

Written Open Book Exam Urban (Social) Geography

Welcome to the Urban (Social) Geography Exam.

First read the following guidelines:

- There are four questions, but to give you some flexibility, you should drop a question related to a module you feel the least comfortable with. **You can only answer three questions out of four.** If you answer all four, we will randomly select three questions and evaluate those.
- When answering do not just list keywords, concepts, and the likes in a bullet-point format, but rather **write a text in which you construct and logical and coherent argument.**
- This is an open book exam: you can use all course materials to individually prepare your answers. **You can also use the internet to collect materials** if you are instructed to do so in one or more of the questions below. When you do so, please cite your sources correctly (with URL).
- This is an individual exam, not a group assignment. **You should not communicate about the exam with your fellow students** and this will be considered as cheating. The nature of the questions will make the copying of answers practically useless. Moreover, all exam copies will be subjected to a **plagiarism check.**
- To write your exam, please **use a simple WORD file which you save on your computer.** Clearly **indicate your name** on page 1 and use the word count to keep track of the length of each of your answers.
- **The duration of the exam is four hours (13-17h): you are expected to submit your exam by 17:00 via the assignment tool on CANVAS.** To do so, upload the WORD version of your exam. Please allow some time to do the actual submission.

Now read all four questions to see if everything is clear. If there are unclarities, you can send an e-mail to david.bassens@vub.be before 12:45. Questions will be compiled, and answers will be posted via the announcements on CANVAS in due course.

Question 1

The two-century old Luxembourg-based asset and wealth management firm Schroders delivers a broad range of investments designed to meet the diverse needs of institutions, intermediaries and high net worth individuals. These categories respectively refer to clients such as pension funds, banks, and what we colloquially call 'the superrich'.

On its website, Schroders emphatically advertises its Global Cities fund which invest client money in a selected set of Global Cities. Please surf to the following webpage <https://www.schroders.com/en/be/professional-investor/global-transformation-range/global-cities/> and watch the short video (5'32") titled "The guide to Global Cities".

The selection of Global Cities targeted by the above-mentioned fund is informed by Schroder's analysis of Global City status called the Global City Index. Please surf to the following page to review how the index is calculated: <https://www.schroders.com/en/schrodersglobalcities/blog/global-cities-index/>.

Please answer the following three questions:

1. Considering how urban geographers define global cities, do you find the Schroders Global City Index a meaningful measure of global city formation? Explain why so or why not.
2. What are the plausible positive and negative effects of Schroders' investment activities on the urban geographies of the targeted cities?
3. Is the existence and use of the Schroders Global City Index proof that the Global City has lost its potential as a critical academic concept? Explain why so or why not.

Feel free to quote from the video or wider Schroders website to support your argument. When quoting from the video, please mention the timing of the excerpt (e.g., 4'22").

The complete answer to this part should be between 750 and 1000 words.

Question 2

Imagine yourself to be the Flemish Minister of Housing and Integration. You have a budget for 100 housing units for refugees. This accommodation is meant to be a temporary housing solution for refugees who have been granted the refugee status and are expected to leave the asylum center.

1. Would you prefer to concentrate all of these units in one place or would you prefer to spread them across the Flemish territory? Why so? In class, seven different arguments have been raised about the effects of residential segregation. Use at least three of these arguments to substantiate your claim. Feel free to add additional arguments or criteria to be met in order for these arguments to be valid (250-500 words)
2. Where exactly would you locate all of these units (in case you prefer concentration) or one of them (in case you prefer dispersal)? Share the full address or the google maps coordinates of this location.
3. Explain why you have picked this precise location. In class, seven different arguments have been raised about the effects of residential segregation. Use at least three of these arguments to substantiate your claim. Feel free to add additional arguments or criteria to be met for these arguments to be valid (250-500 words)

Question 3

Recent years have seen the proliferation across cities in Europe and the world of collectively organized cultural infrastructures based on notions of the commons or other cooperative alternative economic models and visions. Implicitly or explicitly a response to decades of 'neoliberal' policies, the privatization of cultural funding streams and/or the narrow economic focus of mainstream debates on the creative industries, various actors have put forward and have started realizing concrete cultural projects 'on the ground'. Often these initiatives refer to currently popular vocabularies such as DIY urbanism, co-working spaces, the sharing economy etc., but these projects also build on a much longer history of critical theory, the arts and its relation to social movements and contestation.

For this part of the exam, do the following:

1. Find and select one example of a collectively organized cultural infrastructure. You can rely on the following AirTable database that has been compiled by students in another course: <https://airtable.com/shrUEXUR6ud4SGaUM/tblhPzANANCysetVd>. But you are also free to select another case, for sure there are many more good examples! If you select your own case, just make sure to add an URL so we know what you are talking about.
2. Answer at least three of the following six questions:
 - a. What is collective about this project? And what is the specific role played by the arts and artists?
 - b. To what extent can we understand your selected case as an oppositional public sphere?
 - c. What is site-specific about your project? Does the project show evidence of engaging with the local context (in all its diversity and complexity)?
 - d. In what ways can one observe relations between the selected project and (urban) social movements, and what is the role of artists and cultural workers in this?
 - e. Does the collective organization of this cultural infrastructure allow for a stronger 'bottom-up' approach that avoids pressures of commodification (in whatever form)?
 - f. Can we consider the role of the state (at whatever level) in regulating this cultural infrastructure as progressive or regressive, and why?

In developing your argument, please refer to the lectures and related literatures (most obviously lectures 6 and 7, but possibly also to other lectures). The complete answer to this part should be between 750 and 1000 words.

Question 4

In this part of the exam, you are asked to focus on the case of *le piétonnier* in Brussels.

(a) (70% of the grade) Provide a brief (200 words each) answer to the following questions:

- How does *le piétonnier* challenge the neoclassical perspective on urban transport?
- What makes this project an example of “sustainable” perspectives on urban transport?
- What arguments/tension/contradictions regarding *le piétonnier* are revealed by critical perspectives on urban transport?

(b) (30% of the grade) Compare your insights about *le piétonnier* with another case* of a transport policy oriented towards limiting the presence of motorised traffic in urban space.

* Your case may be located in any city in the world.

* You are welcome to browse the internet for inspiration and sources, but please remember to cite them appropriately, and beware of plagiarism.

* Should you need inspiration regarding where to find quality sources, I recommend scanning quality media, including *Cities* section of *The Guardian*, *Bloomberg CityLab*, the English editions of *El País* and *De Standaard*. Feel free to use your language skills, and familiarity with specific urban context, including your hometown.

Address the following questions by bringing observations about both *le piétonnier* and your case:

1. Is socio-spatial inequality bound to happen when automobility becomes limited in cities, or is it effect particular of Brussels?
2. How can this effect be mitigated to overcome the limits and contradictions of the sustainable approach to transport?

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