

Economic Growth & Sustainability: Barcelona's Innovation Model

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: BCLA 3034

Number of Credits: 3

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 45

Instructor: xxx

Course Description

This course examines economic growth and sustainability through the lens of Barcelona's innovation model. It first explores traditional theories of economic growth and their practical applications in urban contexts. Students then analyze Barcelona's transformation from an industrial hub to an innovation capital, focusing on the city's strategies for sustainable development, entrepreneurship, and talent attraction. The course leverages Barcelona's unique ecosystem as a living laboratory, combining theoretical frameworks with real-world case studies. Through lectures, guest speakers, and field visits, students gain insights into the challenges and opportunities of balancing economic growth with sustainability in urban environments. The course culminates in a project where students apply their knowledge to evaluate the transferability of Barcelona's strategies to other urban contexts and propose solutions for current economic challenges facing cities worldwide.

Course Objectives

Through their participation in this course, students will:

- Analyze traditional economic growth theories and their applications in modern urban contexts.

- Examine the interplay between economic growth, innovation, and sustainability using Barcelona's development model as a case study.
- Evaluate the role of institutions, policies, and urban planning in fostering sustainable economic growth and innovation.
- Develop critical thinking skills to assess the challenges and opportunities in balancing economic development with social and environmental sustainability.
- Compare and contrast Barcelona's economic strategies with those of other global cities.
- Engage with local entrepreneurs, policymakers, and community leaders to gain diverse perspectives on Barcelona's economic ecosystem.
- Explore the impact of economic growth on various socio-economic groups within urban environments, with a focus on equity and inclusion.
- Synthesize theoretical knowledge and practical observations to propose innovative solutions for sustainable urban economic development.

Methodology

Experiential Learning & Field Visits

Field study and experiential learning components may include:

- Tour of Barcelona's Tech City initiative and 22@ Innovation District where startup incubators and innovators meet.
 - **Visit to Pier 01 Tech** (30 minutes—not including travel time to and from). Created by Barcelona Tech City, Pier 01 has played a crucial role in nurturing Spanish unicorns, such as Glovo, Holaluz, Wallapop, and Letgo. Recognized by Forbes as one of the world's top five innovation hubs, Pier 01 aims to promote Barcelona's tech brand internationally and foster collaboration among startups and established companies.
 - **Visit to Barcelona's FinTech Hub** (30 minutes—not including travel time to and from). The Fintech Hub located in the Barcelona Stock Exchange building is part of Barcelona Tech City's Urban Tech Campus project and is referred to as Pier 05. This initiative, created through a partnership between Barcelona Tech City, ACCIÓ and Bolsas y Mercados Españoles (BME), aims to provide a collaborative space for startups, investors, venture capital firms, and traditional financial institutions.
 - **22@ Innovation District** (30 minutes—not including travel time to and from). This area called Poblenou was formerly an industrial zone and has in the last decade been transformed into a hub for innovation, technology, and urban regeneration. Students can observe how the district combines companies,

universities, research centers, and housing to create a compact city model that fosters innovation while preserving industrial heritage.

- Walking tour of the Eixample's Superblock project (Consell de Cent). The street Consell de Cent just five minutes walk from Plaza Catalunya and is part of Barcelona's ambitious Superblock project, which aims to transform the Eixample district into a more pedestrian-friendly and sustainable urban environment due to its ability to positively impact local businesses and community life in the transformed areas.
- Guest lectures
 - Representatives from ACCIÓ (Catalonia Trade & Investment): Discuss their role in promoting international initiatives in Catalonia
 - Experts involved in Barcelona's Superblock project: Share insights on the challenges and future prospects of the Superblock model

