

Centre for Urban Research on Austerity (CURA)



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Contents

CURA'S Vision	2
Background and Institutional Context	2
Research	5
Main Research Topics	6
External Funding	9
Research Environment	9
Postgraduate Study	10
Influencing Policy, Politics and Practice	10
Members	13



CURA'S Vision

The Centre for Urban Research on Austerity (CURA) explores the impacts of austerity, retrenchment, neoliberalisation and anti-neoliberal resistance on global urban living. With our national and international collaborators, we seek to do research that contributes to a radically new egalitarian policy landscape, enabling and empowering grassroots democratic participation, and giving a voice to those currently marginalised and dispossessed. We aim to lead debates and develop egalitarian responses to the intersecting inequalities in global urban contexts.

Institutional Context and UN Sustainable Development Goals

Launched in 2015, CURA is, according to the Times Higher, the only centre of its kind in the world. The centre occupies a clearly defined interdisciplinary niche, looking at how governing and resisting austerity (a concept with many valences) leads to urban transformations. CURA is an interdisciplinary research team serving as a mechanism to translate shared interests across disciplines and subject areas into outstanding collaborative research with a global reach.

CURA is a prominent part of De Montfort University's (DMU) research community. As the United Nations' (UN) designated Global Hub for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16 (peace, justice, strong institutions) - the only UK university to be designated as such - DMU is committed to pursuing UN SDGs in research, teaching and enterprise activity. DMU has made significant investments to support a world leading research environment, including the Doctoral College and training programme, Early Career Academic Fellowship scheme, and Future Research Leaders programme.

CURA touches on several UN Sustainable Development Goals, but Goal 8 (decent work), Goal 10 (Reducing Inequalities) and Goal 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) are constant reference points. With a new "age of austerity" threatening, even as the last rites are performed on the last one, we believe these goals are relevant for high, medium and low GDP nations alike. Our agenda has synergies with the New Urban Agenda arising from Habitat III and, regardless of the outcome of Brexit negotiations, the Horizon 2020 societal challenge, "Europe in a changing world: inclusive, innovative and reflective societies".





Research

The mission of CURA is to study and make sense of austere neoliberalism, its contradictions and limitations. Austerity battles and their impacts are lived far beyond the city in its classical sense, and CURA focuses both on the classical metropolis as a fulcrum of the global austerity conjuncture, and the relationships between urban centres and peripheries. These are spaces and relations where austerity bites and where alternatives to austerity are forged through struggle. With the rise of “localist” ideologies, the city has become the object of serious political attention from national and international elites, heralded as the dynamo of “resilience”, and post-crash cultural and economic revitalization. The character of “good” urban living in the aftermath of COVID-19 will be a significant arena for intellectual and political struggle.

CURA's research interests span a variety of topics that are presented under four broad headings of **Urban Austerity Governance and Resistance, Urban Labour, Revitalizing Cities and Racialised Inequalities**, and five cross-cutting themes of **Municipalism, Informality, Intersectionality, Latin America and Urban Culture**. The research domains are presented in Figure 1, along with a short summary below.

Figure 1: CURA research topics and cross-cutting themes

Alternative Urbanisms				
	Urban Austerity Governance and Resistance	Urban Labour	Revitalizing Cities	Racialised Inequalities
	Lead: Jonathan Davies	Lead: Adam Fishwick	Lead: Rachel Granger	Leads: Amina Easat-Daas, Ben Whitham
Municipalism	← Green Arrow →			
Informality	← Yellow Arrow →			
Intersectionality	← Pink Arrow →			
Latin America	← Red Arrow →			
Urban Culture	← Blue Arrow →			

Main Research Topics

A) Urban Austerity Governance and Resistance (Prof Jonathan Davies - jsdavies @dmu.ac.uk)

While some politicians are declaring the “age of austerity” to be over, austere neoliberalism continues unrelentingly in many parts of the world, creating a clash between forces driving retrenchment and marginality and those struggling for “rights” to the city. The multiple dislocations and crises arising from the COVID-19 emergency lend renewed impetus to this strand of our work. It seeks to capture the struggles over austerity and contribute to understanding the urban transformations they bring about.

