
IUS Field Training School and Research Seminar on Urban Ethnography and Theory: Report and Research Abstracts

Italo Pardo

(University of Kent, UK)

i.pardo@kent.ac.uk

Giuliana B. Prato

g.b.prato@kent.ac.uk

In today's increasingly urbanised world, the ethnographic study of life in urban settings is urgent and important. Recognizing the pressing methodological and theoretical questions raised by the multifaceted contemporary urban changes and challenges, the International Urban Symposium-IUS has convened for the second year a Field Training School and Research Seminar in Montecatini Terme, Tuscany, Italy on 21-27 July 2023 (<https://www.internationalurbansymposium.com/events/2023-field-training-school/>). The working language was English.

This IUS School was organised in collaboration with an international group of senior scholars from British, French, Indian, Israeli and USA universities.¹ The event brought together doctoral students and postdoctoral scholars from Bangladesh, Canada, Finland, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Poland, South Korea, Switzerland, Sweden, Ukraine, UK.

The primary aim was to engage junior and early career scholars in the “art” of conducting ethnographic fieldwork and develop the link between ethnographically-based analysis and social theory. The interactive learning environment encouraged productive discussion on the rationale and practices of traditional and new research methods and mainstream debates.

Over 7 full days, the activities developed through 14 interactive Teaching Seminars, 2 targeted Observational Field Trips in the medieval hamlet of Montecatini Alto and in the city of Montecatini Terme, followed by a full day discussion of participants' reports on their fieldtrips; private Study Hours, dedicated to reading selected literature — which had been circulated before the start of the School — and writing up the fieldtrips presentations. The School concluded with a full day Research Seminar during which students presented their own work and engaged in academic debate benefiting from expert feedback from the teaching staff, including advisory guidelines on how to revise oral presentations for publication.

The Teaching Seminars focused on methodological and theoretical debates. Drawing on the teaching staff's wide range of ethnographic and theoretical expertise, the discussions addressed interrelated topical issues — specifically, governance, stereotype and stigma; legitimacy and legitimation; informality; urban diversity and resilience; sport mega-events; violence and risk; aging; urban protest; vernacular landscape, public space and heritage.

¹ They were, in alphabetical order, Gary Armstrong (City University London, UK); Subhadra Mitra Channa (University of Delhi, India); Jerome Krase (City University New York, USA); Italo Pardo (University of Kent, UK); Giuliana B. Prato (University of Kent, UK); Michel Rautenberg (University of St Etienne, France); James Rosbrook-Thompson (City University London, UK); Liora Sarfati (Tel Aviv University, Israel).

Social events benefited from the centrality of the location and its world-renowned SPA iconic establishments.

The School's participants became part of an international network, establishing connections with both other participants and the teaching staff.

Below are the abstracts of the papers presented at the Research Seminar. Revised and expanded versions of select papers are in preparation for publication either in this journal or in edited volumes for the series "Palgrave Studies in Urban Anthropology".

The Research Seminar Abstracts

(in alphabetical order)

Marie Bertrand, Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland.

Title: *What credibility can the researcher-elected politician claim? A methodology of action-research through citizen participation.*

Abstract: Action-research originated from the desire to reconcile two approaches: the political approach (acting to bring about change) and the scientific approach (knowing, in order to analyse change) in order to respond to the need of a large French city to make the lifestyles of its inhabitants more compatible with climate change through local citizen participation, as an innovative construction of public policies. To question such a decision-making process, it seemed interesting to implement this method while the researcher is herself a deputy mayor in the city identified as the field of study. Not only does this position question the posture of the researcher in the research process, but also that of the elected politician in the process of citizen participation. The paper examines the idea of the action-research device adapted to the research field. It defends the need of a partnership strategy by identifying the methodological constants while mitigating the scientific and political risks by a mapping of the actors and interests involved. This epistemological reflection opens up the reflexivity between political commitment and scientific commitment.

Christoph Hedtke, University of Applied Sciences Erfurt, Germany.

