(Re) production of coastal tourist areas and climate change adaptation in the periphery: a critical perspective.

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Abstract

Space and place are the first resources of the tourist industry. Tourism is well known to transform the very own place it has built upon. Coastal tourism is a good example of how spaces, through the form of resources like the shore and the sea, are turn into a tourist product. However, as climate change is transforming the physical space of the coast, the tourist space will also be transformed on the way to adaptation. On one hand, it will transform how tourism, and tourist, interact in coastal space and, on the other hand, it will also transform the fragile cohabitation of many lands uses on the coastal space (residential, commercial, industrial, leisure, tourism, etc.).

Shorelines of the St. Lawrence River are at the heart of the tourist activities in Quebec, Canada, but also are spaces that will be strongly affected by climate change. The erosion and coastal flooding will profoundly change the physical space enhanced by tourism. For coastal communities in the periphery, adapting to these changes is crucial for their development, hence the importance of understanding the process of adaptation that will be implemented. The research aims to explore how climate change, in relation to the discourse of adaptation to climate change, is altering the spatial development of the tourism industry in coastal destinations in the periphery. From a critical approach based on the concept of production of space (Lefebvre, 1974; Harvey, 1996), it will analyze the discourses related to adaptation to climate change in coastal tourist areas. The aim of the paper is to elaborate a production of space framework to analyze the transformation and (re)production of coastal tourist space within a capitalist accumulation process. It will also identify how the discourses of tourist development and climate change adaptation combine to transform space and place, especially coastal tourist space and how local communities can interact with those discourses. The paper will exemplify with cases from the St-Lawrence River estuary, in Québec, Canada.

KeyWords: Tourism, Climate change, Québec, Canada, Production of space.
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Introduction

Recent decades have seen the climate transformed by human actions: oceans and atmosphere have warmed, the sea level is rising, and the poles ice cover has declined (Pachauri et al., 2014). According to the IPCC (2007, 2014) we are heading to an increase in average global temperature of 2.6 to 4.8 degrees by the end of the century. This increase would result in a rise in sea level of 45 to 82 centimeters. These changes are associated with an increase in extreme weather events, ocean acidification, an accentuation of coastal erosion, flooding, and invasive alien species. In Quebec, Ouranos (2014) predict an increase of 2 to 4 degrees by 2050 and 4 to 7 degree by the end of the century. The level of the St. Lawrence Gulf will increase from 30 to 75 cm. This increasing will create erosion, flooding and a transformation of the coastal ecosystem of the Gulf and the Estuary (Bernatchez et al., 2008). These climate changes will affect the whole society and industry sectors, including the tourism industry. The aim of the paper is to elaborate a production of space framework to analyze the transformation and (re)production of coastal tourist space within a capitalist accumulation process. It will also identify how the discourses of tourist development and climate change adaptation combine to transform space and place. First, we will present how climate changes impact tourism. Then, we will present the knowledge gaps in our understanding of climate change and tourism. This will bring us to focus on the importance of addressing the issue of climate change and tourism in peripheral coastal areas. Through the production of a space analysis framework, we will look at the case of the community of Notre-Dame-du-Portage (NDP) in the lower St-Lawrence region of Quebec, Canada.

Climate change and tourism

The tourism industry is vulnerable to climate change because many of its resources will be strongly affected by them, such as coastal areas and natural attractions (Jones and Phillips, 2011; Becken and Hay, 2012; Nicolls, 2014). The expected impacts on the industry are mainly on two levels: the destinations and the tourism operations (Nicolls, 2014; Pachauri et al, 2014.). Coastal destinations are likely to be most affected with the increase in sea levels and extreme weather episodes that will threaten the coastal infrastructures, submerge beaches and erode coasts. Nature tourism, whether by the sea or elsewhere, will be affected by the transformation of ecosystems and loss of biodiversity while winter destinations will have to deal with a reduction in snow cover (Becken and Hay, 2007; Simpson et al, 2008; Hall and Higham, 2005; Germain and Bleau, 2014; Kajan and Saarinen, 2013). All of these changes and the impacts they generate force tourist areas to adapt. However, compare to other sectors, research on the adaptation of the tourism industry lags behind, both internationally (Becken and Hay, 2012; Scott et al., 2009; Saarinen, 2014) and in Quebec (Germain and Bleau, 2014).
Adaptation is set both as a challenge and as a priority for the tourism industry, which is of vital importance for several communities. The main forms of adaptation are behavioral, technical and administrative (Scott et al., 2009). The adaptation of local communities would however be influenced by spatial processes where larger geographic scales intersect (e.g., National and international agreements policies) (Lepy et al. 2014) in the response capacity of local actors (Plante et al. 2011). However, current research on adaptation to climate change of the tourism industry have little interest in spatial dimensions of the adaptation process and their non-climatic factors, neither the evolution of representations of local actors in the transformation of tourism resources valued locally (Kajan and Saarinen, 2013). Effectively, these researches have focused more on the technical dimension of adaptation. Hence the importance of addressing the issue of climate change adaptation of tourism communities, particularly coastal communities, with a social and spatial angle.