B) Urban Labour (Dr Adam Fishwick - adam.fishwick@dmu.ac.uk)

CURA research on urban labour movements focuses on the ways in which changing conditions of work in cities across the Global North and South produce new forms of activism and resistance. Researchers in the Centre are interested in the changing technologies of work, their intersection with urban austerity, and the combined impact on workers' everyday lives and urban living.

C) Revitalizing Cities (Prof Rachel Granger - rachel.granger@dmu.ac.uk)

Recognising cities as places with unique identities and assets that act as resources for change, CURA seeks to understand the conditions which promote or inhibit equitable forms of urban revitalisation. Cities are the meeting point of politics, diverse cultures, capital, people, and ideas. CURA's role is to monitor trends in urbanisation through these different lenses and explore alternative models for urban living that overcome socio-economic inequalities, promote inter-cultural solidarities and develop opportunities for better and more prosperous lives.

D) Racialised Inequalities (Dr Amina Easat Daas and Dr Ben Whitham - amina.easat-daas@dmu.ac.uk and ben.whitham@dmu.ac.uk)

Austerity affects different groups of people very unevenly, and evidence shows that black, Asian, and other minority ethnicity women, for example, have disproportionately suffered from cuts to public spending and public services. The racialisation of urban space, and raced urban hierarchies, meanwhile, persist in cities around the world, and interact with other structural inequalities associated with social class, gender and disability. CURA explores how austerity is produced through and experienced as racialized violence, and how this connects with other intersecting urban inequalities.

E) Cross-cutting research themes

Municipalism: with special interest in the impact of participatory mechanisms upon urban policy-making in different urban contexts, and the circulation of “good practice”.

Informality: with special interest in the intersections between everyday precarity, local state service provision, informal entrepreneurship and informal employment/work relations.

Intersectionality: with special interest in the intersections of race, class, gender and disability as domains of structural inequality that shape, or are shaped by, cities and austerity.

Latin America: with special interest in resistance, environment, local state, governance, and social innovation.

Urban Culture: with special interest in how culture, particularly through festivals, is experienced and used by urban communities to enhance bonds, broaden participation, perform identities and build solidarities.





Publications

Details of new publications from CURA members can be found on our website at <https://cura.our.dmu.ac.uk/category/publications-by-cura-members/>

External Funding

CURA brings together a wealth of experience in producing world class research supported by grant capture. Recent examples include:

- **ESRC** “Collaborative Governance under Austerity: an Eight-case Comparative Study” (April 2015-July 2018), Jonathan Davies.
- **British Academy** “Conversing with Goliath? Participation, mobilisation and repression around neo-extractivist and environmental conflicts” (March 2017-March 2020), Valeria Guarneros-Meza.
- **Leverhulme** International Academic Fellowship “Methodological innovation for comparative labour research in Argentina and Chile” (January- June 2020), Adam Fishwick.

Research Environment

CURA exists to cultivate a collaborative and collegiate research environment through a variety of mechanisms:

- **Seminar Series and Annual Lecture:** CURA hosts regular research seminars and Annual Lecture focusing on its core themes, please visit the blog for details.
- **Blog and social media:** <http://cura.our.dmu.ac.uk>, offers a space for colleagues and collaborators to publish their work online and to link relevant project documentation. The linked twitter account @CURA2015 (with 1714 followers) is a key part of our strategy for demonstrating and enhancing engagement.
- **CURANETWORK:** our jiscmail list has several hundred UK and international subscribers.
- **Latin American Network:** meets regularly to discuss Latin American urban research, particularly labour movements, extractive industries, communities and forms of resistance.
- **Biennial Urban Methodologies Summer School:** Building on the success of the 2019 summer school, CURA plans to host a second summer school in 2021, and every two years thereafter, to provide a dedicated forum for emerging urban scholars and practitioners to develop skills in urban methodologies.
- **Early Career Short-term Visiting Fellowships:** the scheme provides support to early career scholars from across the globe to research development with CURA members. Recent Visiting Fellowships have been awarded to scholars in Brazil, Germany, Portugal and Spain.
- **Mentoring Programme:** CURA offers mentoring and professional support to all staff and students.

