According to several indices, Europe is home to many of the “greenest” cities in the world.¹ But just because a city is green, that does not mean all people there, nor all parts of the city, benefit from efforts to foster sustainable development. There may be an uneven geography as to which people and places gain from these cities going green. It may even be the case that greening Europe’s cities reproduces social inequities along lines of ethnicity, gender, race, and socioeconomic status. Furthermore, who decides what counts as “green” may be limited to an elite group or to a limited perspective. These concerns are especially pressing as many European cities serve as models for other places, especially through policy transfers oriented to build resilience in light of global climate change. Therefore, it is imperative to ask: is environmentally sustainable urban development also socially just in these greenest of urban places? This course will examine Europe’s greening urban geography through the lens of environmental justice. This course is open to anyone, but is especially relevant to students interested in environmental justice, environmental policy, ethics, Europe, geography, sustainability, and urban planning & policy.

While much attention has been given to Europe’s “green” cities and the region’s examples of sustainable development, less attention has been given to the ways in which the uneven distributions of environmental degradation have social and spatial ramifications within and beyond the region. Despite the robust global growth of the environmental justice movement and its associated impacts through increasing civic actions, changing discourses, and shifting policies, understanding the greening of Europe through the lens of environmental justice is a nascent endeavor for academics, activists, policymakers, and citizens alike. This course will provide an overview of environmental justice in urban Europe to consider the key concepts, topics, debates, and trends shaping people and places there.

There are no prerequisites for this course.

¹ For example, see CDP Global, the Siemens’ Green City Index, and the news article “Where is the world's greenest city?” from The Guardian. Europe’s “green” cities have also been celebrated in numerous travel blogs.