

Syllabus - **Selected Topics in Anthropology:**
Anthropology of Infrastructure (SOC 411)
Fall 2018, İstanbul Şehir University



Photo credit: Quentin Stoeffler

Time: Mondays, 10-12am; Wednesdays, 10-11am

Location: ACAD BUILD 7, Room #7202

Instructor: Fiona Gedeon Achi, Visiting Researcher, İstanbul Şehir University
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Office hours: Mondays, 2-4:30pm, and by appointment, AB8 Research Building at Center for Urban Studies (Şehir Araştırmaları Merkezi), Room 014

Course Description: Most of us make extensive use of infrastructure for our daily lives: metro or autobus lines, road networks, the internet, water supply, electricity grids, or sewage and waste systems. It is easy to take the existence of these infrastructures and the services they provide for granted, as they are to us somewhat invisible. Water pipes are hidden, sewage conduits run underground, in many cities internet access is ubiquitous, and people other than us maintain these infrastructures. When these systems fail to function well however (Istanbul’s legendary traffic being one example) or are not there altogether (e.g. in parts of rural Africa where electrification has not reached), one can feel the heavy work of designing, building, repairing, and expanding these vast systems which carry resources, energies, services, things, people, and even – as we will see in this course –ambitions and aspirations.

The anthropology of infrastructure aims at making visible the complex relations between people and infrastructure, especially today when events repeatedly signal the limits of our current ways of living. Officials in South Africa forecasted a “Day Zero” in April 2018 when the city of Cape Town’s water pipes would be shut down and the city would be out of running water. On 14 August 2018, Genova’s Morandi Bridge collapsed unexpectedly in broad daylight, killing dozens of people under the eyes of a bewildered Europe, left to think anxiously about the maintenance failures for its transportation infrastructure. In this course, we will learn about how

railway travel changed human perceptions of space and time in the 19th century. We will also examine, through the case of Mumbai's water supply, how access to water is as much a political as a technical endeavor. Through readings and visual material, we will look at how scholars have studied infrastructure in historical and ethnographic perspectives. There is no prerequisite for this course, but it involves conducting fieldwork research on a piece of infrastructure in Istanbul.

Teaching philosophy: My philosophy is to teach interesting and challenging material to my students, while allowing them to learn at their own pace. My intention is not to teach truths or facts to students which they can learn by heart or revise just before an exam, but rather to bring them to observe and think differently about the world around us, in order to appreciate its complexity and nuances. I recognize that everyone will come to this class with different backgrounds and knowledges and I believe that such diversity is very valuable to the classroom. I therefore assign limited readings to allow ample space for discussions and understanding key arguments.

In turn, I expect that students be committed to the course and fulfill course requirements in due time. This includes close readings of the texts, participating actively and respectfully in class discussions, carrying out regular field research, and submitting assignments by given deadlines. You are expected to read the day's readings in advance of the class section and to think about them carefully. It is fully normal to experience difficulties with the assigned readings and have many questions about them. Write them down in your weekly responses and bring them to class, so that we can address those curiosities and concerns together.

Note on course schedule: There will be **NO CLASS** on December 24 and December 26. Instead, you should make use of these three hours of class for conducting fieldwork throughout the semester. As this course is heavily oriented toward fieldwork, I have purposefully organized the class schedule, including limited the number of readings, to allow time for substantial fieldwork. Students should, as much as possible, try to conduct observation and write field notes at least once a week. The list of themes and readings might be further updated as the class goes on to reflect the class' progress and students' interests.