The impact of climate change on tourism has yet to be fully recognized and the understanding of practical adaptation to climate change is still limited (Hall, 2012). In the short term, the social dimension of adaptation of destinations should be a research priority (Buckley, 2012). Furthermore, in North America, where the issue of climate change has been studied the most, the adaptation of coastal destinations as yet to be addressed (Buckley, 2012). Research has been mainly interested in adapting winter destinations mainly skiing (Germain and Bleau, 2014). The social dimension of adapting to climate change in peripheral coastal destinations is, therefore, necessary. Adaptation to climate change at the local level needs to integrate social representations of local actors (developers, planners, businesses and residents) (Lepy et al., 2014) in relation to the dominant discourses on climate change and tourism development (Joppa et al. 2013). Management and development of tourist areas are already very complex; adaptation to climate change is increasing this complexity.

Why adaptation is problematic for communities?

Tourism is a major industry internationally, it accounts for 9% of global GDP and generate over US $ 6 trillion in revenues (Nicolls, 2014). In Quebec, it accounts for more than 400 000 jobs and $ 12.4 billion in revenue (Tourisme Québec, 2013). Tourism is particularly important for it allows to create jobs outside the metropolitan centers. In Quebec, 65% of tourism businesses are located outside the urban centers of Montreal and Quebec (Tourisme Québec, 2013). For the territories on the outskirts of major cities, tourism is a sensitive industry whose main resource is the land and its geographical and natural attractions. Indeed, tourism is a very active industry in the process of restructuring the economies of peripheral territories, especially for those with desired and attractive environmental amenities (Hall, 2006). Whether coastal, mountain and forest areas, tourism is an economic alternative to replacing the loss of traditional industrial activities. However, this strategy is not without difficulty. As mentioned by Muller and Jansson (2006), despite a dominant discourse of tourism as an engine of development for the communities in the periphery, several obstacles are found such as the difficulty of access to capital, the lack of manpower training as well as tourism development policies ill-suited to their context. Despite these difficulties, some peripheral communities can strive in the tourism
industry. However, for these communities, climate change is likely to transform their primary resource profoundly. The adaptation of the tourism industry of those communities becomes essential to support and maintain their development, which is especially true for peripheral coastal areas we will focus on.

The coastal areas are a major tourist resource, the coastline, access to water and tourism practices associated with them are one of the main motivations for travel (Duhamel and Violier 2009). Climate change will have a significant impact on these areas, especially the changes they cause to water regimes, falling and rising sea levels, flooding and erosion (Jones and Phillips, 2011). This transformation of the coastline is a major challenge for coastal tourist areas, because this is both the physical space of tourist areas and access infrastructure that will be affected by these changes, as well as the nature of possible tourist activities in the coastal space. For example, only for US East Coast, the loss of coastal ecosystems and transformation will endanger a multi-billions industry and radically transform not only the environment but also the economy of thousands of coastal communities (Hughes, 2011).

Space is the main resource for tourism (Lozatot-Giotard, 2008; Hall and Page, 2006), the destinations do not have the ability to relocate, hence the crucial role of the adaptation process that will be at work (Joppa et al. 2013). This is especially true in the case of coastal areas where space is a scarce and coveted resource (Plante, 2011) by a multitude of stakeholders: residents, environmental groups, user associations, government agencies, private companies, etc. These stakeholders are all bearers of representations and discourses of the use and development of its resource and, by extension, of representations and discourses on climate change adaptation. If the potential of tourism to transform the space is a known issue (Ashworth and Dietworest, 1995), the issue of adaptation of tourism to the transformation of the physical space by climate change is little discussed. When approached, it is mainly in terms of natural and technical sciences (Kajan and Saarinen, 2013; Jones and Phillips, 2011), leaving aside social and spatial dimensions. The choice of adaptation strategies to climate change are made from the agents' perceptions of climate change, of the impacts that they have on the territory and of the options considered fit by them. These representations are expressed in discourse, formal and informal, on space, tourism, climate change, and adaptation. Which bring the question: How will climate change and discourse on climate change adaptation will alter the development of the tourism industry in peripheral coastal destinations?

