



GLOBAL SUMMER PROGRAMME 2026

ECON156 URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND GREEN TRANSITIONS IN ASIA

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Asia's cities are growing at a pace and scale unmatched in history, bringing both opportunities and urgent challenges. This course explores how urban centers across the region are balancing rapid development with the need for greener, more inclusive futures. Using Singapore's role as a regional leader in green finance and carbon trading as a focal point, we examine how cities in emerging economies are navigating the complex intersection of growth, globalization, and sustainability.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Recognise key urbanisation trends and sustainability challenges in Asia.
- Explain Singapore's development model and its influence in the region.
- Assess the role of carbon markets, green finance, and trade in shaping cities.
- Compare policy strategies for sustainable urban growth across Asian economies.
- Develop practical, well-reasoned proposals for greener urban futures.

PRE-REQUISITES / REQUIREMENTS / MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE COURSE(S)

This course does not require any pre-requisites.

ASSESSMENT METHODS

Class sessions are of 3-hour lectures for three times per week. Each session will involve a lecture and a discussion of readings and practice problem sets.

Class Participation: SMU education policy requires a class participation grade in order to promote learning through critical exchange of ideas and engagement of mind. Students are expected to make an effort to contribute to class discussions, e.g. by asking clarification questions when unclear about class content or offering some insights that promote understanding of the course material.

SMU takes student participation in class very seriously. Attendance is compulsory except for medical/emergency reasons: students should email me/TA to inform.

Group Project #2/Case Study: For the group project/case study, there will be 6 teams in total. Each team will be required to make a 25 minutes presentation followed by a 5 to 10 minutes discussion session. Each team has to evaluate another project as well.

Quizzes: There will be two in-class quizzes in total. They are meant to help you check your process through the course. Their exact format will be announced in class. The time limit for each quiz will be 30 minutes and there will be no make-up quizzes. However, if you are officially excused by Singapore Management University because of a serious illness or family crisis or other reasons, you must contact me by email at least one week prior to the quiz to make alternative arrangements.

Final Essay Assignment: There is a final essay assignment with two essay questions. Questions will be posted on Elearn one week before its due date. Students are required to upload their typed essay into eLearn on time. Any late submission may face mark deduction.

1. Individual Assessments	
Class Participation	20%
Final Essay Assignment	20%
Quizzes	20%
2. Group Assessments:	
Group Project #1 (Field Trip)	20%
Group Project #2 (Case Study)	20%
Total	100%

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS AND EXPECTATIONS

The course is conducted through interactive lectures, case-based discussions, and structured readings. Students are expected to:

- Contribute actively to discussions by sharing insights, asking questions, and engaging respectfully with peers' perspectives.
- Apply theoretical concepts to real-world cases, drawing on examples from across Asia.
- Collaborate effectively in group projects, meeting agreed deadlines and maintaining a high standard of work.
- Demonstrate academic integrity in all submissions.

Active engagement is essential for success in this course, as assessment emphasises critical thinking, synthesis of ideas, and the ability to connect theory with practice.

CONSULTATIONS

Consultation hours with the lecturer will be via appointment to be made via email.

RECOMMENDED TEXT AND READINGS

Relevant Reading

- Arthur O'Sullivan, Urban Economics, McGraw-Hill Education
- Nick , Jason Shogren, Ben White, Introduction to Environmental Economics, Oxford University Press
- Ramkishen S Rajan, Economic Globalization and Asia : Essays on Finance, Trade and Taxation, World Scientific

UNIVERSITY POLICIES

Academic Integrity

All acts of academic dishonesty (including, but not limited to, plagiarism, cheating, fabrication, facilitation of acts of academic dishonesty by others, unauthorized possession of exam questions, or tampering with the academic work of other students) are serious offences.

All work (whether oral or written) submitted for purposes of assessment must be the student's own work. Penalties for violation of the policy range from zero marks for the component assessment to expulsion, depending on the nature of the offense.

When in doubt, students should consult the instructors of the course. Details on the SMU Code of Academic Integrity may be accessed at <https://smu.sharepoint.com/sites/oasis/SitePages/DOS-WKLSWC/UCSC.aspx>.

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Accessibility

SMU strives to make learning experiences accessible for all. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers due to disability, please let me know immediately. You are also welcome to contact the university's accessibility services team if you have questions or concerns about academic provisions: accessibility@smu.edu.sg. Please be aware that the accessible tables in our seminar room should remain available for students who require them.

LESSON PLAN	
LESSONS	TOPICS
LESSON 1	• <i>Patterns of urban growth in post-colonial and late-developing contexts</i> • <i>Urbanisation drivers: industrialisation, migration, demographic change</i>
LESSON 2	• <i>Historical legacies and spatial inequality in Asian cities</i> • <i>Singapore's state-led urban development model</i>
LESSON 3	• <i>First-mover advantage: early industrialisers like Japan and Singapore</i> • <i>Comparative advantage: trade openness, sectoral specialisation, and export-led growth</i> • <i>Globalisation's impact: FDI, supply chains, and urban form</i>
LESSON 4	• <i>Urban environmental externalities: congestion and pollution</i> • <i>Infrastructure pressures in rapidly growing cities</i>
LESSON 5	• <i>Strategies for sustainable land use and public infrastructure</i> • <i>Land-use planning and transport integration</i>
LESSON 6	• <i>Urban policy tools: zoning, taxation, regulation</i> • <i>Comparative overview of policy responses: China, India, Indonesia</i> • Field trip: <i>China International Capital Corporation Pte. Limited</i>
LESSON 7	• <i>Defining green growth and its relevance for cities</i> • <i>Balancing economic expansion with sustainability goals</i>
LESSON 8	• <i>Carbon pricing mechanisms: taxes, trading systems, offsets</i> • <i>Singapore's carbon tax and its role in regional leadership</i>
LESSON 9	• <i>Green finance instruments: green bonds, ESG standards, sustainable infrastructure funds</i> • <i>Comparative carbon initiatives: Vietnam and the Philippines</i>
LESSON 10	• <i>Balancing growth, equity, and environmental objectives</i> • <i>Distributional impacts of green urban policies</i>
LESSON 11	• <i>Urban governance and stakeholder participation</i> • <i>Participatory planning and citizen-led initiatives</i> • Guest speaker session: <i>corporate compliance and firm-level responses to green policies — strategies such as opening new offices in emerging urban markets, adopting cleaner production methods, and integrating machine learning technologies for efficiency and compliance monitoring</i>
LESSON 12	• <i>Student group presentations: green urban development proposals</i> • <i>Course synthesis and reflections</i>