



Course title

Brussels in Belgium and in Europe: a socio-urbanist approach

Course taught by

Marcel Roelandts

A geographer specializing in urban and socio-economic problems, Marcel is a teacher-researcher in the Hautes Ecoles and university system in Belgium and France, after having pioneered the field of geo-marketing for firms. His published work reflects his long involvement with the public sector, from local to European levels. He has organized international scientific seminars on urban themes. He also teaches pedagogy to future professors of geography.

Purpose of the course

The goal of this course is to draw on Sociology, Economics and Urbanism to understand Brussels specifically, and the Belgian cityscape more generally, in the context of European urban experience. Furthermore, examining the city will help students to grasp the sociological characteristics of Belgium in a European framework and in counterpoint to the United States.

Description of the course

The sessions focus one by one on a series of urban dynamics and issues concerning Brussels: demographics, social stratification, social stakes, labor markets, migrations, inter-cultural relations, relation to Europe, Brussels' role as a national and European capital, and others. In this way, students develop a multi-dimensional but integrated viewpoint on Brussels the city and on Belgian society. Near the beginning of the course, a day-long outing in Brussels led by the professor is the occasion to observe in concrete terms a number of themes of the course.

Course format

The format of this course has been designed for maximum pedagogical effectiveness in light of the constraints of a course offered intensively over a short period of time. Accordingly, the course comprises two types of sessions, with lecture/seminar meetings alternating with discussion sections. Students are expected to participate in both informal debate and discussion as well as formal presentations (oral exposés, press reviews, and the like).

Each course of the preparatory session also includes appropriate site visits.

This course meets approximately 32 hours, including mandatory site visits.

Course outline

1. The main periods of economic development and urban dynamics

Understanding how cities form and grow requires examining them in the context of larger, social and economic dynamics. These include: past heritage (prior to 1945); post-war prosperity and functionalism; the crisis of the 1970s; and the neo-free-market policies accompanying globalization and the metropolitanization of economic activity.

2. Brussels' urban structure and its main cleavages

Past and present trends in the structuring of the Brusselian public space are examined synthetically by reviewing the many historical layers of the city's construction. A summary comparison with certain other European and American cities will be discussed.

3. Economic and urbanistic issues

Brussels' economy today is firmly based in the tertiary sector but its recent past was marked by a strong industrial heritage. The urban economics of Brussels is examined in this context, including a look at: Brussels employment; labor markets and training; socio-spatial inequalities, and related topics. The main issues of Brussels as an economic entity include: the relations with the institutional context; land use and planning, and the like. Several differences and similarities with major metropolitan areas in Europe and North America will be underlined.

4. Demographic issues and related problems

The demographic dynamics of an urban space result from the addition of natural tendencies with migratory net flows. This approach opens a series of issues: families, population aging, ethnic and linguistic migration, working population, housing, cultural and linguistic mixity.

5. Social and institutional issues

These issues will be examined through socio-spatial stratification, mobility, public health, urban environment, the public space, architectural heritage, culture, tourism, urban infrastructure and urban institutions.

6. Brussels: capital of Belgium and of Europe

The closing session will be devoted to placing Brussels in its role as capital of Belgium and of Europe. Themes to be raised in this regard include: the successive realization of a Belgian urban structure; the relative significance of Brussels compared to other metropolises; the economic, institutional and urban impact of institutional Europe, the issues involved in Brussels' IDP (International Development Plan), the challenges of the RSDP (Regional Sustainable Development Plan) for 2020 and 2040; demographic shifts; and the struggle against the dualization and internationalization of Brussels.

Suggested bibliography

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Brenner N – *New State Spaces. Urban Governance and the rescaling of Statehood*, 2004, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Brunet R – *Les villes européennes*, 1989, DATAR, Paris.

Castells M – *The Rise of the Network Society*, 1996, Oxford, Blackwell.

ESDP – *European Spatial Development Perspective. Towards Balanced and sustainable Development of the Territory of the EU*. Luxemburg, CEC, 1999.

Friedmann J – *Where we stand: a decade of world city research*, 1995, in Knox P L, Taylor P J (eds.) *World Cities in a World-System*, CUP, Cambridge, pp. 21-47.

Hall P, Pain K (Eds) - *The Polycentric Metropolis*. 2006, London: Earthscan.

Roelandts M et al – *Économie urbaine, analyses et perspectives, Edition de la Haute École Francisco Ferrer, collection économie*, Bruxelles, 180 pages, 1999.

Rozenblat C and Cicille P – *Les villes européennes. Analyse comparative*, 2003, La Documentation française, Paris.

Sassen S – *The Global City*, 1991, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ).

Taylor P J – *World City Network : A Global Urban Analysis*, 2004, London, Routledge.

Vandermotten C, Vermoesen F, De Corte S, Roelandts M et al. – *Villes d'Europe. Atlas comparatif*. Bulletin trimestriel du Crédit Communal de Belgique 1999 : 207-8.

Veltz P – *Mondialisation, villes et territoires. L'économie d'archipel*, 1996, PUF, Paris

Grading

Student work is evaluated on the basis of a mid-term essay and a written examination at the end of the course, the grades for which are averaged with the participation grade based on oral presentations, press reviews and discussion participation.

Equivalent in American university course offerings

This course is the equivalent of a course on European urban sociology, or any city-as-text course on Belgian society.