

# Afterword: Citizenship and the politics of (im)material stigma and infrastructure

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## Abstract

This afterword to the *Urban Vulnerabilities: Infrastructure, Health and Stigma* special issue highlights two cross-cutting themes that are addressed by all the articles in the issue, and that have the potential to make a significant contribution to debates within urban studies. First, I reflect on how the articles reveal the inseparable connections between infrastructure and stigma, demonstrating both as political *and* material processes that are inter-dependent and mutually constitutive. Consequently, it is urgent to bridge disciplinary siloes in bringing these scholarly debates into deeper conversation in ways that recognise the materiality of stigma and the politicisation of infrastructure (and vice versa). Second, to a greater and lesser extent, the articles all reveal the centrality of citizenship to the capacity of both urban dwellers and the state to negotiate and/or restrict access to infrastructure, and to perpetuate and/or challenge the impacts of stigma. While the connections between infrastructure and citizenship are explored in my recent work on infrastructural citizenship, the articles in this collection demonstrate the importance of temporality and scale in understanding how citizens negotiate their material and political rights.

## Keywords

citizenship, infrastructural citizenship, infrastructure, stigma

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## 摘要

这篇《脆弱的城市：基础设施、医疗与污名》(Vulnerabilities: Infrastructure, Health and Stigma) 特刊的后记强调本期所有文章都涉及的两个相互交叉的主题，这些主题有可能对城市研究中的辩论做出重大贡献。首先，我探讨这些文章如何将基础设施和污名展示为相互依存和相互构成的政治和物质过程，从而揭示两者之间不可分割的联系。因此，迫切需要弥合学科之间的各自为阵，承认污名的物质性和基础设施的政治化（反之亦然），将这些学术辩论带入更深入的对话。其次，这些文章都或多或少地揭示了，对于城市居民和国家协商和/或限制使用基础设施的能力、以及延续和/或挑战污名影响的能力而言，公民身份所具有的核心地位。虽然我在最近关于基础设施公民身份的著作中探讨了基础设施和公民身份之间的联系，但本特刊中的文章展示了时间和规模在理解公民如何协商其物质和政治权利方面的重要性。

## 关键词

公民身份、基础设施公民身份、基础设施、污名

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## Introduction

In reading the articles for this special issue, I am vividly drawn back to the 2018 *Urban Vulnerabilities* workshop, held in a typically cramped UCL seminar room at a moment in time when, as participants, we jostled together to share ideas with no thought to social distancing or face coverings. While the original workshop was held prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the events that have affected everyone since – in remarkably similar and different ways – have rendered more visible and stark the significant diversities in urban dwellers' capacity to navigate the challenges of urban life, and the centrality of infrastructure and politics to this differentiation. This special issue brings into conversation contemporary debates on infrastructure, health and stigma. While these three concepts are arguably at the core of contemporary urban challenges, the intersections between them, and the ways in which they coalesce to deepen inequalities and vulnerabilities, remain under-theorised. Specifically, the collection of articles reveals how infrastructure (in)access is not only embedded in demographic and place-based

stigma, but also has profound and direct impacts on individual and collective health outcomes and opportunities. And while the questions and debates raised by these themes are clearly *global* in scale and reach, it is rare to find discussion that brings together empirical case studies and scholars that traverse and transcend global south/north binaries and hierarchies. This special issue is therefore particularly significant in delivering a powerful collection of articles that contribute fresh insights to the intersections of urban infrastructure, health and stigma that encompass a broad range of empirical contexts, disciplinary perspectives, historical periods and theoretical frameworks.