**Space and place as an analytical framework for climate change adaptation**

Addressing the issue of climate change adaptation in the socio-geographical angle needed to look at social constructivist approaches to space, specifically what is called the approach to the production of space. This intersection between geographical and sociological gaze leads us to an epistemological posture where space is a social output (Harvey, 1990; 1996; Lefebvre, 1986; Di Meo and Bulléon, 2005). Thus, the space is not just a passive receptacle of human action; it is also a result of this action in the interpretation and appropriation that are local players. These interpretations, appropriations and social constructions by actors territorialize action (Klein,
2008; Di Meo and Bulléon, 2005). In the case of tourism, it transforms the public non-market values and amenities associated with space into commodities through product development and land market (Britton, 1991; Overton, 2010).

To analyze these, we will use a tripartite conceptualization of space: absolute space, materiality; the relative space, which flows through the space; and relational. We will focus on the relational space which is all social and political relations that give meaning to a given space for territorial actors (Harvey, 2010), relationships expressed through representations of space and social practices (Lefebvre, 1986). These relationships allows us to focus on the development of the forces that produce the historical result of the socio-economic activity in space (Smith, 1984; Soja, 1989), which includes tourism, without neglecting the role of physical constraints, which are being transformed by climate change. It is with this theoretical approach that we will address the issue of coastal tourism areas in the context of adaptation to climate change.

This paper report the first exploratory phase of a larger project on (re)production of tourist space in the context of climate change. In this phase, we restricted the analysis to the coastal community and the analyzes of four types of discourses: local municipal discourses, regional environmental technical discourses, local and national tourism development discourses and climate change discourses. The stakeholders producing those discourses are either governmental and municipal bodies or local and regional groups and organisations. Those discourses are conceptualized as one moment of the social processes internalizing all others social moments (power, values, institutions, material practices and social relations) (Harvey, 1996). They were selected on the basis that they were discourses from a recognised stakeholders in tourism, land planning and climate changes. These discourses are found under the forms of official documents, and they are aim at defining the use of the shore and the type of actions the stakeholders will take in regards of tourism, land planning and adaptation to climate changes. They have been analyzed with Nvivo with thematic textual queries. The themes guiding the queries were tourism, development, climate change, erosion, and shores. Then, the themes were reified together as part of the relational space produce and (re)produce by those discourses. We used this method to analyze how those discourses act in the local community of NDP in the Lower St-Lawrence region in Québec, Canada. The discourses analysis was twofold, where the four types of discourses were aggregated in two main discourses: tourism development discourses and climate change discourses.

**Notre-Dame-du-Portage : a summer home resort on the forefront of climate change**

The community of Notre-Dame-du-Portage (NDP) is a small community by the Saint-Lawrence River. It is characterized by its history of second home and coastal tourism activities. Since the 19th century, NDP has been a summer home resort. At the time, it was mainly members of the upper class from Québec City and Montreal and, in a lower proportion, from Toronto and New-England, who were spending their summer in the area. The development of steam cruisers on the St-Lawrence, more known as « Les bateaux blancs », and then the railroad have transform the whole region into a popular tourism destination (Gagnon, 2003). At the height of this era,
around 5,000 people were spending the summer in the stations that were NDP, St-Patrice and Cacouna (Choko et al. 2013). The main activities were cruises on the St-Lawrence, and the beaches. Today, only NDP have kept part of its tourism functions.

In 2011, NDP was a village of 1,193 residents. Its average income and schooling level are the highest of the county. Roughly, close to a third (31%) of the population own a university degree compared to 13% for the county and the average household income in 2001 was 66,574$ compared to 43,066$ for the county (Statistique Canada in MRC Rivière-du-Loup, 2012). Mainly a white collar communities, NDP is the place of residence of a local elite attracted by the view on the St-Lawrence and the access to its shore. It still count a good number of summer houses, even if the phenomena is not as important as it used to be in the 19th century. The village has two hotels right by the shore that offers spa and health services. Even if the community is not solely based on tourism anymore, its whole identity revolves around its summer home resort quality and ambiance.

