

Comparative Urbanisms: Cities, Territories and Regional Specialization in the GLM program

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The best way to understand is to compare – that is what I learnt from GLM
(Mohammed Hegazy, GLM 2018, transport expert, founder *Transport for Cairo*).

It is a truism that cities are unique – Amman is not Tokyo, and New Delhi is not Brasilia. It is also a truism that cities have much in common – all cities face social inequality, all cities manage infrastructure (buses, water, electricity, waste management), all cities are adapting to the ecological transition, all cities have political and policy legacies that can constrain change, all cities have changing relationships with other levels of government, and all cities share learnings from each other (through regional governance, institutional networks of cities, fact-finding missions and more).

GLM or Governing the Large Metropolis masters program at the Urban School of Sciences Po focuses on a global and comparative perspective on urban questions. In the second semester of the two-year program, students specialize in two regions to sharpen their comparative knowledge.

This week, in a conversation with our professors who teach in the GLM regional courses, we discussed how to think about cities and how to teach about cities for the urban professionals of tomorrow. We had a chance to catch up with Prof. Olivier Dabène (Sciences Po, Paris) teaching Latin American cities, Profs. Youssef El Chazli (Paris 8) and Anahi Alviso-Marino (Ecole des Ponts Paris Tech), and Professor Christophe Jaffrelot (Sciences Po, Paris) on South Asian cities.

Prof. Dabène's class focuses on public space and local urban democracy in Latin America. He sees Latin American cities as a 'laboratory' for local democracy as he writes in his recent book, *[Street Art and Democracy in Latin America](#)*. He noted that it is a matter of critical reflection to consider what 'urbanization' means in countries with high rates of urbanization (such as Latin America). Compared to Latin America, a key challenge for Indian and Pakistani cities remains ongoing urbanization, the relation of cities to peri-urban and rural areas, informal housing and ethnic / religious conflict. Prof. Jaffrelot talked about the challenges of addressing the diversity of cities that make up South Asia. How can we teach or learn about such diversity? What are the comparative angles we can use? He focuses on the sociological aspects of South Asian cities, inequality, informality, diversity, and conflict. His class also investigates the role of global cities in a geopolitical context (such as Karachi's linkages to the Middle East). Profs. Chazlis and Alviso-Marino shift our attention to the MENA region (especially Yemen, Egypt, Tunisia) with a focus on political contention, how local states engage with market actors, politics and public art, consumption, and climate change. Their class looks at the circulation of concepts across cities (such as the idea of structural adjustment). Given all the large projects being undertaken in the MENA region (new cities, highways, ports), Profs. Chazlis and Alviso-Marino guide students to understand the role of the state in big infrastructure projects that can have unintended consequences for cities.

Themes such as social inequality, segregation, policy legacies, and urban politics run through all the courses. Other regions that are part of our course line-up include North American cities, Chinese cities, Cities in Africa and South-east Asian cities.