In drawing together the core articles in this special issue, I have chosen to highlight two cross-cutting questions and themes that have the potential to make a significant contribution to debates within urban studies. First, the articles clearly reveal the inseparable connections between infrastructure and stigma as political-material processes that are inter-dependent and mutually constitutive. It is therefore urgent to bridge disciplinary siloes in bringing these scholarly debates into deeper conversation in ways that

recognise the materiality of stigma and the politicisation of infrastructure (and vice versa). Second, to a greater and lesser extent, the articles all reveal the centrality of citizenship to the capacity of both urban dwellers and the state to negotiate and/or restrict access to infrastructure, and to perpetuate and/or challenge the impacts of stigma. While the connections between infrastructure and citizenship have recently been explored through the lexicon of infrastructural citizenship (Lemanski, 2019, 2020a, 2020b), the articles in this collection demonstrate the importance of temporality and scale in understanding how citizens negotiate their material and political rights.

### **The material-politicisation and political-materiality of infrastructure and stigma**

The central bridging concept throughout all the articles in this special issue is stigma. Stigma has long been a core lens to explore how discrediting the attributes of an individual and/or social group (re)produces and legitimises structural inequalities at multiple societal scales (Goffman, 1963). While the specific attributes being discredited by institutional practices and societal norms have shifted over time, including for example, race, ethnicity, class, religion, sexuality, physical disability and mental health, stigma has remained core to scholarship within psychology and sociology. More recently, the spatiality of stigma has been examined through the lexicons of 'territorial stigmatisation' and the 'stigma of place' to consider the specific urban dimensions of stigma (Tyler and Slater, 2018; Wacquant et al., 2014: 734). This spatialised perspective recognises that 'collective representation fastened on place' (Wacquant et al., 2014: 1278) intersects with other discredited attributes (e.g. race, class, health) to create 'stigma traps' (Allen, 2021) that (re)produce and

extend the vulnerabilities of specific individuals and groups. For example, in *Urban Outcasts*, Wacquant (2008) revealed how residents of Paris' Banlieues and Chicago's South Side developed personalised strategies to separate their individual identity from the deviant collective tropes of their spatiality, because admitting their address to 'outsiders' would associate them with the 'stain' of the place. This demonstrates how the spatiality of stigma is inherently connected to stigmatised perceptions of occupants' social identities. For example, Baumann and Massalha (2021) reveal how the spatial stigma of Jerusalem's refugee camps is indivisible from the socio-political status of Palestinian occupants; while residents of Mexico's Juarez border region are tainted by narratives that the place and its people are inherently violent (Martén and Boano, 2021).

These imagined societal binaries and hierarchies (e.g. between the superior/inferior claims of settlers/migrants/indigenous groups to urban resources) are entrenched in wider political discourses about the legitimacy of certain groups and their behaviours. Recently, this has been articulated through Tyler's (2020) notion of austerity as a 'stigma machine' that institutionalises differentiation between hard-working taxpayers and workshy claimants in order to explicitly devalue the human worth of those most impacted by welfare retrenchment. Through the lens of austerity, Tyler (2020) argues that the politicisation of stigma is amplified through discourses that centre on who is (un)deserving (due to their attributes) in order to legitimise public policies and social norms that exacerbate and/or ignore human vulnerabilities, rather than focusing attention on exposing and/or addressing the structural causes of those vulnerabilities. This societal bifurcation is evident in the stigmatisation of ethnic minority groups (Black, Asian, Gypsies, Travellers) in the South-East of England, where institutional structures and human

practices that prioritise the socio-cultural health needs of white populations directly exclude and further marginalise ethnic minorities (Moreno-Leguizamon and Tovar-Restrepo, 2021). This directs attention to the ways in which stigma is increasingly entrenched in the 'cultural and political economy' of societies (Tyler and Slater, 2018: 721). In this context, the vilification of certain groups/individuals/places is not only endemic to public discourse and cultural norms, but also used to legitimise political practices of withdrawing the very infrastructures that could provide direct support.