Course Objectives:

By the end of this course, students will have:

1. Developed conceptual tools to reflect analytically not only on infrastructure, but also on current challenges related to the urban environment, development, and globalization
2. Carried out an original fieldwork-based research in Istanbul aimed at familiarizing students with the process of ethnographic research, from data collection, through analysis, and up to reporting
3. Learned how to critically engage with research, by deriving the conclusions, assumptions, and questions produced by diverse texts, and engaging in collective discussions and debate about them
4. Improved presentation and communication skills in English, oral and written, through written assignments, in-class discussions, and presentations

Evaluation and Grading: Fieldwork research will form a significant component of this course's evaluation, which involve ethnographic observation and qualitative interviewing. You will carry out a fieldwork project from start to end, including data collection, analysis, and reporting, just like an anthropologist would do. You will conduct substantial fieldwork, including an interview, submit field notes, present your findings in class, and write a final paper using your findings and other sources. I strongly advise **purchasing a notebook** which you can

take to the field to record notes and observations. These notes will be essential for your success in the assignments.

Resources for developing your project: If you wish to familiarize yourself with what ethnographic attention might look like (something you can even do while commuting to university), feel free:

- To look at some short episodes of the 4 seasons **Van Alen Session** series about urban infrastructure, including electricity or nuclear plants:
<https://www.vanalen.org/projects/van-alen-sessions/#about>
- Or to listen to some podcasts from **99% Invisible** (<https://99percentinvisible.org/>). Here is a podcast episode on American transportation infrastructure (<https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/public-works-rethinking-americas-transportation-infrastructure/>), another on the California fires (<https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/built-to-burn/>), and one on the concept of “average” which I also find very compelling (<https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/on-average/>)

1. Weekly reflection & participation (15%): You will send your comments and questions on the texts for the week, but also a short reflection on your week’s fieldwork. These can be for instance questions about an aspect of the readings you did not understand or comments about something you found interesting or puzzling. You can describe your most striking fieldwork moments or your feelings about conducting fieldwork. Feel free to link your comments about readings to your fieldwork experience. For these assignments, feel free to experiment with other mediums, for instance if you want to communicate your understanding or feelings through drawing. While short, these assignments are important because they will help tailor the class discussions in a way that is relevant to your interests, needs, and curiosities. **You are expected to comment on all readings.** In weeks where multiple readings are assigned, you can submit two response papers (one on Sunday and one on Tuesday), or you can cover all readings in one response paper due on Sunday. In weeks where there are no readings due, you should still submit a short reflection on your field proposal. **Assignment due by email every Sunday at 6pm. Please also bring a copy of these weekly reflections with you in class.**

Note on how to read for this class: Texts, even written by eminent scholars, should not be taken as ultimate truths. Rather, I encourage you to actively engage with the readings for this course. Pay attention to what new ideas you have learnt through the text, what questions and feelings the texts generate for you, and what more you wish to learn now that you have read this text. You can of course disagree with the text, or even dislike it, but try to avoid approaching texts and new ideas only from the perspective of critique.

2. Field research proposal (15%): You will write a one-page proposal detailing which piece of infrastructure you want to work on in Istanbul, as well as why you found this to be an interesting topic and provide research questions which can guide your fieldwork. You will also mention a potential person which you can interview. In class, you will have the opportunity to present your fieldwork ideas to your peer, get their feedback, as well as learn from them about their research topic. This will be a short presentation of about 5 minutes, followed by a short feedback and question & answer session. **Presentations in class on October 15. You should bring a printed copy of your research proposal at the beginning of class on the same day (October 15).**

3. Field observations (25%): This assignment is in two parts.

A) Field notes & short interview questionnaire: You will submit your first field notes (which can include drawings) about the piece of infrastructure you are studying, as well as a short interview guide which you will develop based on your observations. The length of this

assignment should be around 700 words, although I would encourage you to focus on quality rather than quantity. We will discuss in class the details of how to write field notes and interview guides. **Assignment due by email on November 7 at the beginning of class.**

B) Interview transcript: You will conduct an interview about the piece of infrastructure you are studying and submit the transcript of this interview. We will discuss in class the methodology for this interview. Your paper will be an edited transcript of the main answers from the interview along with a description setting the stage of the interview and your main takeaways. It will be around 1000 words. **Assignment due BY EMAIL on TUESDAY, November 27 before 6pm.**

