

<b>Course title:</b>	<b>Urban Imaginaries: Between Place and Space in Berlin</b>
<b>Instructor:</b>	Max Schnepf
<b>Email address:</b>	max.schnepf@fu-berlin.de
<b>Track:</b>	B-Track
<b>Language of instruction:</b>	English
<b>Contact hours:</b>	48 (6 per day)
<b>ECTS credits:</b>	6
<b>Prerequisites:</b>	Students should be able to speak and read English at the upper intermediate level (B2) or higher.

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### **Course description**

Urban studies and its discourse on the city draw on scholarship from fields as diverse as human geography, history, anthropology and the arts. Berlin, with its seemingly infinite possibilities for memory, imagination and creative self-fashioning, offers a rich analytical model. It is a city, which is as much a fixed place with a distinct topography as it is an imaginary that glides between remembering and forgetting. A measured understanding of the interplay of place, space and memory in Berlin's cityscape is key for students who are eager to learn about the city's many pasts and presents. FUBiS invites you to join us as we analyze and explore Berlin.

This seminar brings to the fore connections between Berlin's distinct topography, its radical histories, and its current trajectories as a political and cultural space. That cities are a complex assemblage – at best multiple constellations existing simultaneously – is enabled through perspectives on migration, queerness and postcoloniality for instance. In-class analysis and discussion of academic and literary texts, podcasts and films about Berlin will prepare participants for course excursions. Our temporal-topographical inquiry will take us to a diverse set of historical sites, cultural places and neighborhoods in the city (such as the Berlin Wall Memorial, Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, Schwules Museum, Sonnenallee).

We will conduct on-site discussions of these places/spaces in historical, spatial and social terms and record the urban with methodical observations. Upon completing the course, students will have compiled a portfolio of short essays reflecting their critical reception of Berlin's places/spaces as well as their gendered and embodied engagements, observations and memories of the city. The course not only enables an appreciation of how places/spaces are living archives of Berlin's past and present, it also invites participants to create their own personal record of Berlin.

### Learning Objectives:

After attending this seminar, students will

- understand the topographical, social, and symbolic organization of place/space in an urban setting, Berlin in particular;
- gain insight into the character of cities as multiple, contested and always-in-the making constellations
- be able to reflect how access to the city is always subjective and contingent because it is primarily gendered, embodied, classed and racialized.
- be familiar with how the city's history continues to shape contemporary Berlin and its social imaginaries.

### Student profile

Ideal for students of humanities and the arts, cultural, political, and social sciences.

### Course requirements

#### I. Active Participation

What is active participation?

- Being prepared for the seminar, e.g., having read the texts carefully.
- Constructive and productive participation in class and during the fieldwork.

#### II. Essays

Over the course of the seminar, you will write three 500-word essays. Analyzing a specific aspect of a seminar topic or reading, your essay can adopt scientific or literary styles and include visual and sonic elements. These essays should document and analyze your developing relationship with the city. They are a way to reflect upon class discussions, course readings as well as excursions and fieldtrips. Showing that you engaged with the course content is more important than perfect language or grammar. Possible questions that you could discuss in your essays are:

- What did I learn from class discussions or the assigned readings? Where did I have questions that remained open/unanswered?
- How is the city as well as access to it marked by race, class, gender, dis/ability etc.? How can we methodologically observe, analytically describe and criticize these urban inequalities?
- What did I observe during the excursion? How did it make me feel? Can I relate experiences during fieldtrips to memories from another place and time?
- How have my expectations of Berlin changed? Which new facets of the city have I discovered? Which place can these impressions take in my imaginary of Berlin? Can I compare or contrast Berlin with other (urban) areas that I have lived in – what are the differences and similarities?
- How can I relate the impressions of the city (both inside and outside the course) to my own history, i.e. my embodied self, my upbringing, my family history, my (racialized, classed, gendered, etc.) position in my home country?

### III. Presentation

The final class will consist of a poster walk. Each student will be asked to prepare a poster (or a comparable format) about their course experience and insights. These presentations can either reflect on your personal access to the city or center a particular topic that you further investigate. Each student will have time to present their poster to the class (max. 10 min.). Posters and presentations will be graded based on style and structure, content and the quality of the presented analysis/reflections.