Course Prerequisites

Introductory economics course

Required Reading / Materials

- Acemoglu, Daron, and James A. Robinson. *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.
<https://archive.org/details/why-nations-fail-daron-acemoglu/mode/2up>.
- Amorim-Maia, Ana Terra, Isabelle Anguelovski, Eric Chu, and James Connolly. "Governing Intersectional Climate Justice: Tactics and Lessons from Barcelona." *Environmental Policy and Governance*, 2023. <https://www.uab.cat/web/news-detail/governing-intersectional-climate-justice-tactics-and-lessons-from-barcelona-1345680342044.html?noticiaid=1345903171053>
- Burdett, Ricky. "Shaping Cities in an Urban Age." YouTube, 15 Nov. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1sqTOKwxQ8>.
- Burdett, Ricky, and Philipp Rode. "Flexible Urbanisms." *Metropolis*, Barcelona City Council. Accessed February 14, 2025. <https://www.barcelona.cat/metropolis/en/contents/flexible-urbanisms>.
- Central Intelligence Agency. "The Economic Slowdown - Spain." EUR 84-10321. Langley, VA: Central Intelligence Agency, December 1984. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85S00316R000300120002-4.pdf>.

- Council of Europe Development Bank. "Resilience in Action: Barcelona's Superblock Programme." Thematic Review, September 2023.
https://coebank.org/media/documents/Thematic_Review_Barcelona_Superblock.pdf.
- DeLong, J. Bradford. "Cornucopia: The Pace of Economic Growth in the Twentieth Century." NBER Working Paper No. 7602, March 2000.
https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w7602/w7602.pdf.
- European Commission. "Country Study: Spain in EMU: a virtuous long-lasting cycle?" European Economy Occasional Papers, No. 14. Brussels: Directorate-General for Economic and Financial Affairs, February 2005.
https://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/publications/pages/publication970_en.pdf.
- European Environment Agency. "Supporting Urban Greening and Social Justice in the City of Barcelona." Climate-ADAPT, December 19, 2024. <https://climate-adapt.eea.europa.eu/en/metadata/case-studies/barcelona-trees-tempering-the-mediterranean-city-climate>.
- Fava, Nadia. "Tourism and the city image: the Barcelona Olympic case." In 6th Conference of the International Forum on Urbanism (IFoU): TOURBANISM, Barcelona, 25-27 January. Barcelona: IFoU, 2012.
https://upcommons.upc.edu/bitstream/handle/2099/12154/C_114_3.pdf.
- Foster, Norman, and Ricky Burdett. "Norman Foster and Ricky Burdett on Sustainable Cities - 'Future of Cities' Conversations Series." YouTube, November 9, 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lBtZA9B4YPI>.
- Frago, Lluís, and Alejandro Morcuende. "The Superblock Barcelona Case (2016–2023)." Universitat de Barcelona, 2024.
<https://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/bitstream/2445/216756/1/870102.pdf>.
- Martí, Miquel. "Barcelona's technological ecosystem will only exist if companies work with startups." Via Empresa, July 18, 2017.
https://www.viaempresa.cat/via-empresa-in-english/marti-barcelona-s-technological-ecosystem-will-only-exist-if-companies-work-with-startups_50712_102.html.
- Prados de la Escosura, Leandro. A Millennial View of Spain's Development: Essays in Economic History. Cham: Springer, 2024.
<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-60792-9>.

Grading

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Participation in class	10%
Homework (5 at 3%)	15%
Quizzes (4 at 5%)	20%
Midterm	15%
Case study (group presentation 7.5%, written report 7.5%)	15%
Final group project (proposal 12.5%, presentation 12.5%)	25%
Overall grade	100%

Assessment Details

Requirements

Active participation is essential in this course. Students are expected to attend each class and field study components, including guest lectures from local entrepreneurs and visits to innovation hubs, as outlined in the CET Attendance Policy. Students are expected to read all assigned materials before the relevant class session and come prepared to participate thoughtfully in class discussions. Reading assignments are generally 7-10 pages per class session. All assignments must be submitted via Canvas unless otherwise noted.

