

Greening the Dams: Sustainable Development, Ecological Restoration and Indigenous Knowledge in Northern Quebec

Caroline Desbiens (Geography), Université Laval, Québec (Canada)

With hydro power increasingly being presented as a form of green energy in relation to alternatives such as oil, coal, or nuclear, State institutions wishing to promote hydroelectric projects in Northern Quebec are now using a multi-faceted discourse of sustainable development. A key component of this discourse – and the practices it seeks to authorise – is the ecological restoration of river networks that have been remade through extensive damming and diversion. This paper explores how the scientific data called on to represent green practices interacts with indigenous knowledges held by Eeyouch (East Cree Indians). Since the 1970s, Eeyouch have been confronted with policies of economic development bolstered by scientific knowledge: James Bay (Eeyou Istchee) has commonly been referred to as an open-air laboratory. How has local knowledge been able to oppose and/or support the marketisation of Eeyou Istchee? What is the place of such knowledge within Hydro-Québec's green image? I will explore these questions using the example of Upichiwin bay as a landscape of “sustainable development.”