A focus on how stigma is driven by spatial and social differentiation points analysis towards understanding urban dwellers' uneven access to, and consumption of, infrastructure. As the special issue introduction (Baumann and Yacobi, 2021) notes, there is minimal scholarship that explicitly works across the lexicons and practices of stigma and infrastructure. However, long-standing research addressing both stigma and infrastructure *implicitly* connects these concepts and approaches, exploring how certain individual and collective discredited attributes (e.g. location, employment, class, income, sex, ethnicity, religion) directly affect access to infrastructure. For example, Anand's (2012, 2017) detailed analysis of the political economy of water infrastructure in Mumbai demonstrates how water engineers and municipal officials systematically neglect pipe repairs in Muslim areas due to the stigmatisation of these communities as 'undeserving; ... as dirty ... and threatening to the city's water system'; a perception that is exacerbated by restricted access to clean water (Anand, 2012: 490). This is echoed in Jerusalem's refugee camps, where the abundance of accumulated waste perpetuates stigmatising narratives of Palestinians as 'dirty' (in contrast to the 'purity' of Israelis) that legitimise the state's failure to deliver equitable public services (Baumann and Massalha,

2021). These forms of territorial stigma are arguably dominated by majoritarian political tropes in relation to race, religion and ethnicity – that are deployed in order to legitimise unequal access to infrastructure in ways that limit the health and socio-economic outcomes of marginalised groups, as well as perpetuating further stigma. This is demonstrated by the remarkably similar examples of Ulaanbaata (Mongolia) and a Bedouin community (Israel), where in both cases the state justifies its refusal to extend networked infrastructure (heating and electricity, respectively) to specific urban spaces by blaming occupants for 'choosing' to live in under-served parts of the city (Plueckhahn, 2021; Yacobi and Milner, 2021). In these cases, the state's territorial stigmatisation is both material and political, used to blame marginalised communities for their housing options and health outcomes, and to ignore wider political-economic structural forces that restrict certain urban dwellers' capacity to 'choose' well-served residential locations. Furthermore, exclusion from infrastructure is not only justified through socio-spatial forms of stigma, but also driven by state-centric perceptions of 'appropriate' consumption of infrastructure that disciplines 'inappropriate' users and uses. For example, public discourses in South Africa criticise occupants of state-subsidised housing settlements for adapting public infrastructure (e.g. informal housing extensions), and blame the urban poor for 'inappropriate' behaviours (e.g. public dumping of waste, illegal electricity connections) rather than recognising the limitations of public provision in the context of urban poverty (Lemanski, 2020a). And in contemporary London, the stigmatisation of public toilets and their users as 'immoral' and 'deviant' is used to justify the closure of public sanitation that was historically designed to ensure public decency (Pollak Williamson, 2021). These diverse examples build on wider

recognition that uneven landscapes of access to services such as water, healthcare and education, for example, are not random accidents or temporary errors, but structural forms of ‘infrastructural violence’ (Rodgers and O’Neill, 2012). This is important to acknowledge because it reveals how infrastructure (in)access is a political tool that (re)produces forms of socio-political exclusion and marginalisation via discipline and control (Graham and Marvin, 2001). As this special issue reveals, this politicisation of infrastructure is frequently legitimised by (often state-led) discourses of stigmatisation.

Connecting infrastructure and stigma not only brings into conversation the material and political forms of exclusion and marginalisation that dominate contemporary cities, but also reveals how they are entwined and indivisible, contributing to the perpetuation of each other in complex and multifaceted ways. This is important because it reveals how *material* access to the city is inherently *political* (and vice versa). Consequently, while the initial focus of the special issue was to investigate connections ‘between the material networks of the city and the immaterial stigma’ (Baumann and Yacobi, 2021), in fact, the collective contributions of the special issue challenge this assumed binary. Instead, taken as a whole, the articles reveal the significance of *immaterial* (and highly politicised) infrastructure networks, alongside the significant ways in which stigmas are materialised (and politicised). Consequently, in developing a critique of the political-economy of infrastructural stigma, or stigmatised infrastructures, it is important to re-frame analysis to recognise that *both* infrastructure and stigma are material and immaterial, and that these (im)material processes are highly politicised.

