

Sarah Wolfe

Professor in the School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability at University of Waterloo

Waterloo, ON, CA

Assistant Professor

Description

I am an Assistant Professor in the School of Environment, Resources and Sustainability at the University of Waterloo.

Research: Effectively addressing water problems requires contributions from technical, ecological and social perspectives. The objective of my transdisciplinary research program is to generate scholarly and policy discussions within the context of climate change uncertainty and extreme water events (drought/flood). My research approach is to gather, translate and combine the insights from geography (space/place attachment), environmental psychology (behaviour choices, belief-value systems and social milieu), cognitive science (emotion regulation), and knowledge management (information transfer) with findings on water decision-making processes. I am specifically interested in understanding the ways that individuals make water decisions outside of formal institutional rules, processes and policies. In particular, my goal is to integrate non-rational drivers into discussions of water governance and decision-making. I broadly define "non-rational" drivers as individuals' values, beliefs or emotions that are socio-culturally derived, often implicit and not readily quantifiable by standard metrics. I use mixed qualitative methods to explore these ideas, because I want to better understand how individuals and institutions make their water decisions, particularly under conditions of constraint or scarcity.

My SSHRC-funded research is an interdisciplinary examination of the social dimensions in water decision-making and governance. I question how and why water research and water decisions evolve using ideas from environmental and social psychology, cognitive science, geography and sociology. My research group examines 1) how individuals' cognitive processing effects their perceptions, definitions and prioritisation of water issues, and 2) how this individual-level cognitive processing then scales up to group or societal decisions about water management.

Industry Expertise

Education/Learning, Environmental Services, Research, Program Development, Writing and Editing

Topics

Geography, Water Decision Making and Governance, Water Research, Environmental and Social Psychology, Sociology, Emotion, Social Network, Water Efficiency, Water, Higher Education, bottled water

Affiliations

Past Talks

The cognitive-affective sciences and water governance
Invited Lecture to the International Development Research Centre

Chasing the Dream: the myth of work-life balance in the water sector
Young Professionals Summit, Water Environment Federation and the American Water Works Association

Building towards Water Efficiency - Research Findings
The 3rd National Conference on Water Efficiency and Conservation

Building towards Water Efficiency: Policy Innovation and Education in New and Existing Homes
WaterSmart Innovations Conference

Social Capital in Community-Level Water Efficiency Programs: Reports from South Africa and Canada
2nd National Conference and Policy Forum on Water Efficiency and Conservation

Education

University of Guelph
Ph.D. Geography

University of Toronto
M.A. Political Science and Environmental Studies

University of Guelph
B.A. International Development and Biophysical Environment

Accomplishments

Awards and Research Grants information
Please see cv or sarahwolfe.ca for list of awards and grants

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