Course Description:
Urbanization is inherently unequal, inscribing social, economic, environmental, and political unevenness into the spatial fabric of the city. But the distribution of such inequality is not inevitable. Urbanization is a product of the collective decisions we make (or choose not to make) in response to the shared challenges we face in our cities. And, thus, the patterns of urbanization can be changed. This is the task of urban planning and the starting point for this advanced seminar, which asks how we can reshape our cities to be more just—to alleviate inequality rather than compound it. In embarking on this effort, we face numerous "wicked" problems without clear-cut solutions. The approaches one takes in addressing urban inequality are therefore fundamentally normative—they are shaped by one's place in the world and one's view of it. The central challenge in addressing inequality is thus establishing a basis for collective action amongst diverse actors with differing—and sometimes conflicting—values and views. In other words, planning the just city a matter of both empathy and debate. In this course, we will endeavor to develop informed positions that can help us engage with others as a basis for taking collective action.

The course is organized into four 3-week modules, each of which addresses a dimension of the just city: equity, democracy, diversity, and sustainability. In the first week of each module, we will discuss how the issue has been understood in history and theory (with an emphasis on tradeoffs between different priorities and values); in the second week, we will apply this discussion to a global case study prepared and presented by a team of students; and in the third week, we will hold an in-class debate to determine what should be done. Case studies vary each year.