This material-politicisation and/or political-materiality of infrastructure and stigma is vividly demonstrated through the vignettes of Francisco and Estela’s housing

histories on the urban periphery of Lima. Allen (2021) reveals how citizen-led processes that produce urban space via land invasions and incremental ‘auto-construction’ (Caldeira, 2017) are not only the *material* creation of houses and communities, but also an inherently *political* strategy to claim agency as legitimate urban citizens. Equally, state refusal to extend equitable public services to specific parts of the city is an ethnic and spatial agenda of infrastructural exclusion and marginalisation that is simultaneously material and political (Baumann and Massalha, 2021; Plueckhahn, 2021; Yacobi and Milner, 2021). Consequently, it is not just that stigma is both affected by and transforms infrastructural lives, but that stigma *is* a material feature of urban life. And concurrently, that infrastructure is not just the material structures, cables and roads that visibly punctuate the urban landscape, but also a political process that delivers and dispossesses citizenship rights and responsibilities (Lemanski, 2020a, 2020b).

### **The temporality and scale of infrastructural citizenship**

Citizenship is explicitly and implicitly central to all the articles, demonstrating that how urban dwellers negotiate their rights to occupy certain spaces and access infrastructures is inherently connected to their *de jure* and *de facto* rights as citizens (or ‘permanent residents’ in the case of Jerusalem’s Palestinians; Baumann and Massalha, 2021). This builds on recent scholarship developing the analytical framework of ‘infrastructural citizenship’ in order to bridge disciplinary silos and critically explore how state–society relations are materialised through infrastructure for both citizens and states (Lemanski, 2020a, 2020b). As the articles in the special issue confirm, for marginalised urban dwellers, their primary interaction with the state is largely via (in)access to infrastructure, such

as transport, housing, education, healthcare, water, sanitation etc. Consequently, citizenship identities and aspirations are mediated through infrastructure. Infrastructural citizenship therefore provides an analytical lens to consider how the state conceives of and plans for citizens as infrastructure claimants, consumers and complainers; as well as how urban dwellers' citizenship perceptions and practices (in relation to the state and other citizens) are materialised through infrastructure. For example, in both Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) and the Bedouin communities of Israel, residents sought access to networked infrastructure not only as a material means to secure improved services, but also as a citizenship strategy to propel their residential space (district and/or building) and socio-political identity into inclusion in legal and political networks (Plueckhahn, 2021; Yacobi and Milner, 2021). Similarly, residents of the urban periphery of Lima sought to claim their citizenship rights to the city by constructing their own houses and occupying land in the absence of state provision (Allen, 2021). Concurrently, several articles also highlight how the state uses infrastructure as a tool to discipline and control particular groups and behaviours deemed 'uncivic'. For example, the stigmatisation of Bedouin settlers, Indian migrants and gypsies and travellers as 'invaders', 'temporary workers' or 'deviant' cultures is used to legitimise their unequal access to infrastructure, despite their legal citizenship (Moreno-Leguizamon and Tovar-Restrepo, 2021; Yacobi and Milner, 2021). Furthermore, the Egyptian state uses sonic infrastructures (e.g. restrictions on music and public noise, hearing others' torture) to regulate and punish the behaviour of (in)appropriate citizenship (Malmström, 2021). These examples reveal how the state deploys normative assumptions about who has a legitimate claim to citizenship, materialising differentiated access to citizenship through (in)access to infrastructure (Lemanski, 2020b).

This special issue contributes fresh insights to infrastructural citizenship by highlighting the importance of temporality and scale. All the articles in the special issue explore infrastructure and stigma through a focus on everyday temporality and the local scale (individual and community), exploring how urban dwellers who experience discourses and policies of stigmatisation navigate their material and political rights largely through non-radical practices, such as building a home and accessing basic services. As Moreno-Leguizamon and Tovar-Restrepo (2021) indicate, the everyday scale reveals how stigma is 'produced, reproduced, negotiated and renegotiated on a daily basis'. This is important because scholarship on marginalised groups' (in)access to infrastructure has tended to focus attention on radical forms of (often violent) protest, rather than more quotidian practices of urban survival. In contrast, exploring how citizens navigate stigma (e.g. through access to infrastructure) affords a window into understanding how this affects broader capacity to exercise and challenge individual and collective citizenship rights. While the everyday localised scale reveals the endemic and entrenched nature of infrastructure inequalities and stigmatising processes, it also hints at wider structural drivers and the limitations citizens face in attempts to challenge and re-design the material and political form of the cities in which they live and work. Indeed, both Pollak Williamson's (2021) and Plueckhahn's (2021) accounts of citizen-led strategies to secure access to infrastructure (public toilets and heating) reveal the difficulties citizens face in seeking to penetrate opaque processes of municipal governance without access to clientelistic connections. However, the special issue also hints at the possibilities of transformation via collective action.

