

HI2A6-30 Urban Catastrophes: Disasters and Urban Reconstruction from 1906 to the Present

21/22

Department

History

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Pierre Purseigle

Credit value

30

Module duration

23 weeks

Assessment

60% coursework, 40% exam

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

Urbanization is a defining feature of modernity and its history. Although the majority of the world population did not live in towns and cities before 2008, the experience of urban life offers a very useful perspective on the making of the modern world. Centres of political power, cultural influence, and economic activities, towns and cities have long played a critical role in global history. As a result, urban disasters often threatened the long-term trajectories of cities and states alike as their human and material toll reverberated for years and decades thereafter. From San Francisco in the 1900s to Beirut in the late-twentieth century, the capacity of urban settlements to recover from environmental catastrophes, industrial accidents, economic decline, and from the ravages of war revealed the strengths and the weaknesses of their social fabric. In dramatic circumstances, urban reconstruction also brings to light many issues of great importance to modern historians: the link between the built environment and local identity, the nature of social cohesion, the relationship between state and civil society, the emergence of transnational solidarity, etc.

[Module web page](#)

Module aims

This 30 CATS second-year option module will introduce students to urban history by focussing on the most extreme examples of urban crises in the twentieth and twenty-first century. It will combine general and comparative discussions with individual case-studies that will inform our collective reflection. Those will include cities destroyed by earthquakes (Valparaiso, 1906; Tokyo, 1923; San Juan – Argentina, 1944, or Mexico City, 1986); hurricanes (New Orleans, 2005); fires (1871; San Francisco, 1906; Salonika, 1917) or accidents (Halifax, 1917). We will also consider the dramatic impact of deindustrialization and economic decline (Camden, NJ). Inevitably, of course, this module will deal with post-conflict reconstructions including in the aftermath of the First World War (Reims and Lviv); the Spanish Civil War (Barcelona); the Second World War (Coventry, Leningrad); the Lebanese Civil War (Beirut) and the collapse of Yugoslavia (Sarajevo).

The module will also go beyond urban history to introduce students to the history of humanitarian action. We will indeed highlight the roles played in urban recovery by a host of local, national and transnational charitable initiatives. The module will therefore trace the origins of humanitarianism and of humanitarian NGOs. It will also underline the interdisciplinary nature of a field of enquiry where historians often collaborate and learn from urban planners, architects, political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists.

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

1. Introduction
2. Cities and towns in modern history
3. Nature, man and disasters in modern history
4. Fires in early twentieth-century cities
5. Industrial accidents and urban devastation
6. ~ Reading Week: no lectures or seminars ~
7. The urban aftermath of the First World War
8. Urban reconstruction and the origins of humanitarianism
9. Earthquakes in early twentieth-century cities
10. The future of cities: the transnational history of urban planning
11. The meanings of reconstruction in the interwar period
12. The urban aftermath of the Spanish Civil War
13. The urban aftermath of the Second World War
14. Cities in the wake of atomic warfare
15. Urban devastation and refugeedom in both world wars
16. ~ Reading Week: no lectures or seminars ~
17. Earthquakes in late twentieth-century cities
18. "Urbicide" in 1990s Europe
19. Urban reconstruction in the contemporary Middle-East
20. Economic decline and urban renewal
21. How terrorism is reshaping global cities
22. Cities and risks: urban resilience and the social sciences

23. Comparing catastrophes and making sense of urban disasters

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate a detailed knowledge of theoretical approaches and sources related to the study of urban history.
- Communicate ideas and findings, adapting to a range of situations, audiences and degrees of complexity.
- Generate ideas through the analysis of a broad range of primary source material connected to urban history.
- Analyse and evaluate the contributions made by existing interdisciplinary scholarship.
- Act with limited supervision and direction within defined guidelines, accepting responsibility for achieving deadlines.