Postgraduate Study

MA in Urban Studies

Our new MA in Urban Studies is an international programme translating our research directly into classroom and teaching. It draws on the critical urban research traditions developed in close collaboration between CURA and other research institutes. Combining the study of politics, urban studies, urban geography and political economy and the development of a Participatory Action Research Project, this course provides the theoretical knowledge, analytical tools and professional skills needed to address urban topics such as local governance, local socio-political and economic innovation, social inequalities and urban sustainability.

PhD

CURA has an active PhD researcher community and an excellent track record in winning scholarships for talented students.

CURA welcomes applications from excellent prospective PhD students and visiting doctoral students at any time of the year, and from anywhere in the world. If you are interested in developing PhD research in a field related to cities, urbanism and austerity, we would welcome an inquiry from you. Please contact Mercè Cortina-Oriol, Head of Research Students, merce.cortina-oriol@dmu.ac.uk for further details about the MA in Urban Studies or our PhD programme.

Influencing Policy, Politics and Practice

CURA research is grounded in critical theory, and thus challenges convention in productive, potentially transformative ways. Most of our projects have the goal of informing stakeholders (policy makers and activists) or influencing policy and politics. Examples include:

- The ESRC report on our austerity governance study, led by Jonathan Davies, led to an invitation to join the Advisory Board to the UK Labour Party's Community Wealth Building Unit, which advises local authorities on ways of **governing beyond austerity**.
- Together with the Urban Institute (University of Sheffield), the New Economics Foundation and The Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES), we founded a new *Municipalist Research and Advocacy Network* through which to develop a structured relationship between academics and non-academics promoting new and radical ways forward for UK local governance.
- In July 2019, CURA funded a study day (led by Dr Maria Berghs VC2020 lecturer in Health and Life Sciences, DMU), looking at the role of research in making cities more inclusive, socially just spaces for people with disabilities (an event linked to DMU's SUCRAN user network).
- Valeria Guarneros Meza's British Academy project *Conversing with Goliath* was designed to develop impact with and for the Mexican partner organisation, C Ciudadano, in the sphere of effective community organising and has received wide coverage in Mexican newspapers.
- Ben Whitham's CURA-funded work on austerity and Islamophobia in London influenced the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) in developing its widely endorsed **definition of Islamophobia**.





MEMBERS

Academic Staff	Academic Staff	PhD Students	Associates/ Fellows
Dr Adrian Bua	Dr Jamileh Manoochehri	Jonny Ball	Dr Raphael Bischof
Dr Mercè Cortina Oriol	Dr Sara Marquez-Gallardo	Sharon Ball	Dr Jenni Cauvain
Dr Erika Cudworth	Dr Alona Martinez Perez	Miguel Bravo Candela	Manuel Fernandez Garcia
Prof Jonathan Davies	Dr Adriana Massidda	Mark Charlton	Prof Mike Geddes
Dr Amina Easat Daas	Dr Steven Parker	Arunima Ghosal	Ines Newman
Dr Adam Fishwick	Prof Jonathan Payne	Ibrahim Has	Dr Hillary Shaw
Dr Regina Frank	Dr Zoe Pflaeger Young	Tabea Latocha	Dr Ricard Vilaregut
Dr Arianna Giovannini	Prof Jo Richardson	Martina Locorotondo	
Prof Rachel Granger	Dr Mark Roberts	Paul O'Brien	
Prof Steven Griggs	Prof Julia Shaw	Heather Powell	
Dr Valeria Guarneros-Meza	Dr Simon Stevens	Leon Reichle	
Prof Richard Hall	Dr Ed Thompson	Angela Sibley-White	
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