

ENGAGE.EU Winter School “Cultural Perspectives on Sustainability”

Workshop title: City, Voice, Inclusion: Urban Communicative Ecologies and the Conditions for Diversity

Lecturer + Status & affiliation:

Emiliana De Blasio is a Full Professor of Sociology of Communication and Culture at LUISS Guido Carli University, Rome, where she directs the OGID Observatory on Gender, Inclusion and Democracy and serves as Rector’s Advisor for Diversity, Inclusion and Sustainability. Her work spans the sociology of communication, the mediatization of political life, gender and media, and the transformation of public spheres under platformisation. She leads a comparative study of urban communicative ecologies across Latin America, Europe and Asia — including the Mannheim, Milan and Barcelona cases that inform this workshop.

Workshop description:

SDG 11 is usually read as a question of urban planning. This workshop starts from a prior question: who can speak in the city, and on what terms? Inclusive communities are not only those that manage physical resources fairly — they are those able to sustain the conditions for collective deliberation and for the recognition of difference. That capacity is communicative before it is institutional.

Working from live comparative research on urban communicative ecologies across cities in Latin America, Europe and Asia, the workshop focuses on three post-industrial European cases from that study — Mannheim, Milan and Barcelona. It treats each as a distinct “communicative ecology”: a specific configuration of media institutions, platform infrastructures, civic associations and digital publics that shapes who is heard in public life and who is not. The same platforms and algorithms produce very different effects across these cities, and those differences reveal the structural conditions that determine whether urban communication sustains inclusion or reproduces existing hierarchies. Mannheim — the students’ own city — serves as both a case and a starting point. No prior knowledge of media studies, sociology or urban theory is required.

Learning objectives:

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

- Read a city’s communicative ecology as an analytical object — identifying the actors, infrastructures and asymmetries that determine who speaks and who is heard;
- Use comparison across urban cases to isolate the structural conditions that shape how communicative ecologies manage diversity and inclusion;
- Apply the concepts of mediatization, platform logic and the post-public sphere to explain how urban communicative life produces or erodes inclusive participation;
- Connect this analysis to SDG 11 and articulate why communicative sustainability is a necessary dimension of sustainable urban communities;
- Develop a situated policy argument addressed to an institutional audience and grounded in the communicative conditions of a real city.

Content:

The session moves from cities to concepts rather than the reverse. It opens with Mannheim: students work from a short briefing on the city's communicative ecology and map who is absent from its public conversation. A structured comparison with Milan and Barcelona then introduces the analytical vocabulary — mediatisation, platform logic, the post-public sphere — as concepts that name what the comparison has already revealed. Students re-examine the three cities through three lenses (gender; migration, origin and ability; language and cultural belonging), then translate the analysis into a one-page proposal addressed to a real municipal body of their choice. A structured debate — does platform logic make inclusive urban communication structurally impossible, or does it remain a political and institutional choice? — closes the analytical arc, followed by a synthesis and short exit reflections.

Input/examples:

Facilitator input is deliberately light and comes in short structured segments: the framing of the central question after the Mannheim mapping, a comparative presentation of the Milan and Barcelona cases (approx. 25 minutes) and targeted debriefs that build a composite picture from the students' own analysis. Most of the time is student-led. Concrete examples and materials include: a two-page briefing on Mannheim's communicative ecology (local media, demographic composition, civic digital infrastructure); evidence fragments on Milan (the mediatisation of migration and the narrowing of discursive space) and Barcelona (linguistically stratified digital counter-publics) drawn from ongoing comparative research; structured prompt sheets for group work; and a one-page situated-proposal template with guiding questions. A short optional reading list (3–5 texts) is provided; no prior reading is assumed. All materials in English.

Duration/number of students:

Four hours, delivered twice on two consecutive days, each time to a different cohort of 15–25 students. Designed for mixed bachelor's cohorts from any disciplinary background.