Indicative reading list

- Daniel P. Aldrich, *Building Resilience: Social Capital in Post-Disaster Recovery* (Chicago, 2012).
- Dilanthi Amaratunga and Richard Haigh (eds.), *Post-Disaster Reconstruction of the Built Environment: Rebuilding for Resilience* (Chichester, 2011).
- Greg Bankoff, Uwe Lübken, and Jordan Sand (eds.), *Flammable Cities: Urban Conflagration and the Making of the Modern World* (Madison, 2012).
- Roger Chickering and Marcus Funck (eds.), *Endangered Cities: Military Power and Urban Societies in the Era of the World Wars* (Boston, 2004).
- Michele Landis Dauber, *The Sympathetic State: Disaster Relief and the Origins of the American Welfare State* (Chicago, 2013).
- Andrea Rees Davies, *Saving San Francisco: Relief and Recovery after the 1906 Disaster* (Philadelphia, Pa, 2012).
- Kai T Erikson, *A New Species of Trouble: The Human Experience of Modern Disasters* (New York, 1995).
- Robert Freestone (ed.), *Urban Planning in a Changing World: The Twentieth Century Experience* (London; New York, 2000).
- Sofia Garcia and Bronwyn Kotzen (eds.), *Re-Construction Sarajevo. Negotiating Socio-Political Complexity* (2014).
- Marianne Holm Pedersen, *Between Homes: Post-War Return, Emplacement and the Negotiation of Belonging in Lebanon* (2003).
- Kruno Kardov, *Reconstructing Community, Recreating Boundaries: Identity Politics and Production of Social Space in Post-War Vukovar* (Trondheim, 2006).
- Bertrand Patenaude (ed.), *The Big Show in Bololand the American Relief Expedition to Soviet Russia in the Famine of 1921* (Stanford (Calif.), 2002).
- Ronald W. Perry and E. L. Quarantelli (eds.), *What Is a Disaster?: New Answers to Old Questions* (Philadelphia, Pa., 2005).
- Karl D. Qualls, *From Ruins to Reconstruction: Urban Identity in Soviet Sevastopol after World War II* (Ithaca, 2009).

- Simone Ricca, *Reinventing Jerusalem: Israel's Reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter after 1967* (London, 2007).
- Havidán Rodríguez, E. L. Quarantelli, and Russell Rowe Dynes (eds.), *Handbook of Disaster Research* (New York, 2007).
- Peter Rogers, *Resilience & the City: Change, (dis)order, and Disaster* (Farnham; Burlington, Vt, 2012).
- Jane Schneider and Ida Susser (eds.), *Wounded Cities: Destruction and Reconstruction in a Globalized World* (Oxford; New York, 2003).
- Lawrence J. Vale and Thomas J. Campanella (eds.), *The Resilient City: How Modern Cities Recover from Disaster* (New York, 2005).
- Jelle Zeilinga de Boer and Donald Theodore Sanders, *Earthquakes in Human History: The Far-Reaching Effects of Seismic Disruptions* (Princeton, 2005).

[View reading list on Talis Aspire](#)

Subject specific skills

See learning outcomes.

Transferable skills

See learning outcomes.

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	20 sessions of 1 hour (7%)
Seminars	20 sessions of 1 hour (7%)
Tutorials	2 sessions of 1 hour (1%)
Other activity	2 hours (1%)
Private study	256 hours (85%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

History modules require students to undertake extensive independent research and reading to prepare for seminars and assessments. As a rough guide, students will be expected to read and prepare to comment on three substantial texts (articles or book chapters) for each seminar taking approximately 3 hours. Each assessment requires independent research, reading around 6-10 texts and writing and presenting the outcomes of this preparation in an essay, review, presentation or other related task.

Other activity description

Revision seminar

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group D1

	Weighting	Study time
Seminar contribution	10%	
1500 word essay	10%	
3000 word essay	40%	
7 day take-home assessment	40%	

Feedback on assessment

- Written feedback on essay and exam cover sheets\r\n- Student/tutor dialogues in one-to-one tutorials\r\n

[Past exam papers for HI2A6](#)

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UENA-VQ32 Undergraduate English and History

This module is Option list B for:

- UHIA-V100 Undergraduate History
 - Year 2 of V100 History
 - Year 2 of V100 History