Title: *How emotions impact the research process and its outcomes. The example of researching nationalist, regressive movements.*

Abstract: Since the Emotional Turn in the social sciences, emotions have increasingly become the subject of research interest. For decades, feminist researchers in particular have emphasised the ethical responsibility associated with them and the importance of reflexivity in the research process. It is all the more surprising that the emotional experience of the researcher still receives very little attention in research practice, although it has obvious implications for the research process; e.g. how we move in the field, how we inquire about and interpret certain statements, and last but not least, how we deal with our emotions and how these experiences affect future research. A special challenge seems to be posed by research on nationalist, authoritarian actors and regressive movements, investigated in marginalized and peripheralized contexts. A certain degree of empathy

is the basis of any interview situation. But what does this mean for research in anti-democratic contexts? While marginality usually evokes sympathy and agency of social scientists, with heuristics explaining the production of marginality, stigma and the like, researchers working on this topic are confronted with actors' practices and values they feel alien and even hostile to. This impacts the research process in a number of ways. During interviews, one's own political position is undeniably present and influences any communicative situation. Negative emotions like anger, rejection, even disgust mix into the communication on both sides. Furthermore, established ways of interviewing are called into question by the fact that we as scientists and our science itself are questioned by the field. This paper draws on focus groups with researchers and my own research experience in this field. It aims to show the interconnection of emotions, one's own political positioning and activity as well as normative and analytical perspectives.

Halyna Herasym, University College Dublin, Rep. of Ireland.

Title: *Between Tradition and Modernity: Funerals in the Irish Urban Landscapes*".

Abstract: The paper presents the result of the fieldwork conducted on the body disposal process in the modern Republic of Ireland. The processes of rapid urbanisation and secularization, and changes in the social fabric that follow in Ireland began rather late in comparison to Ireland's European counterparts. The paper explores how the timing of these processes affects the funeral process in three Irish cities: Dublin, Cork and Limerick. The text argues that, unlike in many European countries that had to reinvent the ways of dying and body disposal, which were tailored to the individual needs of the families and the dying people, this process had been made smoother in Ireland through the preservation of the informal bonds in the tightly-knit communities.

Mia Jaatsi, University of Turku, Finland.

Title: *Labour, life, and the question of justice in urban public space.*

Abstract: This paper combines ethnographic research methods and theories of urban justice in the context of public space in Helsinki, Finland. It uses ethnography to follow the daily manoeuvrings of a man who collects bottles for his work. Despite being known for welfare structures, Finland, too, is subject to urban inequalities and those outside of the securities of the state and formal labour. From the bottom-up, this study investigates the struggles the man encounters as he labours through public space. The ethnography reveals that life on and of the street is not secure nor idle: it consists of strict schedules, competitive territories, self-management, learning of space and time, and seeking for quick solutions. The empirical study demonstrates that while for some urban public spaces are sites of leisure and optimism, for others, they unfold as sites of precarious work, informality and scepticism. This on-going paper invites to discuss on the interplay between theory and empirical work, that is, between the micro-geographies of lived urban space and broader questions related to justice in the city.

Selima Sara Kabir, BRAC University, India.

Title: *Love is Blind; Online Dating is Holds a Magnifying Glass: Exploring the role of online dating in shaping identities among young people in Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

Abstract: There is very limited scholarship, particularly qualitative studies taking an anthropological approach, on how dating apps are used by young people in South Asia. The paper aims to unpack what young people are seeking in terms of relationships and connectedness from dating apps. Moreover, we seek to explore how this impacts their personal identity in terms of self-worth, understanding of emotions and self. We will contrast their innermost desires and expectations of relationships from these apps to the ways they choose to present themselves online through their pictures and “bios”. Through in-depth interviews and dating profile analysis, this study aims to take a focused ethnographic approach to understanding the experiences of Bangladeshi youth using online dating apps like Tinder, Bumble and Hinge. Our respondents are expected to share stories of their “firsts” on these apps — the first time opening their profile, their first match and their first date from the app; as well as first disappointments and heartbreaks from the app. We aim to understand their emotional journey over time since these firsts, whether they feel any different to “real life” connections and how they impact their perceptions of love, romance and themselves.

Jin Myoung Lim, City University of London, UK.

Title: *How creative hubs can be used to cultivate sustainable cultural ecosystems.*

Abstract: Creative hubs are physical spaces that bring together artists, creatives entrepreneurs and cultural organizations to collaborate and create new work. They play a critical role in the development of sustainable cultural ecosystems and the growth of the creative economy. The paper provides a literature review on the current state of creative hubs and their impact on the cultural and creative industries. The review emphasizes the importance of creative hubs in creating a supportive environment for the growth of the creative economy and sustainable cultural ecosystems. The paper also presents case studies of successful creative hubs from around the world, highlighting their unique features and the ways in which they have contributed to the growth of their respective cultural ecosystems. The case studies provide insights into the challenges and opportunities of developing and sustaining creative hubs, as well as the strategies that have been successful in achieving this goal. The paper concludes with a framework for cultivating sustainable cultural ecosystems through the development of creative hubs. The framework outlines the key components of a successful creative hub and the strategies that can be used to support its growth and sustainability. It emphasizes the importance of collaboration, community engagement, and a supportive policy environment in achieving sustainable cultural ecosystems. In summary, this paper highlights the critical role of creative hubs in cultivating sustainable cultural ecosystems. It provides insights into the challenges and opportunities of developing and sustaining creative hubs and outlines strategies for their growth and sustainability. By creating a supportive environment for the growth of the creative

economy, creative hubs can contribute significantly to the development of sustainable cultural ecosystems.

