Members in Profile

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Gareth Edwards

I have been a member of the Geographical Society of NSW since I received a GSNSW prize (which included a year's membership) whilst an undergraduate student at the University of Sydney in 2002. My interest in Geography started at school. I was fascinated by learning how the natural world functions – for instance how mountains form, and why we have different climates – basically why our planet looks like it does. But what really attracted me to geography was that it addressed the interaction between the natural and the social: how humans interact with and change the environments and landscapes they live in. A dynamic and enthusiastic teacher (Mrs Comino) while I was in my early teens probably didn't hurt either!

Not having a clear idea of what sort of career path I wanted to follow at the end of school, I enrolled in a BA at the University of Sydney and picked Geography and History as my majors. At first I was more interested in understanding how landscapes develop over time and how they operate (I've always been fascinated by mountains and glaciers, for instance), but humans are the single biggest agent of landscape and environmental change, and as my undergraduate studies progressed I became more interested in how human societies modify, reshape and 'manage' the natural world. So my honours thesis looked at how ideas about what 'wilderness' is influence the policies and practices of landscape conservation and management, focussing on Kosciuszko National Park in southern NSW.

After I finished my undergraduate studies, I worked at a small Sydney-based environmental consultancy for several years on a variety of projects, including strategic natural resource management in rural NSW and the Environmental Assessment for a major energy infrastructure project in Sydney. But I think I always wanted to do further study, so I enrolled in a PhD at the University of Sydney. Still interested at the most basic level in how humans interact with nature, my PhD examined how water scarcity is conceptualized and how notions of 'justice' are mobilized in the context of severe drought in eastern Australia and the most significant reforms to national water policy in Australia's history.

There has been a lot of debate within several sub-disciplines of geography about the environmental and social implications of market-based, 'neoliberal' approaches to environmental governance. My PhD examined how the shift to such approaches in Australia depended on particular narratives about the causes of water scarcity, and how the social and environmental implications of market-based governance of water is shaped by the notions of justice espoused both by those implementing such policies and wider community views.

After finishing my PhD in late 2010, I relocated to Durham in the UK to take up a Post-Doctoral Research Associate position at Durham University with Prof. Harriet Bulkeley. At Durham I've been working on a project examining how cities around the world are responding to climate change with various mitigation and adaptation initiatives. As part of this project, I have recently spent time in both Philadelphia and Berlin talking to policymakers, NGOs, private companies and residents about particular climate change initiatives in each city. In Philadelphia our focus was on retrofitting residential housing to make it more energy efficient; in Berlin our focus was on the development of renewable energy in the city, particularly solar. One of the things we're really interested in is how issues of social and environmental justice affect the ability of cities to respond to climate change. My deep conviction is that environmental sustainability and justice are two of the greatest challenges facing the world today, and that we will never truly achieve one without the other.

In May 2012 I will take up a new post as Research Fellow in Sustainable Development at the University of St Andrews, continuing my general northward trajectory from Sydney. Of course, if I maintain this trajectory I will end up back in Australia!