4. Presentation (20%): You will present your main fieldwork findings in class, drawing also on relevant secondary literature. This presentation will also be a chance to share with others your fieldwork experience and your sentiments about it. Presentations will be around 10 minutes long and should make use of visual support, in the form of a powerpoint slides or another outlet. Your presentation will be followed by a question & answer section, like in actual conference presentations. **Presentations in class the week of December 10-14 2018.**

5. Final paper (25%): You will write a final paper based on you research findings but also importantly drawing on secondary literature. You should be able to find relevant bibliographic sources among the required and suggested readings of this syllabus. Please consult with me in advance if you wish to use bibliographic sources other than those mentioned in the syllabus or in class. The paper should address specific research questions but that does not mean it needs to provide final or decisive answers to it. Your paper can even conclude by detailing further research questions which interest you and you have not addressed during this fieldwork project. Length should be between 1800 and 2000 words. **Assignment due BY EMAIL on January 7 2019 by 11pm.**

Class Schedule & Readings

*Mandatory readings are available on LMS. When the assigned reading is an online newspaper article or short academic piece, I also provide the hyperlink on the syllabus. In addition to mandatory readings, do not hesitate to ask me for further readings on topics you are eager to know more about. Should you wish to have more resources on a particular type of infrastructure, or on a topic of interest to you, please feel free to ask me during office hours. I will also show a significant number of documentaries as a support to class discussions and to inform your fieldwork reflections.

WEEK 1: Why study infrastructure?

September 24: Introduction to the course: why infrastructure?

No readings.

September 26: How do anthropologists study infrastructure?

Readings:

*Edwards, Paul N. 2017. The Mechanics of Invisibility: On Habit and Routine as Elements of Infrastructure. In I. Ruby & A. Ruby (Eds.), *Infrastructure Space* (Berlin: Ruby Press), 327-336.

*Pamuk, Orhan. 2014. *A Strangeness in My Mind* (original title: *Kafamda bir tuhaflik*). Selections. Both English and Turkish texts are available on LMS.

English text:

“Home: The Hills at the End of the City”, pp.57-64

Excerpt from “The Twelve-Story Building: You Have a Right to the City’s Rent”, pp. 683-689

Turkish text:

“Ev: Şehrin Bittiği Yerdeki Tepeler”, pp. 52-56

Excerpt from “On İki Katlı Apartman: Şehrin Rantı Seni Hakkın”, pp. 433-437 (until the paragraph which starts “Yedi yıldır evliydim”)

In class movie: (Tentative) Turning the Tide in Miami, Van Alen Sessions, Season 4, 2018
Episode 3, Season 2, Van Ales Sessions – Pilgrim Nuclear Reactor

WEEK 2: History of infrastructure

October 1: History of Infrastructure

Reading:

*Rankin, William J. 2009. Infrastructure and the international governance of economic development, 1950–1965. In Jean-François Auger, Jan Jaap Bouma and Rolf Künneke, eds., Internationalization of Infrastructures: Proceedings of the 12th Annual International Conference on the Economics of Infrastructures (Delft: Delft University of Technology), pp.61-75.

October 3: Fieldwork project explained

No readings.

In class movies: What I discovered in New York City trash, Robin Nagle, TED Talk

Dark Days (Selections), 2000, Marc Singer

Turning the Tide in Miami (Van Alen Sessions, Seasons 4, 2018)

WEEK 3: Moving, commuting, traveling

October 8: Roads and Highways

Readings:

*Harvey, P. & Knox, H. 2016. Infrastructural Incursions. In *Public Infrastructures/ Infrastructural Publics*. Limn: Issue 7. Accessible at <https://limn.it/articles/infrastructural-incursions/>

*Pamuk, Orhan. 2014. *A Strangeness in My Mind* (original title: *Kafamda bir tuhaflık*). Selections. Both English and Turkish texts are available on LMS.