Erin E. Lynch, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada.

Title: *“It Must Be Something in the Water”*: A Comparative Sensory Ethnography of Urban Spa Atmospheres.

Abstract: From signature aromas to lilting soundscapes and “natural” textures, the sensory design of spa atmospheres deliberately appeals to all the senses. Using sensory ethnography, and informed by my previous research on spa atmospheres in the context of pandemic culture (where atmospheres of wellness bumped up against the overarching atmosphere of contagion), the proposed paper would compare the sensory design and experience of the prototypical Scandinavian/Nordic-style spa in North America to that of the thermal baths in the Italian spa town of Montecatini Terme. On the one hand, the comparative approach of the proposed paper would give insight into the way that varying cultural and touristic ideas of wellness are expressed in the sensory design of these spaces. At the same time, this paper would explore how atmospheres of wellness in a “spa town” are interconnected with a variety of other drivers of the so-called experience economy in the city. My overarching aim is to illuminate both the curation of (branded) atmospheres of wellness in the city and the precarious, uneven, and thoroughly multisensory experience of co-producing these atmospheres and spaces with others.

Nils Julian Meiß, University of Cologne, Germany.

Title: *Making sense of the imaginary in practice as an approach to urban futures*,

Abstract: In urban research, which favours the city as an epistemological object, the engagement with imaginaries is not very widespread and only visible in marginal areas of urban theory. In anthropological research, the systematized analysis of imaginaries is also undeveloped and can sometimes be found through the nexus of habitus and the city. In this context, the reference to imaginaries often has fictional notes and exhibits ontological fuzziness. With Lefebvres’ and Castoriadis’ notions of the imaginary, two variants are available — albeit each theorized and placed very differently in the authors work — and are fruitful for the synthesis of current debates in practice theory and anthropology of the future. Lefebvres’ and Castoriadis’ notions of the imaginary meet, first, in materialistic-embodied practices of the everlasting creative subject, and second, in the forward-looking temporality of the possible. Building on their works, methodological facets of the imaginary are to be confronted with positionalities in the ethnographic co-production of knowledge. Using the empirical case of a “traffic experiment” in Cologne, I will examine how social imaginaries and everyday life rhythms complement the governance of infrastructure projects. Identifying the urban as an imaginary of collective practice opens ways for a different production of space.

Cecile Poullain, Independent Scholar, France.

Title: *How smartphones influence our ability to perceive our urban environment.*

Abstract: Drawing on recent research, this paper revisits in the digital age some of Kevin Lynch's work in his book *Image of the City* to discuss how smartphones influence our ability to perceive our urban environment. The data were collected through a questionnaire (over 200 respondents) and a series of workshops on the impact of smartphones over urban spatiality and visual perception of cities. Outcomes were greatly interesting: with the use of smartphones, new navigational norms seem to emerge in the way people practice their urban environment and it also creates new ways of understanding our cities.

Ipsita Pradhan, SRM University, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Title: *The Shopping Mall as Work-Place: An Understanding of Layered Space(s).*

Abstract: The paper studies women employed as retail shop-floor employees in a shopping mall in Hyderabad, India. It is an attempt to understand the shopping mall as a work space, instead of only a site of consumption. In doing that, it uses the concept of "layered space" to understand the nature and processes of stratification and exclusions that the shopping mall produces. The concept of layered space is useful in understanding the characteristics of a space that is shared by people of different social strata, yet there are differences and hierarchies in the nature of their relation to that space. The layers formed, as a result, are fluid with varied acts of constructing physical and social boundaries, under the overarching structure of the rules of the mall. These are manifested in the relationship that the retail shop-floor employees have a) with the customers, visible in the starkly different customer areas and employee areas within the mall, b) amongst themselves on the basis of position in the job hierarchy, caste and gender. Talking from the perspective of women's experiences as employees in the shopping mall, the paper shows the gendered nature of the layers within the space of the mall as well as the larger space of the city where the mall is located.

