

Infrastructures as a contested terrain, 6.0 credits

Infrastrukturer som politisk arena, 6.0 hp

Third-cycle education course

7FTEM18

The Tema Institute

Valid from: Second half-year 2024

Approved by
The Board of PhD Studies

Approved
2024-04-11

Registration number
Tema-2024-00183

Entry requirements

Eligible for this course are PhD candidates who are currently enrolled in PhD education. Basic eligibility for courses at the research education level is granted to those who have:

- Obtained a degree at an advanced level,
- Completed course requirements of at least 240 higher education credits (ECTS), including at least 60 ECTS at an advanced level, or acquired equivalent knowledge in some other way.

Specific information

The course "Infrastructures as a contested terrain" is a PhD-course open for PhD-students at Linköping University as well as other universities. It introduces key theoretical perspectives on infrastructure from the field of science and technology studies, as well as from different strands of the social sciences and humanities. The course is organised in 4 modules. Course participants and teachers meet in person on 4 occasions for 2-day long course gatherings. The time between the course gatherings is intended for course readings, preparatory work and course assignments. Participants will be asked to shortly present course readings and raise questions on the texts during the modules. The course language is English.

Learning outcomes

Having completed the course, the PhD-candidate should be:

- familiar with theories and perspectives on infrastructures within social sciences in general and science and technology studies in particular
- able to analyse and critically reflect on the role of infrastructures in society, both in general and in specific contexts
- able to use theories/perspectives on infrastructure to reflect on the candidate's own PhD research project
- be able to present, discuss and critically examine -- orally and in writing -- theories and perspectives on infrastructures and their politics.

Contents

Infrastructure is multiform and ubiquitous. We live in environments that are laced with infrastructures: roads, trains, power grids and power plants, clinical practice guidelines, sewers, knowledge systems and categories, mobile phone networks, wifi hotspots, or water pipelines. Infrastructures materially integrate societies, while at the same time they come to symbolise nationhood and even modernity. The British empire was materialised in steam train networks and telegraph lines. The conquest of the American West similarly solidified in train tracks, telegraph roads and later electrification. Likewise, infrastructures are often at the centre of environmental debates and are an intrinsic part of our ways to relate to nature(s). In everyday life, infrastructures often pass unperceived (or unnoticed). However, the invisibility of infrastructures easily leaves out of sight how infrastructures produce certain integrations and exclusions. They may be infrastructures for some while others are falling through the cracks.

Infrastructures are also contested political terrains with distinct spatialities, temporalities and norms: they shape how we communicate, how we move, how we lead our everyday lives, and they are interlaced with political and economic power relations. Many of today's most pressing challenges, whether climate change, the future of health systems, or global economic disparities are deeply interrelated with our (in)capacity to change current infrastructures.

This course will challenge, explore, and think about the (in)visibilities of infrastructure. We will discuss different ways of conceptualizing infrastructures, main strands of scholarly critique towards "infrastructuralism", and how infrastructural perspectives help us understand contemporary society. The course is organised to allow participants to explore and discuss different technological developments, and relate them to cultural and historical processes, such as the role of infrastructure in the construction of nationhood and as harbinger of modernity, and to issues in areas such as the research system, health care, digital media and communication, energy or climate change. It further encourages course participants to reflect on the challenges of building alternatives and transforming current infrastructures.

Educational methods

The course features lectures, guest lectures and student-led discussions, seminars and presentations.

Examination

To pass the course, the following criteria must be fulfilled:

- Active participation in all course sessions.
- Submission of a short seminar document (1 paragraph about the literature and a few questions) before each seminar, providing brief reflections on or posing questions for the seminar in question.

- Responsibility for preparing an oral “text introduction” together with a fellow PhD candidate at two course sessions (introduction max 15 minutes and then discussion). The text introduction must problematize the texts for the current seminar in a manner freely chosen by the candidates.

- Submission of a short reflection paper (roughly five pages) in which the own PhD topic is discussed through the lens of infrastructures

Students who fail to pass the course are offered one opportunity for re-examination in connection to the course. Thereafter, participation in examination at a later course is offered. The scope of the re-examination shall be the same as that of the regular examination.

Grading

Two-grade scale

Course literature

The course literature will be distributed no later than four weeks before each of the four in-person course meetings.