English text:

Excerpt from “In Tarlabası: The Happiest Man in the World”, pp.394-402 (start at the bottom of page 394; the paragraph starts with “There were moments when Mevlut...”)

Excerpt from “Mevlut Finds a New Spot”, pp. 422-425

Turkish text:

Excerpt from “Tarlabaşı’nda: Dünyanın En Mutlu Adamı”, pp.257-261 (until new section 13 “Süleyman Ortılığı Karıştırıyor”)

Excerpt from “Mevlut Bir Başka Köşede”, pp. 273-275 (on p.273, the paragraph starts with “Her sene...”)

In class movie: Using drone technology to inspect bridges in Minneapolis (Van Alen Sessions, Season 3, 2018)

October 10: Traffic

Reading:

*YAZICI, Berna. 2013. Towards an Anthropology of Traffic: A Ride Through Class Hierarchies on Istanbul’s Roadways, *Ethnos*, 78:4, 515-542, DOI: 10.1080/00141844.2012.714395.

WEEK 4: Infrastructure and lived experience

October 15: Presentation of research proposals

No readings.

*****Research proposals due in class*****

October 17: Changing perceptions: the beginning of the railroad

Reading:

*Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. 1986. Chapter 7: The Pathology of the Railroad Journey. In *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the 19th Century*. The University of California Press: Berkeley & Los Angeles. Full text available online on <http://library.sehir.edu.tr/Pages/home.aspx>

In class movies: Frères Lumieres, 1896, L’Arrivée d’un train en gare de La Ciotat
Tunnel Vision, Episode 1 & 3, Kelly Loudenberg, Van Alen Sessions, Season 1, 2016

WEEK 5: Infrastructures for global health

October 22: Health and migration

Syrian Refugees’ access to Healthcare and Integration into the Healthcare System Presentation by guest speaker: Souad Osseiran, Anthropologist

No readings.

October 24: Health systems under scarcity or crisis

Readings:

*Beisel, Uli. On gloves, rubber and the spatio-temporal logics of global health. *Somatosphere*. October 6, 2014. Accessible at <http://somatosphere.net/2014/10/rubber-gloves-global-health.html>

*Street, Alice. Rethinking Infrastructures for Global Health: A View from West Africa and Papua New Guinea, *Somatosphere*, December 11 2014. Accessible at <http://somatosphere.net/2014/12/rethinking-infrastructures.html>

Suggested reading: Redfield, Peter. 2012 Bioexpectations. *Public Culture*, 24(1), p..157-184.

WEEK 6: Cables, wires, and lines

October 29: Electricity: immaterial power?

Readings:

*Gupta, Akhil. 2015. An Anthropology of Electricity from the Global South. *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 30, Issue 4, pp. 555–568.

*McRobie, Linda Rodriguez. 2016. The Surprisingly Cool History of Ice. Accessible at: <http://mentalfloss.com/article/22407/surprisingly-cool-history-ice>

*Pamuk, Orhan. 2014. *A Strangeness in My Mind* (original title: *Kafamda bir tuhaflık*). Selections. Both English and Turkish texts are available on LMS.

English text:

Excerpt from “The Brothers-in-Law Boza Shop: Doing the Nation Proud”, pp. 482-483 (the section by “Ferhat”, paragraph starts on p.482 with “As soon as I got my college degree...”) Excerpt from “A History of Electric Consumption”, pp.551-554 (until the section of “Mahinur Meryem” on p.554)

Turkish text:

Excerpt from “Bacanakların Bozası”, pp. 312-313 (the section by “Ferhat”, paragraph starts on p.312 with “Diplomayı alır almaz...”) Excerpt from “Elektrik Tüketiminin Hafızası”, pp.354-356 (until the section of “Mahinur Meryem” on p.356)

In class movie: Shock and Awe, The Story of Electricity, Jim Al-Khalili BBC Horizon (2011)

October 31: Landline telephone

Reading:

*Fischer, Claude S. 1994. *America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940*. University of California: Berkeley and Los Angeles. Selected chapter.

