of care persists in cities and communities across the global North and South. We provide policy recommendations oriented toward transforming material and social urban infrastructures, simultaneously addressing gendered and intersectional power relations.

Brenda Parker is an Associate Professor and Director of Urban Studies in the Urban Planning and Policy Department at UIC. Broadly, she is interested in how we can create more inclusive, caring, and just cities. Her work addresses topics such as affordable housing, urban politics, and activism and seeks to understand gender, race, and other power relations in cities and governance. Dr. Parker’s research is situated at the intersection of geography and urban planning and is informed by feminist and intersectional approaches. She has published a book, Masculinities and Markets: Raced and Gendered Urban Politics in Milwaukee (2017, University of Georgia Press), and multiple articles. She has taught classes and conducted research in many places, including Canada, Chile, Hungary, and the United States.

Martín Alvarez is a Sociologist and Master’s in Urban Development from the Pontifical Catholic University, Coordinator of the Urban Laboratories program at the Center for Sustainable Urban Development (CEDEUS) at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. His areas of interest focus on criminology, stigmatization, and ethnography.

Magdalena Rivera is a Social Anthropologist from Universidad de Chile, Coordinator of the Policy and Practice Unit in the Center for Sustainable Urban Development (CEDEUS) at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile. Her areas of interest focus on gender and geographical analysis of care relationships.

October 18 | Sergio Montero

Comparing cities, a posteriori

Urban studies scholars have engaged in a lively debate on how to reformat comparative methods in the face of critical scrutiny of the discipline’s purported universalism. In this talk, Prof. Sergio Montero will discuss a recently published article on comparative urban methods co-authored with Gianpaolo Baiocchi (NYU). Sharing the enthusiasm for a reformatted urban comparativism, Prof. Montero will turn to the thorny and more pragmatic question of how to actually do it. While
traditional comparisons in urban studies have sought to find variation among similar cases by selecting a priori, the authors propose to compare the findings of different researchers through a posteriori, that is, after the research has been done. They argue that urban researchers need to focus on urban processes rather than cities; on repeated instances rather than on controlling for difference; and on mid-level abstraction rather than on grand theory or descriptive empirical cases.

In this talk, Prof. Montero will also put this strategy to work to compare empirical research previously undertaken by both co-authors on how two Latin American cities became international urban ‘best practices’: Bogotá as a sustainable transport model and Porto Alegre as a model of local participatory budgeting. The comparison highlights the tension between the simplified policy narratives that were mobilized to circulate Bogotá and Porto Alegre as international ‘best practices’ and the broader multi-scalar institutional reforms that these ‘best practice’ narratives have left behind in their global circulations. In doing so, the talk will show the potential of a posteriori comparisons to analyze contemporary global urban dynamics and provide some explicit methodological tactics on how to do urban comparisons in a more systematic way. It will also push us to think about how South-South and South-North comparisons can contribute to theorizing contemporary global urbanism.

Sergio Montero is Associate Professor of Geography & Planning and Inaugural Director of the Institute for Inclusive Economies and Sustainable Livelihoods (IIESL) at the University of Toronto, Scarborough. Prof. Montero research focuses on the politics of urban and regional planning; on the South-South and South-North circulation of international policy models and “best practices,” particularly around sustainable transport; and on local and regional economic development strategies, especially in Latin America. He has published on these topics in several academic journals such as Urban Studies, Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, Latin American Studies or the International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, among others. He has also edited two books on local economic development in Latin America (in English and Spanish) and a recent collection on the global circulations of Latin American urban policy knowledge (in English and Portuguese). Sergio Montero is associate editor of the journal Regional Studies and international corresponding editor of Urban Studies. He holds a master and PhD in City and Regional Planning from the University of California, Berkeley (USA) and a BA in Economics from Universidad de Granada (Spain). Before joining the University of Toronto, he was a professor of urban & regional planning and development at Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá, Colombia.

