



Radical Care-work, Critical Pedagogy and the Livable City: Revisiting the History of Urban Squatting in West Berlin, 1968-1977

- Speaker:** **Professor Alex Vasudevan**
School of Geography and the Environment
University of Oxford
- Chair:** **Dr Shaun Teo**
Department of Geography, NUS
- Date/Time:** Monday 16 March 2026, 9.30am
- Place:** Geography Seminar Room, AS2 #03-02

ABSTRACT

This paper re-traces the early history of housing struggles in West Berlin as a history of radical care work. It focuses, in particular, on the relationship between care work, inhabitation and the making of an alternative urban imagination. In so doing, the paper proposes a new reading of the communal spaces and autonomous youth projects that first flourished in West Berlin in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Drawing on extensive archival research, the paper connects the everyday spatial practices of squatters and other housing activists in the city to matters of care that politicized health and were intimately intertwined with a wider struggle over the meaning of political action, community organization and collective city living. Taken together, these orientations aimed to make visible the actual physical sites – the radical urban infrastructure - in which alternative (and undeniably intersectional) forms of solidarity and social reproduction were actually assembled and developed from clinics to communes, squats to youth centres. At stake here, is the recognition of a largely neglected archive of care and social pedagogy that was assembled in response to intensifying forms of housing insecurity and labour precarity and the wider terrain of social marginality that they ultimately produced. This was an expansive landscape of political action that ultimately encompassed struggles over housing, migrant rights, youth services and social welfare while opening up a critical space to imagine and conceive of the city as a livable space of empowerment and self-organisation.

Convenors

Professor Brenda Yeoh | Professor Dariusz Wojcik | Prof Lu Xi Xi | Assoc Prof Lin Weiqiang



ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Alex joined the School of Geography and the Environment in January 2017 having previously taught at the University of Nottingham and Durham University. Alex has a BA (Hons, first class) and PhD from the University of British Columbia.

Alex's research interests combine cultural and historical geography and urban studies with a commitment to experimental artistic practices and grassroots social activism. His work explores, in particular, the city as a site of political contestation drawing on a range of methods (archival, ethnographic and participatory). For the past 15 years, Alex has conducted extensive fieldwork in Germany (most notably in Berlin). More recently, he has worked across Europe as well as North America. Alex has published widely in major geography and other interdisciplinary journals. He is the author of [The Autonomous City: A History of Urban Squatting](#) (London: Verso, 2017), [Metropolitan Preoccupations: The Spatial Politics of Squatting in Berlin](#) (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015) and co-editor of [Geographies of Forced Evictions: Dispossession, Violence, Insecurity](#) (London: Palgrave). He has written for the *Guardian*, *openDemocracy* and *New Left Project*.

Convenors

Professor Brenda Yeoh | Professor Dariusz Wojcik | Prof Lu Xi Xi | Assoc Prof Lin Weiqiang