

MASTERS IN SUSTAINABLE URBAN PRACTICE

From siloed practitioner to urban integrator for
sustainable African city futures



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD



AFRICAN CENTRE *for* CITIES

WHY DO WE NEED URBAN INTEGRATORS?

The complex, multi-dimensional demands of our rapidly urbanising world require holistic, inter-disciplinary thinking and practice. However traditional professional paradigms and often-siloed institutions seem doomed to replicate the entrenched patterns and practices of path-dependent urban infrastructure provision and management.

To overcome the often-fragmented ways in which urban questions are framed, institutionalised, and engaged by varied levels of government, citizens, civil society organisations, and private sector actors, we need a new kind of urban practitioner, who can work across practices, professional norms, hierarchies, sectors and urban problems.

We need a new kind of urban practitioner, who can work across practices, professional norms, hierarchies, sectors and urban problems.

The **Masters in Sustainable Urban Practice (MSUP)** cultivates urban integrators who are able to discern opportunities for integration, and can build the necessary coalitions for change; who are confident in varied cultures of communication and can build bridges between sectors, fields, and scales of urban practice.

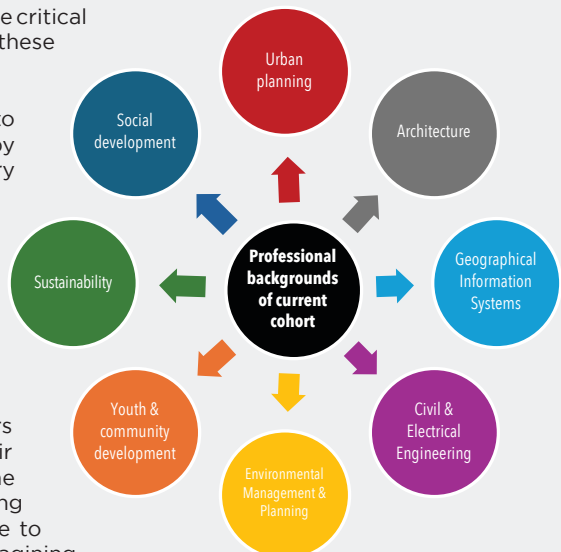
WHO SHOULD APPLY?

This programme is aimed at mid-career urban professionals in either government, civil society, or in the private sector, who have realised the limits of their practice. The programme provides students with specialist knowledge of urban theoretical frameworks, and schools them in the critical and analytical tools to assess these from a global South perspective.

Students will be equipped to bridge theory and practice by appropriately applying theory to real life cases and complex problems in individual research projects. This is a professional masters designed to allow students to continue working. Courses are presented in block weeks and scheduled across the year .

The programme explicitly offers a space for students to bring their own work and experience into the learning process. On completing this degree graduates will be able to return to practice confident in imagining

and enacting integrated and innovative forms of urban practice in various spheres.



PROGRAMME STRUCTURE

Core Courses (80 credits)

4 compulsory courses

- Sustainable Urban Transitions & Urban Infrastructure
- Adaptive Urban Management
- Urban Infrastructure Finance
- Research Methods for Assessing Urban Practice

Minor Courses (55 credits)

In second year, students complete three of the five minor courses listed below. The selection of courses offered each year is determined by the faculty as part of an annual rotation:

- Urban Food and Health Systems Governance
- Climate Change and the City
- Creative City Theory, Policy and Practice
- Adaptive Smart Cities
- Social Power and Spatial Justice

Research Project (45 credits)

The compulsory research component will constitute 45 credits and will consist of one research-based project. This research project will be designed around a case study linked to the students' professional practice as well as new policies and planning developments within the urban management sphere.

CORE COURSES

SUSTAINABLE URBAN TRANSITIONS AND URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

The aim of this course is to highlight the unique dynamics that characterise African urbanisation and infrastructural transition dynamics to foreground four development imperatives:

- environmental sustainability, which pivots us towards the green or sustainable economy and infrastructure.
- social inclusion through access to basic services (energy, water, sanitation, waste removal, education and health care) to address the unacceptably high levels of multi-dimensional poverty that stunts the potential of Africa's youthful population.
- employment (across the formal, informal, social sectors); and
- institutional competence (capable state, effective civil society organisations, and productive businesses).

Building on contemporary policy debates, the course also examines the implications of pursuing sustainable urban transitions.

ADAPTIVE URBAN MANAGEMENT

This course will explore a coherent conceptual framework to understand the institutional, managerial and political implications of steering sustainable urban transitions. Central to this is an understanding of the political economy of policies to pursue sustainable urban transitions and the ability to identify the leverage points in a complex and conflictual urban system to advance experimentation and innovation. Students will be equipped to map, interpret and devise regulatory modes

and practices of urban intervention that are capable of addressing the most pressing problems of our cities and transforming the places where people live.

URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE FINANCE

City governments are at the coalface of responding to the various challenges and demands created by fast-paced urbanisation in cities of the South. This often occurs within an institutional environment characterised by severe financial constraints and other organisational limitations. This requires innovative thinking and capacity for experimentation amongst local government practitioners to explore alternative financing mechanisms. Students will become versed in the urban finance lexicon, develop an understanding of contemporary debates related to financing the development of urban areas and city governments.

RESEARCH METHODS FOR ASSESSING URBAN PRACTICE

The aim of this course is to equip students with the conceptual, methodological, and practical skills necessary to design a research project based on a case study from their professional practice. Students will develop an advanced understanding of different research methods and approaches; strengthen their ability to formulate research questions; engage with ethical considerations; and apply appropriate analytical techniques. By the end of the course, students will be prepared to produce a rigorous research proposal and confidently undertake an independent research project.

ELECTIVE COURSES

URBAN FOOD AND HEALTH SYSTEMS GOVERNANCE

The objective of the course is to provide students with theoretical, operational and policy-oriented tools to understand the urgent need for food and health systems thinking at the urban scale, particularly but not exclusively in African contexts. The course is novel as it engages both food system related challenges and urban health system challenges, and goes further to connect these two essential urban considerations. The food systems focus works from the premise that high levels of urban food and nutrition insecurity across cities of the South are the result of history and mandates/policies. Critically, there is more than enough food in cities of the South, but infrastructural, spatial and structural issues amplify urban food and nutrition insecurity. Weak governance of these systems exacerbates inequities in the urban environments, inequities that have generational implications. The urban health focus explores the complex intersections between health, wellbeing, and the urban environment in African cities, with relevance for other Global South contexts. It explores how urban environments, ranging from city-wide infrastructure to individual dwellings, shape health outcomes, and how interventions in the urban environment, at different scales and ranging from policies to physical projects, can improve health outcomes."



CLIMATE CHANGE AND THE CITY

The Sustainable Development Goals and recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change reports recognise that cities have the potential to drive decarbonisation, climate resilience and economic growth. This course aims to familiarise students with climate change and development challenges at the city scale, and to equip them to provide advice and establish workable priorities on development decisions at this scale. To this aim, the course systematically works through how climate impacts, adaptation and mitigation, as well as broader agendas of systemic change intersect with the key dimensions of urban development. Students will engage critically with the two dominant theoretical framings of climate impacts and actions: risk and resilience. Students will develop an understanding of the risks and opportunities posed by climate change to African urbanisation, and by African urbanisation to climate change, as well as the international climate change science-policy-advocacy context influencing the development trajectories of (African) cities.

CREATIVE CITY THEORY, POLICY AND PRACTICE

This course explores the nexus of culture and creativity and sustainable, just African cities, through imaginative and innovative approaches to planning, governance and citizenship. Using global case studies, the course will look at creative city-making as well as unpacking the ways in which the notion of Creative Cities has landed within UNESCO as a networking opportunity between cities linked to art, culture and heritage. The case studies will evidence that these kinds of development can have liberating effects on people and places, but can also run the risk of reinforcing inequalities – most typically seen in critiques of gentrification. Drawing on examples from the UNESCO's Creative Cities Network, the course asks, what does

a creative African city look like? It explores the role of tangible and intangible heritage in urban sustainability and justice. It introduces cultural mapping, planning and impact assessment as a tactic for mobilising cultural values. Drawing on examples from Africa and the global South, the course asks how can culture-based development foster civic creativity and urban well-being?

ADAPTIVE SMART CITIES

There is widespread media coverage of so-called 'smart cities' and the transformational possibilities of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT, to develop, deploy, and promote sustainable development practices to address urbanisation challenges. The purpose of this course is to explore the intersection of technology and cities, concentrating on a series of case studies from African cities. Students will develop insight into smart cities and platform urbanism theory and practice, and how technology can be used for e-governance; civic action and citizenship; innovation; and the delivery of services. The course takes a socio-technical lens to understand the relationship between technology and society, demystifying tech utopias and dystopias. It unpacks phenomena like blockchain and what digital data means for cities. It explores how platformed paratransit (motorcycle) mobility is shifting urban accessibility, and how tech infrastructure is shaping how governments and urban residents are connecting to opportunities in unprecedented ways. Ultimately, the course explores how digitisation can foster more accessible, sustainable and just cities.

SOCIAL POWER AND SPATIAL JUSTICE

In the context of fast-paced urbanisation in Africa and other parts of the Global South, cities have become sites of contestation over space, access to infrastructure, services and other livelihoods opportunities. This raises important

questions about belonging, inclusion/exclusion, social and spatial justice, rights - who can claim rights and the strategies used to contest rights and advance social and spatial justice. Many cities are still battling to overcome the remnants of historical processes which have created deep rooted spatial and socio-economic inequalities and patterns of exclusion which have had devastating impacts on the lives of the most marginalised. South African cities are struggling to reverse the legacy of Apartheid spatial planning and to bring about social and spatial justice. Within this context, this course aims to help students think through the factors, historic moments (the cracks) which enable social change and can bring about more inclusive cities. The course aims, in particular, to answer the following questions: What is the historic moment we are currently in? What are the possibilities and opportunities? How can we take advantage of these to realise spatial justice?