November 2 | Andrés Uruqui-Bustamente

Moving Beyond Mainstream Economic Valuation in Natural Resource Management: Non-economic values associated with payment for hydrological services programs

Payment for hydrological services (PHS) is a mainstream environmental policy aimed at incentivizing environmentally friendly land management practices that reduce deforestation and forest degradation. As a market-oriented policy, PHS uses traditional economic approaches to ecosystem services valuation that often neglect the complex social, cultural, and spiritual values associated with water, forests, and biodiversity in general. To broaden our understanding of the
non-economic values associated with forest conservation, water sources and biodiversity, we conducted in-depth interviews with institutional actors, landowners enrolled in PHS programs and household water users in three locations in Latin America (Mexico and Colombia). We explored the role of local shared values in defining PHS schemes, eligibility criteria and expected outcomes and inquired into their potential for supporting innovations in PHS programs. In this work, we highlight the non-economic values associated with PHS programs and water/forest conservation, including trust, transparency, reciprocity, fairness, and shared responsibility, and discuss their significance for PHS design, implementation, and effectiveness. We conclude with recommendations for ways in which PHS advocates can explore local shared values and facilitate their involvement in PHS design.

Andrés M. Urcuqui-Bustamante is a Bridge to Faculty Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Department of Urban Planning and Policy (UPP) at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC). His work explores the interconnections between nature, society, and policy through the lens of human dimensions of natural resources. Andrés is currently studying how people’s perceptions, attitudes and values towards natural resources and landscape management impact infectious disease preventive behavior and institutional responses. In addition, Andrés is currently studying how participatory research methods, such as collaborative modeling and role play simulations, impact social learning and inform environmental policy and programs. Prior to joining UIC, Andrés worked as a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the School of Forest Resources at the University of Maine and as a visiting instructor in the Department of Environmental Studies at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

November 16 | David López-García

Urban Growth Machines with Latin American characteristics: *ad hoc* coalitions and the governance of urban spatial structure in Guadalajara, Mexico

Understanding the politics behind the trajectory of urban spatial structure is relevant because urban form has important implications for livelihoods and overall urban equity. This paper looks at the politics behind such structuring. By analyzing the case of Guadalajara Metropolitan Area (GMA), Mexico, the study asks: what governs urban form in a region that, despite a clear intention to advance a polycentric urban form, still trends towards a monocentric urban spatial structure? Based on sixteen semi-structured interviews with key informants, the study finds that it is the aggregation of the individual actions of rentiers that is unintendedly shaping the trajectory of urban spatial structure in the GMA. Such rentiers engage in urban politics to advance their individual investment projects in a way that resembles an urban growth machine, but with Latin American characteristics. The findings allow to propose the concept of *ad hoc* Urban Growth Machines, which we define as a logic of action through which rentiers assemble and mobilize a short-lived and fluid collation of urban actors to influence policy in ways that will support their investment projects.

David López-García is an Assistant Professor in the University of Illinois Chicago Department of Urban Planning and Policy. His research looks at shifts in urban spatial structure in large Latin American urban regions and its implications for accessibility to jobs and workers’ quality of life. He
also looks at the policy-making process of state-led efforts that aim to influence the evolution of urban spatial structure. His book “Worker Mobility and Urban Policy in Latin America: Policy interactions and urban outcomes in Mexico City”, result of his doctoral dissertation, was published in 2023 by Routledge. His research has been published in top peer-reviewed journals such as the Journal of Urban Affairs, Annals of the American Association of Geographers, Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space, Journal of Urbanism, and Estudios Demográficos y Urbanos. He serves as the Academic Coordinator for the Latin American Chapter of the International Network for Transport and Accessibility in Low-Income Communities (INTALInC-LAC).

