

## Environmental Studies Departmental Seminar



**Speaker:** Julie Trottier and Jeanne Perrier

**Title:** *The Paracommons of water*

**Date:** Nov.22, 2016

**Time:** 13:15 (refreshments served at 13:00)

**Venue:** Classroom 2, AKIS

**Abstract:** Different definitions of efficiency exist. Each definition involves a different political and social construction. Engineers and Scientifics who use these definitions of efficiency do not pay attention to the political ramifications of this concept. Saving water and reallocating it to sectors in need is a common objective for development projects willing to improve efficiency. However, these expectations have rarely been met. When water is freed thanks to an efficiency improvement, it can take various trajectories, which have been silenced by the hegemonic discourse on efficiency. In this seminar, we will present our research on the paracommons of water. The term designates potential material gains resulting from efficiency improvements (Lankford, 2013). But who will get these material gains? Various users may compete for the appropriation of these potential gains. Any change in the material system will change how the water flows. However, water also flows in the political world and is embedded in a complex structure of governance. Understanding it is necessary to study the paracommons and the power relations linking different actors and systems around the governance of water. We will present the case of virtual water, generating potential material gains by transferring the consumption of water to a location where water is more abundant. Harnessing the framework of the paracommons, we will provide a critical analysis of the concept of virtual water. Usually put forward as means of improving the efficiency of water use, the concept of virtual water is highly problematic. Our research shows this concept treats water as a stock. The conceptual framework of the paracommons allows us to treat it as a flow. Our results demonstrate that the present methods for assessing the amounts of virtual water are deeply flawed.

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