CORE FACULTY



DR NOBUKHOSI NGWENYA

Nobu convenes the MSUP. She co-teaches the Sustainable Urban Transitions & Urban Infrastructure and Adaptive Urban Management courses



PROF EDGAR PIETERSE

Edgar is the founding director of ACC. He teaches the Sustainable Urban Transitions & Urban Infrastructure and Adaptive Urban Management courses



DR LIZA ROSE CIROLIA

Liza is a senior researcher at ACC and teaches the Urban Infrastructure Finance course



ASTRID HAAS

Astrid is an ACC Research Associate and co-teaches the Urban Infrastructure Finance course

REQUIREMENTS

Candidates qualify to apply if they have an NQF level 8 honours/PGDip degree. The discipline of the prior degree is not prescribed. Applicants with an NQF level 7 three-year Bachelor's degree from a university or a Bachelor of Technology degree from a university of technology need to demonstrate at least five years of relevant work experience post-qualification, as well as satisfactory academic performance (deemed to be a >60% mean course mark for the entire qualification or in the final year of study) in order to be considered.

This work experience has to relate to urban development work, whether in the private, public or NGO sector. Furthermore, work experience will also be assessed in terms of the professional responsibilities they have performed and the skills they have demonstrated, as presented in their curriculum vitae. Where deemed necessary, former and/or current employer references will be contacted for their assessment of the suitability of the applicant for postgraduate study.

HOW TO APPLY

Complete the University of Cape Town online application process at <https://applyonline.uct.ac.za>. The application form will require the following:

- Select 'Master of Sustainable Urban Practice' from the Engineering and Built-Environment Faculty course offerings

Course code: **EM035APG14**

Registration date: **February 2027**

DEADLINE FOR SA & INTERNATIONAL CANDIDATES: 30 September 2026

CONTACTS

Programme convenor
Dr Nobukhosi Ngwenya
Email: nobukhosi.ngwenya@uct.ac.za

Postgraduate administrator
Faranaaz Bennett
Email: faranaaz.bennett@uct.ac.za
+27 (0)21 650 1606

Postgraduate Funding Office
Email: pgfunding@uct.ac.za
+27 (0)21 650 3622

International Academic Programmes Office
Email: iapo@uct.ac.za
+27 (0)21 650 2822 / 3740

ABOUT AFRICAN CENTRE FOR CITIES

Established in 2008 and rooted at the University of Cape Town, African Centre for Cities (ACC) is one of the leading knowledge centres conducting meaningful research on how to understand, recast and address pressing urban crises z particularly on the African continent.

Since most urban challenges — for example, food security, climate change adaptation, economic inclusion, cultural vitality and tolerance — are inherently interdisciplinary and spatially layered, ACC nurtures the co-production of knowledge favouring and cultivating critical Southern perspectives.

Through its research, ACC develops imaginative policy discourses and practices to promote vibrant, just and sustainable cities. This purpose has become all the more pertinent with the adoption of Agenda 2063 at a pan-African level, which chimes with the 2030 global agenda for sustainable development. Thus, a lot of the research and capacity development work seeks to foreground the urban dimensions of these new political horizons, embedded in an epistemic commitment to Southern solidarity and theory building.

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN STEERING COMMITTEE

Dr Ruchi Chaturvedi, Sociology

Dr Zarina Patel, Environmental and Geographical Sciences

Dr Zwelethu Jolobe, Political Sciences

Dr Nomusa Makhubu, Fine Art

Prof Francis Nyamnjoh, Anthropology

Prof Nancy Odendaal, Architecture, Planning and Geomatics

Prof Philippa Tumubweinee, Architecture, Planning and Geomatics

Prof Harro von Blottnitz, Chemical Engineering

INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY BOARD

Dr Akin Adesokan, Indiana University

Prof Ash Amin, Cambridge University

Dr Thomas Asher, Columbia University

Dr Gautam Bhan, Indian Institute for Human Settlement

Prof Jo Beall, British Council & London School of Economics

Prof Teresa Caldeira, University of California, Berkeley

Prof Teddy Cruz, University of California, San Diego

Dr Divine Fuh, Institute for Humanities in Africa

Prof Alcinda Honwana, London School of Economics and Political Science

Prof Daniel Inkoom, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi

Prof Susan Parnell, Human Geography, University of Bristol

Assoc Prof Vyjayanthi Rao, Adjunct Associate Professor, Spitzer School of Architecture

Prof AbdouMaliq Simone, Honorary Professor, ACC

Physical address:

Level 2, Environmental &
Geographical Science Building,
Upper Campus, University of Cape Town
Rondebosch, 7701
South Africa

Stay up to date with ACC news:



African Centre for Cities



@UrbanAfricaACC



www.africancentreforcities.net



**AFRICAN
CENTRE *for*
CITIES**