January 25 | Soledad Álvarez Velasco

From small border towns to global connecting hubs in the Americas: the socio-spatial impacts of transit migration through Meteti and Necocli

In the wake of the pandemic and post-pandemic crisis, thousands of migrants have intensified their crossings via the migratory corridor connecting the Andean Region with Central America. According to data collected by the International Organization of Migration (2023), more than 250,000 migrants were travelling through Panama only during the first semester of 2023, mostly migrants coming from Venezuela, Ecuador, Haiti, China, Brazil, Afghanistan, Nepal, Peru, and diverse other African countries who intended to reach the United States through Panama. Colombian and Panamanian border towns have thus become global hubs, connecting migration routes from south to north. This paper is based on exploratory ethnographical fieldwork and seeks to analyze three interrelated complex socio-spatial processes: 1) the urban transformations that Necocli and Meteti, two small border towns located at the foot of the Darien jungle, are experiencing as an effect of those intensified global transits; 2) the new urban illegalized border economies that have been built around those mobilities; and 3) the ecological impacts that these mobilities have produced in both border towns.

Soledad Álvarez Velasco is an Assistant Professor in the Latin American and Latino Studies Program and the Department of Anthropology in the University of Illinois Chicago. A social anthropologist and human geographer whose research analyses the interrelationship between mobility, control and spatial transformations across the Americas. She investigates the intersection between undocumented global south-north and global south-south transit migration, border regimes, the formation of migratory corridors across the Americas and the migrant struggle across these transnational spaces. She combines a multi-scale and historical analysis with multi-sited ethnography and a digital ethnography based on a migrant-centered perspective to reconstruct migrants’ spatial and temporal trajectories. In her research, she foregrounds the Andean Region as a key space for understanding the dynamics at stake in the transits of Latin American, Caribbean, African and Asian migrants to reach the U.S., or other southern cone and Caribbean destinations. Her work also analyzes the impact of the externalization of the U.S. border regime across the migratory corridors of the Americas, the movement of unaccompanied and undocumented migrant children, as well as the dynamics of transnational migrant smuggling networks operating across those transnational spaces.
February 21 | Kareem Rabie

Shifting Priorities, and how private development is transforming aid, governance, and daily life in the West Bank

Despite being under occupation, surrounded by checkpoints and settlements, and subject to military incursion, the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank is today building a state in and through private development and neoliberal practice. The putative state is almost entirely dependent on international financial aid and political support, and it increasingly and officially emphasizes private investment and privatization as a form of public service. The Palestinian Authority is working to build stable institutions in an environment of pervasive scarcity—of land, mobility, and sovereignty. Paradoxically, as I will argue, they are also redistributing instability downwards.

The dynamic and productive processes in the West Bank can help us understand how it might be possible to construct a state as a social and geographical scale within which market relations can be organized. In Palestine, it is a scale that does not depend on clearly defined national boundaries. The Palestinian state is a hybrid of government, aid conditions, and private initiative; a case that allows us to examine neoliberalism in some new and concrete ways. If neoliberal governance is often what remains post state roll-back, what does it mean to produce it from scratch? These questions operate at local, regional, and global scales. This talk will tell that story from the middle, and describe practices around an officially stated Palestinian Authority “national priority to develop affordable housing.” As the PA developed that priority, its practices bridged geographical scales and aggregated state authority to certain goals. As they remade governance, they established new markets in housing and finance alongside new physical places and contexts for social reproduction.

Kareem Rabie is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Illinois, Chicago. His work focuses on privatization, urban development, and the state-building project in the West Bank. Previously he was Assistant Professor of Anthropology at American University in Washington, DC; Harper-Schmidt Fellow at the University of Chicago; and Marie Curie Fellow/Senior Researcher at the University of Oxford Centre on Migration, Policy, and Society (COMPAS).

