

From territorial stigma to territorial justice: a critique of vested interest urbanism



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Wednesday 30 November 2016 at 6.30pm
ArtsTwo Lecture Theatre, ArtsTwo Building,
Queen Mary University of London, Mile End Road, London E1 4NS

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Summary

In *Geography and Social Justice* (1994) - a book written for an undergraduate course of the same name that I had the privilege to take in 1997-98 - David M Smith argues persuasively that social justice should not be left to the free market, as “the claim to generate social justice depends on the justice of the distribution that already drives the system.” Accordingly, this lecture draws upon 20 years of close engagement with Smith’s remarkable body of scholarship to expose, analyse and critique the arguments of free market think tanks vis-a-vis housing, poverty and social welfare in UK cities. These think tanks, as non-state institutions, often purport to be independent, but they rely on donations from corporations, institutions and individuals with clear political agendas, resulting in the mobilisation of state power to reinforce free market rule. I argue that the huge influence of think tanks in shaping the fate of cities can be explained not only by their mastery of what I call ‘decision-based evidence making’, but by their activation and amplification of territorial stigma. The ways in which noxious representations of specific geographies are produced, diffused, and harnessed in the field of power to produce a vested interest urbanism raises important questions about justice, care and responsibilities to those living in

stigmatised places. These are questions that lie at the heart of David M Smith’s scholarship, and particularly his concept of territorial social justice, which I position against territorial stigmatisation to analyse the role of symbolic structures in the production of inequality and marginality in the city.

Biography

Tom Slater is Reader in Urban Geography at the University of Edinburgh. His undergraduate studies in Geography at Queen Mary University of London (graduated in 1998) triggered research interests in the institutional arrangements producing and reinforcing urban inequalities, and in the ways in which marginalised urban dwellers organise against injustices visited upon them. He has written extensively on gentrification (notably the co-authored books, *Gentrification*, 2008 and *The Gentrification Reader*, 2010), displacement from urban space, territorial stigmatisation, welfare reform, and social movements. Since 2010 he has delivered lectures in 18 countries on these issues, and his work has been translated into 8 different languages and circulates widely to inform struggles for urban social justice. For more information, see www.geos.ed.ac.uk/homes/tslater.



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