



**Jointly organised by  
Department of Geography & Cities Research Cluster, FASS**

## **Brokers of Urban Transformations? Metropolitan Economic Governance and Business Elites in Australasia**

**Speaker:** Dr Steffen Wetzstein  
School of Earth and Environment  
The University of Western Australia

**Chair:** Dr Jun Zhang  
Department of Geography &  
Asia Research Institute, NUS

**Date/Time:** Wednesday, 25 August 2010  
3.30 pm – 5.00 pm

**Place:** Honours Room (AS2 03-02)  
Department of Geography, NUS

### **Abstract**

This speech presents the tentative findings of an empirically rich comparative study that investigates the links between metropolitan economic governance and new forms of business political representation in Australasia. As decisions affecting cities' contemporary economic and urban development are mediated by complex actor alliances, the increasing role of powerful formal and informal business leader networks raises questions about their nature, composition, practices, relationships, legitimacy and impacts. The analysis draws on the author's particular positionality of being involved in knowledge production in both, academic and policy arenas, in two case study sites, and benefits from the combination of traditional business-focussed political economy literatures and a range of post-structural political economy (PSPE) methodologies developed by Auckland-based researchers (see Le Heron, 2009). Based on extensive policy document review as well as in-depth interviews with both state and business governance actors in Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Auckland, the paper argues that business actors are an integral part of contemporary urban governance arrangements. It is contended that, while being key agents in globalising knowledge and policy transfer (McCann, 2010) and engaging in broadly similar governmental practices, business elites contribute in particular, contested and uneven ways to context-specific governance trajectories in their respective city-regions. It is hoped that this exploration from the global semi-periphery can complement, and potentially challenge, northern hemisphere-centric academic and policy knowledge production on business-mediated urban economic governance.

### **About the Speaker**

Originally from Germany, Steffen draws on ten years of professional experience in academic research and teaching as well as socio-economic policy focused work in New Zealand and Australia. He was awarded a PhD from the University of Auckland in 2007 on the topic of Auckland's economic development in a globalising and neoliberalising world. He has worked as lecturer in Urban and Economic Geography at Wellington's Victoria University and is currently Assistant Professor in Human Geography at the University of Western Australia. He is broadly interested in questions of urban and economic governance, political economy, political representation of business interests, urban liveability as well as the processes of globalisation generally and their impact on people and places. He is actively involved in policy-focused research for the business organisation "Committee for Perth", a self-declared promoter of, and change agent for, the metropolitan region of Perth/Australia. His most recent research endeavour is targeted at investigating the complexities and contradictions of urban economic management from an actor-perspective (engagement of powerful state/ business interests) and a governing perspective (role of ideas, spatial and other imaginaries, discourses, particular practices and political projects) in the context of Australasian city-regions.

**ADMISSION IS FREE – ALL ARE WELCOME**

**ENQUIRIES:** Mrs Lim – 65166101 **CONVENORS:** Dr Lim Han She, A/P Alan Ziegler, Dr Jun Zhang