

Urban Sociology

Urban Sociology is a Year 3 course unit at the University of Manchester, currently taken by around 40 students. For this course unit, we collaborated with Vanessa May, the unit convenor, to develop resources to enhance lectures and support students to use quantitative data independently in project work.

Urban Sociology: combining the global and the local

Urban Sociology introduces students to sociological accounts of urbanisation and the development of cities. The course unit takes a global perspective; however, Vanessa May also tries to engage students with a more local focus on Manchester, the first industrial city.

A global and historical picture

Starting with global and historical perspectives, we identified materials to use in lectures. In particular, Vanessa was keen to use interactive online tools. For example,

- differences between countries were highlighted using World mapper www.worldmapper.org/, a website showing world maps with territories sized according to the subject of interest such as [city living](#)
- for a historical perspective of urbanisation in Britain, we used A Vision of Britain through Time (www.visionofbritain.org.uk), which shows change over time using historical surveys and maps such as the rise of the [service industry](#) or [decline of mining](#).

The websites help give the lectures a more interactive element that help students engage with the course material. They also provide valuable resources for students to explore in their own time.

Using the local to bring theory alive

Assessment for the course includes a mini research project on an area of Manchester. Students choose the area and focus of the project. The task is to link empirical evidence to course themes.

For this element, we supported students to integrate quantitative data into their research project by highlighting resources such as www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk.

“...they are in Manchester, the first industrial city, it’s a playing field for them to really apply what they learn and try and to understand cities in a more grounded way than they would if they just read books about it”

Dr Vanessa May, Lecturer at the University Manchester

Course aims and learning outcomes

- To examine sociological accounts of urbanization and the development of cities
- To establish an understanding of the links between urbanization and other social developments in areas such as the economy, industry and politics
- To debate how urbanization has affected human forms of sociality for example interactions in public spaces
- To provide students with an understanding of theoretical developments and debates in the field of urban sociology

On completion of this unit successful students will:

- have knowledge of changing patterns of urban living
- understand different contemporary sociological approaches to explaining modern urban life
- have an appreciation of the complex impact that urbanization has had on societies and individuals
- be able to apply these theories to their own experiences of living in a city

Combining a local focus with independent research gets students to really think about and engage with theories. As Vanessa May describes, the aim is that students are “not just putting stuff together from books and theories but they're actually having to think I've got this piece of data, ...can this be used to illustrate anything that I've read about or they're reading and have to think ... how would I actually show that this has happened or not happened in the area I'm studying”

Student using better data

Highlighting sources of data gives students both experience sourcing and interpreting data. The quality of students work improved overall as they selected more appropriate data. For example, rather than simply using statistics from newspapers and textbooks, students access data from sources such as the Office for National Statistics.

Many students then successfully related data to key theories and themes from the course unit.

Selected resources

- World Mapper (<http://www.worldmapper.org/>) shows world maps with territories sized according to the subject of interest such as [city living](#)
- Gapminder (<http://www.gapminder.org/>) provides data about social, economic and environmental development at local, national and global levels. Includes interactive charts and videos.
- A Vision of Britain through Time (www.visionofbritain.org.uk) shows change over time using historical surveys and maps.
- Neighbourhood statistics (<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk>) contains a wealth of Official Statistics, including data from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses. Users can search by area name or postcode
- The 2014 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects (<http://esa.un.org/unpd/wup/>)
- Worldbank data on urban development (<http://data.worldbank.org/topic/urban-development>)

About this resource

'Urban Sociology' was developed by the ESSTED team in collaboration with Vanessa May the convenor of the Urban Sociology at the University of Manchester.

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