Possible formats are:

- An in-depth research about one aspect discussed in class, including further material and literature on the topic (e.g. postcolonial debates in Berlin)
- Your personal reflections on your developing relationship with the city, putting your own writing and photos in conversation with the in-class discussions, literature and excursions
- An artistic (literary, visual, sonic etc.) engagement with Berlin and its urban imaginaries
- An analysis of one aspect of Berlin's history (e.g. the history of queer movements in Berlin)
- A literature review of concepts or a theory of the city (e.g. in sociology)
- A literature review of methods or one particular method for analyzing the city / urban life

### Required language skills

The language of instruction is English. Language proficiency on an advanced intermediate level (B2) is a prerequisite for participation. For orientation purposes, you can assess your language skills here (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR): <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=090000168045bb52>)

### Attendance

Each class consists of six teaching modules (45 minutes each). If you miss 6 modules (unexcused), your final course grade will drop by one grade. Coming more than 20 minutes late counts as one missed module (this also applies to excursion days). If you come late to class six times (up to 20 minutes) your entire course grade will also drop by one grade. If you miss 14 modules or more (unexcused), you will fail the class. Excused absences, such as those with medical documentation, do not count toward these totals.

### Grading

Active Participation:	40%
Presentation:	30%
Essays:	30% (3 essays of 500 words each. Evaluation based on content, style, and quality of analysis)

More information on grading can be found here:

[https://www.fubis.org/2\\_prog/zeugnis/index.html](https://www.fubis.org/2_prog/zeugnis/index.html)

## Readings

A digital reader will be provided.

## Course schedule

Date	Program*
Tuesday, July 21, 2026	<p><b>Week 1: Historicizing Berlin: Sites of Memory</b></p> <p><b>Session 1.1</b>  Jaffe, R., &amp; de Koning, A. 2022. „Introduction.“ In <i>Introducing Urban Anthropology</i>. London, New York: Routledge, 1-19.</p> <p>Bell, Kirsty. 2022. <i>The Undercurrents: A Story of Berlin</i>. London: Fitzcarraldo Editions, 13-60.</p> <p>The first session brings together theoretical approaches to theorizing and research the city with personal writing on Berlin. Students will acquire an understanding of the importance of engaging both material and immaterial perspectives, relevant to the overall course. This will be achieved by workshopping some of the ideas from the assigned readings and by collecting students' own imaginations/expectations of the city. It will also prepare students for the first excursion.</p>
Friday, July 24, 2026	<p><b>Session 1.2</b>  Ladd, Brian. 2018. <i>The Ghosts of Berlin: Confronting German History in the Urban Landscape</i>, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1-6; 237-255.</p> <p>Jaffe, R., &amp; de Koning, A. 2022. „Urban places.“ In <i>Introducing Urban Anthropology</i>. London, New York: Routledge, 23-40.</p> <p>This session will take place outdoors. Students will be expected to carry forward the key ideas of the workshop and identify its material-architectural formations. They will engage in discussions on-site and begin a field-diary (to be carried along to all excursions).</p> <p><b>Excursion:</b> Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe</p> <p><b>Student input:</b> Evans, Jennifer V. 2015. „Harmless Kisses and Infinite Loops: Making Space for Queer Place in 21st Century Berlin.“ In <i>Queer Cities, Queer Cultures: Europe Since 1945</i>, edited by Jennifer V. Evans and Matt Cook, 75–94. London: Bloomsbury Academic.</p> <p><b>ESSAY 1: DUE BY SUN. 26 JULY</b></p>

<p>Tuesday, July 28, 2026</p>	<p><b>Week 2: (Post-)Colonial and Multicultural Berlin: Past and Present</b></p> <p><b>Session 2.1</b> Engler, J. 2013. "Renaming Streets, Inverting Perspectives: Acts of Postcolonial Memory Citizenship in Berlin." <i>focus on German Studies</i> 20: 41-61.</p> <p>Podcast <i>Decolonization in Action</i>. Season 1, Episode 1, Part 1: Decolonizing Berlin. <a href="https://www.decolonizationinaction.com/episodes/2019/10/04/decolonizing-berlin-episode-1-part-1">https://www.decolonizationinaction.com/episodes/2019/10/04/decolonizing-berlin-episode-1-part-1</a></p> <p>This session will introduce students to German colonial history and postcolonial/decolonial debates in Berlin.</p> <p><b>Excursion:</b> Berlin Postkolonial City Tour <i>OR</i> Visit of the Exhibition "zurückgeschaut   looking back: The First German Colonial Exhibition of 1896 in Berlin-Treptow" (Museum Treptow) <a href="https://www.museumportal-berlin.de/en/exhibitions/zurueckgeschaut-looking-back/">https://www.museumportal-berlin.de/en/exhibitions/zurueckgeschaut-looking-back/</a></p>
<p>Friday, July 31, 2026</p>	<p><b>Session 2.2</b> Pink, Sarah. 2008. "An urban tour: The sensory sociality of ethnographic place-making." <i>Ethnography</i> 9 (2): 175-196.</p> <p>Kasmani, Omar. 2023. "Migration: An Intimacy." In <i>The Affect Theory Reader 2: Worldings, Tensions, Futures</i>, edited by Gregory J. Seigworth and Carolyn Pedwell, 214-232. Durham: Duke University Press.</p> <p><i>Optional:</i></p> <p>Gebrael, Imad. <i>Sonnenallee Podcast</i>. Episode 5: Shade. (Arabic with English Subtitles).</p> <p>The first-half of the session will take place in class. Students will be introduced to ideas of doing fieldwork in the city, especially the role of observation and sensorial methods for urban ethnography. The class will end with a walk down Sonnenallee. Students will be expected to document their walk.</p> <p><b>Excursion:</b> Sonnenallee Walk (with Imad Gebrayel and/or Omar Kasmani tbc)</p> <p><b>ESSAY 2: DUE BY SUN. 2 AUGUST</b></p>