***In this week, I will also leave some time to discuss openly your experience with doing fieldwork so far.**

WEEK 7: Managing “our” waste and discard

November 5: Sites of disinterest: landfills/garbage dumps

Readings:

*Dinler, Demet Ş. 2016. New forms of wage labour and struggle in the informal sector: the case of waste pickers in Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 37(1), pp.1834-1854.

*Jensen CB. 2017. Pipe Dreams: Sewage Infrastructure and Activity Trails in Phnom Penh. *Ethnos*, vol 82:4, 627-647.

In class movie: Waste Land (2010), by Lucy Walker

November 7: The life of waste (pickers)

No readings.

*****Field notes due in class*****

In class movie: Autonomous Infrastructure, Baltimore, (Mr Trash Wheel), Van Alen Sessions, Season 3, 2018

Welcome to India, Episode 1

WEEK 8: Recycling

November 12: Recycling scrap metal

War and Markets: Steel-Manufacturing Industry in Iraqi Kurdistan

Presentation by guest speaker: Umut Kuruüzüm, post-doctoral scholar, Istanbul Technical University

No readings.

November 14: How to conduct an interview

No readings.

WEEK 9: Unearthing hidden infrastructures

November 19: Unseen global connections

Readings:

*The undersea cables: Starosielsky, Nicole. 2012. 'Warning: Do Not Dig': Negotiating the Visibility of Critical Infrastructures. *Journal of Visual Culture*, vol 11(1).

*Kilometers of pipes: Anand, Nikhil. 2016. Hydraulic Publics. In *Public Infrastructures/Infrastructural Publics*. *Limn*: Issue 7. Accessible at <https://limn.it/?article=hydraulic-publics/>

In class movie: The submarine cable network, Episode 3 of *The People's Cloud*, dir. Matt Parker (2017)

November 21: The politics of water access

No readings.

In class movie: Episode 2, Season 3, Van Alen Sessions, about Portland's water pipes producing electricity

WEEK 10: Democratizing infrastructures?

November 26: Microfinance: inclusion in the global economy?

Reading:

*Roy, Ananya. 2012. Subjects of Risks: Technologies of Gender in the Making of Millennial Modernity. *Public Culture*, 24(1), pp. 131-155.

In class movie: (tentative) *A History of Microfinance*, Mohamad Yunus

*****TUESDAY, November 27: ***Interview transcript due by email before 6pm*****

November 28: Presentation guidelines / Developing an argument
No readings.

WEEK 11: Liberating infrastructures?

December 3: The promise of wire-less technologies

Reading:

*Park, Emma, and Donovan, Kevin. 2016. Between the Nation and the State. In *Public Infrastructures/Infrastructural Publics*. Limn: Issue 7. Accessible at <https://limn.it/articles/between-the-nation-and-the-state/>

In class movies: The Anthropology of Mobile Phone, Jan Chipcase, TED Talk (2007)
& The history of the cloud and what existed before it, Episode 1 of The People's Cloud, Dir. Matt Parker (2017) [tentative]

December 5: In the periphery of urban life: informal structures

Reading:

*Leleul, Eric & Joos, Vincent. 2018. The Invisible 'Jungle' of Calais. In *Chokepoints*. Limn: Issue 10. Accessible at <https://limn.it/articles/the-invisible-jungle-of-calais/>

WEEK 12: Fieldwork projects' presentations

December 10: *Fieldwork project presentations in class*****

December 14: *Fieldwork project presentations in class*****

WEEK 13: Infrastructure as ruins of modernity?

December 3: People as infrastructure

Reading:

*Simone, A. M. 2004. People as Infrastructure: Intersecting Fragments in Johannesburg. *Public Culture*, 16(3), pp.407-429.