March 14 | Alejandra Marin-Buitrago

Rebuilding Community and Post-Conflict Urbanization: A Study of Social Housing Neighborhoods in Colombia

By the end of the civil war between the Colombian government and the guerrilla group FARC, seven million people were displaced from rural areas to urban slums. In 2014, 100,000 displaced households received apartments for free through a government housing restitution program. This research analyzes the processes of rebuilding the community and integrating into the city in three neighborhoods of that program. It describes the practices of community formation, the gendered factors shaping different civic participation styles, and the factors of the physical environment that influence those processes. This research aims to explain community formation and civic leadership based on underlying factors such as poverty levels, perceptions of safety, rates of
single-mother heads of households, and access to public and communal spaces. These factors were also the lenses to examine the leadership’s struggles and incentives. Another key factor in understanding the phenomena is the involvement of municipal authorities with the communities. Thus, the research compared municipal investments, including quality urban design, social services, and infrastructure. It analyzes leaders’ strategies to guide civic action in environments perceived as highly unsafe where negotiation with gangs became part of their roles.

This paper engages with the literature claiming that social housing projects enfranchise neglected groups and allow them to politicize their space. It also built on the peacebuilding literature that sustains that some caregiving and peacebuilding roles became feminized labor in the post-war context. This study will contribute to the post-conflict and post-disaster urbanization literature by shedding light on the process of social cohesion amidst the most vulnerable populations. It will also inform policies aiming at sustainable housing solutions in these contexts.

Alejandra Marin-Buitrago is a Ph.D. candidate whose research explores housing policy in post-conflict cities. Her study on Colombian government-subsidized housing investigates the social cohesion and gender differences in the context of a war-torn society. Her research seeks to understand the impact of this housing program on residents’ ability to rebuild trust, community, and livelihoods. She compared three government-subsidized projects for war-affected people in three cities. She aims to identify how the different social programs applied and public spaces built in those areas impacted residents living conditions. She also focuses on the factors driving perception of housing tenure security in the neighborhoods.

Before beginning her Ph.D., Alejandra practiced urban planning law for nearly 15 years in Colombia. She worked as a law professor for the universities Libre and Piloto. She worked as an advisor for several municipal comprehensive plans of urban development. She participated in policy design and negotiations with stakeholders for the application and amendment of those plans. Her work focuses on housing policy, municipal financing, and large-scale urban projects in local communities in Latin America. She holds a BA in Public Administration, a law degree, a MA in Urban Planning from the University of Alicante- Spain, and a MA in Habitat from U. Nacional in Colombia.

April 4 | Patrisia Macíás-Rojas

“They’ll take your house, your car, your papers”: A historical and ethnographic (re)investigation of systemic barriers to economic mobility and access to justice on the US-Mexico Border

Since the reorganization of the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) under what we know today as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in 2003, there has been no systematic longitudinal study of the transformation of border security, much less the consistent and divergent factors contributing to barriers to mobility and access to justice for residents living in US-Mexico Border communities. While there is a renewed interest in the topic in light of Trump era politics and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, few scholars are engaged in rigorously examining present conditions within a context that includes the past 20 years of policy and practice at the community level. This talk presents preliminary findings from my current project that launches an ethnographic revisit of US-Mexico border policing practices twenty years after the creation of the
DHS, examining its impact on border communities and the everyday lives of residents in securitized zones.

Patrisia Macías-Rojas is an Associate Professor in Sociology and Latin American and Latino Studies at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Her research interests are in the areas of race, law, and migration. Her current work focuses on the politics surrounding the criminalization, deportation, detention, and incarceration of immigrants on the U.S. –Mexico border. Macías-Rojas studies the effects of “tough on crime” approaches to immigration control on the everyday practices of Border Patrol agents, local law enforcement, civil and human rights advocates, and migrants and residents of predominantly Latina/o border communities. More broadly, her research examines historical, economic, and political links between the immigration and criminal justice systems. Her recent book, From Deportation to Prison: The Politics of Immigration Enforcement in Post-Civil Rights America (New York University Press, 2016) analyzes how the politics and policies of civil rights reforms and mass incarceration gave rise to the punitive turn in immigration and border enforcement. From Deportation to Prison won the 2017 Oliver Cromwell Cox book award from the American Sociological Association’s Section on Racial and Ethnic Minorities.