Graded assignments include:

- **Participation:** Students are expected to actively engage in class discussions, group activities, and field study components. This includes asking thoughtful questions during guest lectures and site visits, and contributing insights that connect course material to real-world observations.
- **Homework:** The first four homework assignments will be bi-weekly response papers (1-2 pages) analyzing assigned readings and relating them to Barcelona's economic

context. The fifth and final assignment will be a reflection journal, due at the end of the semester, documenting your observations and insights from field visits.

- **Quizzes:** Short quizzes at the end of the four major course sections to assess understanding of key concepts and theories. They will consist of both multiple choice and short answer questions.
- **Midterm project:** An analysis paper (7-8 pages) examining Barcelona's economic evolution in light of the Solow-Swan model and Spain's resource endowments.
- **Case study analysis:** Students will work in small groups (3-4 people) to analyze a specific aspect of Barcelona's economic growth and sustainability model, presenting their findings to the class. The Case Study Analysis will consist of a group presentation (10-15 minutes) and a written report (5-7 pages).
- **Final group project:** A group project (3-4 people) presenting a comprehensive proposal (15-20 pages) for sustainable economic development in a city of the student's choice, applying theories and strategies learned throughout the course. This will be accompanied by a 15-minute presentation to the class.

Course Content

Unit 1

The Emergence of Economic Growth

- Pre-industrial economies and limited growth
- The Industrial Revolution as a catalyst for sustained growth
- Urbanization and the rise of industrial cities
- Measuring economic growth: GDP and other indicators

Unit 2

Theoretical Foundations of Economic Growth

- The Solow-Swan model: basics and assumptions
- Factors of production: labor, capital, and technology
- The role of savings and investment in growth
- Limitations of the Solow-Swan model

Unit 3

Spain's Economic History & Late Industrialization

- Factors contributing to Spain's delayed industrialization
- The economic impact of the Franco era
- Spain's entry into the European Union (1986)
- Catching up with Europe: challenges and opportunities

Unit 4

Urbanization & Economic Development

- Rural-urban migration patterns

- Cities as engines of economic growth
- Challenges of rapid urbanization: infrastructure, housing, and social issues
- The depopulation of Spain's countryside

Unit 5

Urban Planning in the Industrial Age

- The grid system and city expansion
- Barcelona's Example: Ildefons Cerdà's vision
- Balancing residential, commercial, and industrial needs
- The impact of modes of transportation on the city

Unit 6

Barcelona's Urban Transformation

- Pre-Olympic urban challenges
- The 1992 Olympics as a catalyst for change
- Key urban renewal projects and their impact
- The "Barcelona Model" of urban regeneration

Unit 7

Tourism & Economic Growth

- The rise of mass tourism in Spain
- Barcelona as a global tourist destination
- Economic benefits and challenges of tourism
- Balancing tourism with local needs and quality of life

Unit 8

Innovation & the Knowledge Economy

- Transition from industrial to knowledge-based economies
- The role of universities and research institutions
- Attracting and retaining talent in cities
- Barcelona's initiatives to foster innovation

Unit 9

Smart Cities & Sustainable Urban Development

- Defining smart cities and their objectives
- Barcelona's smart city initiatives
- Balancing technology, sustainability, and social equity
- Challenges and criticisms of the smart city model

Unit 10

Creative Industries & Urban Economies

- The rise of the creative class and its economic impact
- Barcelona's creative clusters and districts
- Policy measures to support creative industries
- Gentrification and displacement concerns

Unit 11

Social Inclusion & Economic Growth

- Income inequality in growing urban economies
- Barcelona's approach to social inclusion
- Affordable housing initiatives and challenges

- Balancing economic growth with social equity

Unit 12

Future Challenges & Opportunities for Barcelona

- Addressing over-tourism and diversifying the economy
- Climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies
- Maintaining competitiveness in the global economy
- Preserving local identity in a globalized world

Policies

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).