December 21: Living in the aftermath of "modern" infrastructure

In class movie: Power Lines, Episode 2, Van Alen Sessions. The case of South Texas and oil gas

WEEK 14: NO CLASS (December 24-28)

****Final papers due by email on January 8 by midnight*****

Guidelines for Submission of Written Work

- Word process all written work
- Staple your pages together
- Double-space, using 2.54cm margins
- Number your pages.
- At the top of the first page include your name, date, and essay title
- Proofread and spell-check before turning in papers.

Presentation Guidelines: Presentation skills are vital, in and outside of anthropology and academia. Communicating content clearly in an engaging manner is not a natural capacity but a skill that one acquires through practice. The objective of the presentation is for students to develop these skills and for the other students to learn from their peers. The general ideas which make a good presentation also apply to make a strong paper.

It is essential to put yourself in the shoes of the audience: this is the key to a good presentation. Ask yourself: would I understand this set of arguments if I had not conducted the fieldwork myself? Would I understand this concept if I had not read the article? How would I react to the presentation? What is the message that I would remember?

Do not read from notes or from the powerpoint. This makes presentations difficult to follow and is not well received by the audience. However, you can certainly use written notes to support your memory, to remember the structure or some keywords. Also, you should not try to learn by heart your presentation; rather, and thanks to your slides, you should be able to speak relatively naturally.

Expectations from Students:

1. **Contact and questions:** Feel free to ask any question to the instructor during the class and office hours. If you have a question in class, do not feel shy to ask it, as it is likely that your classmates share the same concern and would benefit from the answer as well.
2. **Office hours:** Office hours are opportunities to discuss the course material, get my advice about how to carry out your field research, and inform me of difficulties you might encounter with the course.
3. **Attendance:** Attend all classes. Skipping classes is the main factor that jeopardize your success in the class. For this reason, the University rule which states that you should attend 80% of your class will be enforced.
4. **Take notes in class:** powerpoint presentations used in class by the instructor are in no way sufficient to remember what was covered in class. Besides, writing down ideas has been proven to support active learning.
5. **Complete mandatory readings before class:** You are expected to read the day's texts in advance of the class section and to think about them carefully. It is fully normal to experience difficulties with the assigned readings and have many questions about them. Write them down and bring them to class, so that we can address those curiosities and concerns together.
6. **Punctuality:** Class begins on time. Please inform me via email if you plan to be late. Lack of punctuality is not only disrespectful, it also disturbs the instructor, the presenter, and/or the flow of the class.
7. **Respectful attitude:** Treat all class members with respect: listen to them carefully and take their perspectives into consideration. Do not have private conversations with your

classmates as it is distracting to others. If you have a question, please ask the whole classroom instead as it is likely that everyone will benefit from the answer.

8. **Electronic devices:** You may use laptop to take notes, but you must turn off its internet connection. The instructor reserves the right to discontinue the use of laptops in class if students browse the web or do other things than be engaged in the class conversations. You must turn off all electronic devices (including smart phones, music listening devices, etc.) and place them in your bag. Texting, messaging, or calling during the class is of course forbidden and will not be tolerated.
9. **Submit work on time:** It is your responsibility to submit all assignments before the due date, in person or by email, as stipulated by the syllabus. If you feel you require an extension for a due date, come see me in office hours well before the due date of the assignment. Worked not turned in, or turned in after the deadline without my consent, will receive a failed mark.
10. **Academic integrity:** As students and scholars, we must acknowledge what we take from the work of others. Not doing so means committing plagiarism. Plagiarism will not be tolerated, will result in failing the course, and could be reported to the University board. In addition to plagiarism, cheating or copying from your classmates for an assignment will also result in failing the course. Trust your ideas, even when you feel unsure. You are at university to experiment and to learn from your instructors and peers.