Yvann Pralong, Université de Jean Monnet à Saint-Étienne, France.

Title: *Heritage Through the Digital Prism: Doing Online Fieldwork.*

Fieldwork's importance within social sciences has been discussed numerous times and is at the centre of this seminar. However, is fieldwork only a thing of the "physical realm" or could we extend it, in a way, to the non-material one that constitutes the digital network? While working on heritage through online initiatives and representations, I had to walk through the online research field, collect data and conduct online interviews and surveys. What should be considered before collecting data and how usable are these data? What are the similarities between those two fields? In what way do they differ? Using separate research experiences, one revolving around Lyon's heritage and the other one on Saint-Étienne, this paper aims to develop a discussion around online research not unrelated to physical fieldwork.

Francesca Ru, Uppsala University, Sweden.

Title: *Market gentrification pandemic: an ethnographic research of Turin's Mercato Centrale.*

In recent years, the profile of many working-class neighbourhoods has changed as new sophisticated businesses have opened. This change can trigger gentrification and foodification processes. One example is Mercato Centrale in Turin, an indoor market opened in 2019 in a multi-ethnic neighbourhood. Its main feature is the offer of expensive, typical Italian dishes. This paper explores whether the opening of this market is not only a commercial initiative but also a catalyst for commercial gentrification and foodification processes. Between October 2020 and January 2021, I conducted qualitative research, a content analysis of the Mercato Centrale website and an analysis of 41 articles published in three newspapers; thirteen semi-structured interviews with people working in the market; a period of participant observation. The market is presented as a meeting place on the website and in the articles analysed. The interviewees divided the clientele into two groups: Café visitors and restaurant visitors. The first group consisted mainly of Maghrebians who consume almost exclusively coffee. The second group consisted mainly of Turinese and tourists. Finally, participant observation revealed that the main customers during the pandemic period belonged to the first group. The opening of the Mercato Centrale is an urban regeneration action carried out by a private entity. Although it is presented as a place of encounter, it excludes rather than includes. However, with the pandemic, tourism came to a complete halt and the clientele changed, making the Maghreb population the main customers of the Mercato Centrale.

Karolina Dziubata Smykowskam, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan, Poland.

Title: *Attitudes to Climate Change in Rural and Medium-Sized Urban Environments on the Example of Intangible Cultural Heritage Practices.*

Abstract: The pilot research I am conducting responds to the issue of the relationship between climate change and local practices around intangible cultural heritage, which has not yet been sufficiently explored in Polish anthropology. The research will allow a preliminary analysis of the impact of the climate crisis on traditionally established rituals and customs related to the growing season, the annual snow cycle (cf. Bolin 2009) and surface water level. The ethnographic research sites are phenomena in rural and medium-size urban environment selected for their connection with the natural environment and included in the National list of intangible cultural heritage. The planned research will help strengthen the sense of empowerment of local communities, who have the right not only to be informed about the consequences of climate change — they are also capable of generating concrete solutions. The research also aims to reflect on the strategies taken by people in the context of the climate crisis. What do people do with their tradition in the face of hydrological draught? What do they think about yearly rituals that no longer correspond to the growing season? The paper is embedded in the currents of ethnoclimatology, climate ethnography and anthropology of folklore.

Insub Song, City University London, UK.

Title: *What does it mean to be “Itaewon people”? A study on young-generation South Koreans visiting Itaewon, Seoul.*

Abstract: This study investigates the ways in which Itaewon, a multicultural neighbourhood in Seoul, is being consumed by its major clientele of young generation South Koreans. For this, 18 semi-structured interviews conducted with regular visitors to Itaewon are used as data. The findings suggest that while multicultural consuming experience is commonly discussed as key motivation for visiting Itaewon, what is being pursued by majority of the participants at deeper level is the distinction of oneself from the Confucius, conservative and nationalistic tendencies of Korea as who can appreciate and adapt to cultural differences. I argue that the symbolism of Itaewon needs to be understood not as a one-way construction by various types of migrants and their cultures, but as what has been sustained and reconfigured by the cultural resistance materialised by the young generation Koreans, who emerged as dominant clientele in the last 10 years, through consuming its multiculturalism. This study is expected to contribute, particularly, to the local scholarship by presenting an empirical study on what it means to appreciate multiculturalism within the Korean society, and by recognising the critical role of consumers in the production of Itaewon, whom have been unattended by the scholarship.