

## Reflections on the HGO4201 course evaluations (Fall 2021)

This document merges my interpretation of the course evaluation and of spontaneous discussions held with students with my own reflections on the course.

The course evaluation response rate was low, and the results must therefore be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, there are some very useful comments delivered in the open-ended questions.

Overall, most of the respondents were satisfied with the course (5 out of 9, with 3 more “neither or” and 1 who person who was not satisfied). The seminars and lectures were largely appreciated (again with the caveat of the low response rate), but the breakout room function was not successful. The general feedback seems to be that the digital format should be avoided whenever possible (unfortunately, it was not possible to avoid it this year, but I believe the problem should be solved by the time we reach the course’s 2023 edition).

As to the seminars, it is evident that making participation voluntary (which was a covid-19 adaptation) was **not** a good idea. The result was that about half of the group was absent, and the pre-made discussion groups didn’t hold. Additional specific comments related to the structure of the seminars, including suggestions to include small presentations/lectures at the beginning of each one, and to perhaps include fewer and possibly more straightforward discussion questions. But the main issue, all in all, related to the digital format and, especially, to the use of breakout rooms. A physical meeting place is preferable by far (and I agree).

The field trips have been the course’s weakness in the past, and I was close to replacing them with something else this year. However, the comments in the evaluation, as well as our discussions, indicate that they were largely perceived as refreshing. This might also have to do with the fact that they allowed the students to finally meet in person. Overall, however, given this year’s outcome, I am inclined to keep the field trips, although they might need to be developed somewhat. One comment suggested that the amount of effort put into them would motivate grading them. I agree, but there are two problems with this, and I am not sure much can be done about them: (a) given the current rules, only one graded form of examination is permitted, (b) the grading itself is very tricky, and it is not clear how an appeal situation could be handled. I will think about this point. The same comment added that an additional seminar reflecting on the fieldtrips should be considered, and this is a point that I will think about seriously.

Finally, it seems that most students appreciated the course readings, even though some (especially those without an urban “baggage”) thought that there was a bit too much to read, especially in advance of each seminar. The syllabus is updated before each edition of the course; no major critique was directed towards individual readings.