<p>Tuesday, August 4, 2026</p>	<p><b>Week 3: Berlin Otherwise: Queer Imaginaries Then and Now</b></p> <p><b>Session 3.1</b>  Rottmann, Andrea. 2023. <i>Queer Lives across the Wall: Desire and Danger in Divided Berlin, 1945–1970</i>. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 3-21.</p> <p>Lemmey, Huw and Ben Miller. 2022. Special Episode: Magnus Hirschfeld (with Laurie Marhoefer). <i>Bad Gays Podcast</i>.  <a href="https://badgayspod.com/episode-archive/special-episode-magnus-hirschfeld">https://badgayspod.com/episode-archive/special-episode-magnus-hirschfeld</a>.</p> <p>Queer Exhibition <i>Love at First Fight</i>, <a href="https://www.queerexhibition.org/en">https://www.queerexhibition.org/en</a>.</p> <p>Based on the readings, students will learn about queer relations of the urban and how the city exists otherwise (beyond/ behind/ underneath); also, the ways in which the more-precarious and less-visible histories of the city can be archived/ recorded. The session will either take place at the museum entirely or will involve an excursion. Students will learn about Berlin's queer history through a guided visit to the museum's archive (to be confirmed) or through their interactions with museum objects/ discussion of the exhibit.</p> <p><b>Student input:</b> Beachy, Robert. 2014. <i>Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity</i>. New York: Knopf, 160-186.</p> <p><b>Excursion:</b> Schwules Museum</p>
<p>Friday, August 7, 2026</p>	<p><b>Session 3.2</b>  Çetin, Zülfukar. 2018. "The Dynamics of Queer Politics and Gentrification in Berlin." In <i>The Queer Intersectional in Contemporary Germany: Essays on Racism, Capitalism and Sexual Politics</i>, edited by Christopher Sweetapple, 141-181. Psychosozial-Verlag.</p> <p>This session addresses queer forms of place making as well as conflictive relationships between queer identifications and urban space. We will discuss the contemporary imagination of "Queer Berlin" as composed of and enacted in embodied practices, representational discourses and political economies. Recent dynamics of city politics and gentrification will be discussed with inhabitants of the queer housing project Tuntenhaus.</p> <p><b>Excursion:</b> Tuntenhaus OR Nollendorfplatz</p> <p><b>Student input:</b> Harvey, David. "The Right to the City": New Left Review (2008)." In <i>The City Reader</i>, edited by Richard T. LeGates, Richard T. Legates, Frederic Stout, Frederic Stout, Roger W. Caves. Routledge, 2020. 281-289.</p> <p><b>ESSAY 3: DUE BY SUN. 9 AUGUST</b></p>

<p>Tuesday, August 11, 2026</p>	<p><b>Week 4: Berlin in Transformation</b></p> <p><b>Session 4.1</b></p> <p>In this session, students will discuss the questions of change and urban transformation. They will build on the learnings of previous sessions by tying material dimensions of memory (architectural sites and memorials) with the city's immaterial/ hidden dimensions (migrant/ queer/ postcolonial presence). Students will also reflect on their experiences in the city especially in relation to their expectations/ imaginations (identified in session 1).</p> <p>The second half of the session will be dedicated to preparing student presentations.</p>
<p>Friday, August 14, 2026</p>	<p><b>Session 4.2</b></p> <p>The final session will involve student presentations and discussions.</p> <p>Concluding Remarks and Summary</p> <p><b>FUBiS Farewell Ceremony</b></p>

\*Field trips are subject to change depending on the availability of appointments and speakers. On field trip days, class hours may be adjusted.