

# Is this Urbanism?

## UD 715 / Arch 509 THEORIES AND METHODS OF URBAN DESIGN

FALL SEMESTER 2026 - TIME: Tu-Th: 10:00-11:20 am - ROOM: A&A Building

INSTRUCTOR: Assoc. Prof. María Arquero de Alarcón [marquero@umich.edu]

### COURSE BRIEF

Amid accelerating urban transformations and mounting global crises, what agency do the design professions—and allied disciplines—hold in developing new ways of knowing, researching, and acting toward more inclusive, pluralistic, and just urban futures?

This seminar critically engages urban design as both discourse and practice, examining the forces shaping contemporary urbanization across diverse global contexts. Approaching urban design as a transdisciplinary field, the course surveys multiple urbanisms while interrogating the relationships between space and power; policy and design; publics and their representation; cultural and socio-environmental specificities; and the socio-economic and political regimes through which cities and their hinterlands are produced and contested.

Open to students interested in urban design and the research of contemporary urban transformations, the seminar operates as a collaborative and evolving intellectual laboratory. The syllabus adapts annually to reflect participants' disciplinary backgrounds and research interests, supporting investigations across a wide range of urban phenomena. Students play an active role in co-shaping the course by selecting themes, contributing materials, and advancing their own research agendas. Through critical reading, analytical writing, visual and spatial inquiry, site-based exploration, dialogue with invited scholars, and collective discussion, participants cultivate both individual research trajectories and the seminar's shared body of knowledge.

### COURSE LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Critically engage contemporary urban theories and debates through cross-disciplinary, intersectional, and multicultural perspectives.
- Analyze, interpret, and theorize urban design projects and processes, recognizing their environmental, socio-political, cultural, and spatial entanglements while demonstrating disciplinary awareness and global literacy.
- Examine and challenge relevant precedent studies, assessing their transferability, replicability, and implications for spatial justice.
- Develop advanced critical thinking skills by interrogating assumptions, identifying biases in sources and methods, and synthesizing abstract concepts into informed analytical and design propositions.
- Collaborate effectively across disciplinary and cultural differences, building mutual trust and employing inclusive communication practices to expand the scope and diversity of research outcomes.