While there is wide acknowledgement that stigma is often rooted in discrediting the

attributes of collective units, such as communal residence of a spatiality/territoriality or group-based demographic identity, the articles also demonstrate how collective action can be a crucial tool in combating stigma and securing access to infrastructure. For example, Allen's (2021) discussion of 'bare citizenship' in Lima reveals that while stigmatisation can isolate individual residents and limit their capacity to claim their civic rights, access to community groups and collective action provides the social capital necessary for marginalised residents to access infrastructure and overcome stigma. This reveals the importance of scale for understanding the relationships between stigma and infrastructure – for while place-based stigma is arguably collective in its target, and can be mitigated by collective action, it is also individualised in its specific impacts. Equally, in the refugee camps of Jerusalem, occupants expressed how individual perceptions of socio-spatial stigma and isolation and alienation – both from the rest of the city and from other residents of the transient and rapidly expanding population of the camp – contributed to weak collective action to bring about structural change (Baumann and Massalha, 2021). While not suggesting that community-scale collective action can necessarily transform structural processes of stigmatised and differentiated infrastructural citizenship, the special issue highlights the importance of considering multiple temporal and spatial scales of analysis.

### **Conclusion: Global perspectives on global challenges**

In exploring how infrastructure, stigma and health coalesce and inter-connect to (re)produce (and potentially challenge) urban vulnerabilities, this special issue draws on case studies from remarkably diverse (i.e. *global*) empirical locations, ranging across cities in South and North America, the Middle East,

Europe and Asia. Such global diversity is important because questions related to the political materialisation of inequalities in the distribution of, and access to, urban infrastructure are long-standing global challenges that have been recently exposed by the dramatic inequalities within and between countries addressing the global Covid-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, the special issue is important in avoiding reliance on concepts or examples derived from one spatial location, and instead embracing a postcolonial approach to knowledge production that values the global south and north as equally valid sites for producing and critiquing urban theory (Lemanski, 2014). Nonetheless, it *is* important to recognise that the geopolitical histories and contemporary politics of urban infrastructure differ across the empirical sites, and that (despite limitations in the use of aggregate categories) southern cities are different from northern cities (Schindler, 2017). For example, while Gamlin (2021) is the only article to explicitly address colonisation – exploring how contemporary practices of globalisation are a colonial form of urban space production that violently (re)creates unequal and exclusionary spatialities of resource distribution – in fact, colonial legacies are relevant to virtually all the case studies in this special issue. Differentiated citizenship was central to colonial practices, legitimised by stigmatising the (typically racialised) 'native' as inferior and undeserving, and materially plotted onto spatialised landscapes of uneven access to urban infrastructure. As the case studies reveal, from Lima to London and Juarez to Jerusalem, access to urban space (and its infrastructure) continues to remain embedded in socio-spatial hierarchies that are legitimised by, and reinforce, stigmatised (often racialised) identities. Even in Mongolia, where Ulaanabaata's central heating system was framed by the Soviet

ideology of ‘communal’ provision rather than the colonial system of ‘divide and rule’, the political and material provision of resources has clearly fragmented in the post-Soviet era (Plueckhahn, 2021).

To conclude, this afterword has highlighted how the articles in this special issue are important in revealing how the material-political connections between infrastructure and stigma are indivisible, and how the temporality and scale of infrastructural citizenship are central to understanding (and challenging) the uneven distribution of political and material resources.

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