

Séminaire du LATTS

VENDREDI 09 DÉCEMBRE 2022, 14h00

Salle B235 (salle du LATTS), bâtiment Bienvenüe, Champs-sur-Marne

Isadora Cruxên

Finance and Water Politics in Brazil



What are the political implications of financial investment for the provision of essential infrastructure services such as water and sanitation? Existing urban political economy scholarship has revealed an important role for states and other intermediaries in enabling financial deepening within cities. However, these analyses tend to position financial investors as relatively removed from the everyday politics of making financialization happen. This study spotlights the political agency of investors. Through comparative analysis of private water companies in Brazil, I explore what kind of political and regulatory relations financial investors such as private equity groups engender-and what political tensions emerge-after they acquire ownership stakes in urban service providers. My analysis reveals that securing financial returns may require political (re-)engineering. I show that while private water companies were quite engaged in local politics under their original owners (construction business groups), under finance they sought to “escape” it by curbing ties to public officials, reducing the autonomy of local subsidiaries, and mobilizing for the standardization of regulatory activities at the national level. I argue these centralizing efforts constituted forms of *centripetal politics* meant to enhance asset monitoring, increase regulatory legibility, and ensure stable returns within a fragmented political environment. These findings problematize the conventional analytical focus on how financial investors capitalize on local forms of entrepreneurial or speculative politics. They also reveal the need to treat institutional environments not simply as “filters” for financial investment but as objects of political contestation by finance. This opens a window for illuminating the blurry boundaries between finance and politics, and, crucially, for politicizing finance.

Isadora Cruxên is a Lecturer in Business and Society at Queen Mary University of London. Her research explores how relations between state and market actors shape the governance of essential urban infrastructures and natural resources in the global South, with a focus on water politics in Latin America. She holds a Ph.D. in Political Economy, Development and Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT '22), a Master in City Planning from MIT, and a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from the University of Brasília.



Discussants: Félix Adisson, LATTS, Université Gustave Eiffel
Daniel Sanfelici, Universidade Federal Fluminense (Brazil), USF fellow at LATTS

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