The core of the tourism activities of NDP is concentrated on a small linear road at the bottom of a cliff and parallel to the shore of the St-Lawrence estuaries. This linear occupation of the shore, limited in the back by the physical constraint of the cliff make space a rare and valuable resource, but also a space at risk from extreme weather events. If the effect of climate change on the estuaries and its shore are documented since 1998 (Shaw et al. 1998), the questions became acute for NDP’s residents in December 2010 when a storm surge hit the community. During the storm, a part of the road was submerged, many houses were damaged and one of the summer homes was carried into the river by the waves. Following this storm, the question of the climate change adaptation of the community has been raised locally. Because of the strong tourism identity of the community, we analyzed the tourism discourses and the climate change discourses to try to understand the (re)production of NDP tourism space following the 2010 storm.

**Findings**

**Tourism discourses**

The tourist discourse is carried by several levels of stakeholders. Indeed, the St. Lawrence is considered one of the major attractions of the province of Québec. As mentioned by Lapointe et al. (In press) the tourism development strategy of Tourisme Québec builds an image of the St. Lawrence as a place of dreams and desires. The strategy proposes to structured recreation poles connected by touristic routes and circuits. The poles are designed to capture the international passenger flow, mainly cruise lines, and circuits to disseminate them in the coastal area. The community of NDP is 200km from the nearest pole, Quebec City and integrated into the circuit of the Route des navigateurs.

Regionally, the St. Lawrence, and its coast is also the favorite site of tourism activities. This space is represented as an exceptional natural environment, a place of contemplation and healing, but also a space for discovery and active leisure. The images used to describe are those
of a wild ecosystem little changed by man. The discourse represents it like a natural heritage that it is proposed as tourism resources.

At the local level in the municipality of NDP, tourism is presented from the perspective of vacationing. It revolves mainly around an approach of the historical heritage of the resort area express by a set of rules to keep the buildings characters and also the views of the rivers surrounding landscape. These measures result in the adoption of a Site Planning and Architectural Integration. It supervise "constructions, renovations, changing colors of buildings or changing the landscape aspect (shed, fence, hedges, parking) affecting all sectors of the buildings on the route du Fleuve "(Info-portage July 2010 p.3) . The objective is to ensure that the cultural landscape of the route du Fleuve keeps its sober looks by respecting the architectural styles and in ensuring that the views on the St. Lawrence are not unduly obstructed by architectural changes and landscaping. This policy is part of the NDP membership to the association of the most beautiful villages in Quebec.

Another element of the tourism discourse lies in the identification of the areas where the public access to the coast and beaches. This last point reflects the land ownership of the coastal area, appropriation already identified by Gagnon (2003) as a process in the development of tourism positions in Quebec. Indeed, this area is now heavily artificialized and densely built. Land holdings are held by the private and serve as a barrier to the use of the public part of the coast. This observation highlights the importance that is put locally to identify, and in some cases to negotiate, passages for access to the coast.

In short, this tourist discourse represents NDP’s space as an access point to the St. Lawrence River, which is a unique natural area harboring ecosystems to protect and discover. Heritage conservation values are invested in space along the route du Fleuve to limit changes that private residential use, now in the majority uses, can cause to the resort-like atmosphere. In addition, local desire to preserve public access to the coast in order to maintain the social and material practices associated with it (eg. Walking, swimming, boating and landscape contemplation) emphasizes the importance of access to the coast in local tourism practices. These observations also allow seeing the extent of private ownership of this highly valued space. It is also important to note that the analyzed tourist discourses only mention the issue of climate change in terms of the change in the seasonality of tourism and never as a force capable of transforming the tourism space.

Climate changes adaptation discourses

The discourse on climate change is carried by national actors, mainly in the form of the Quebec strategy to fight climate change (Quebec, 2012). As we pointed out in a previous article (Lapointe et al., In Press), this speech presents the St. Lawrence as a focal area through multiple streams, economic and social, but also a vulnerable area to climate change. The adaptation is presented as being dependent on the values that will be granted to these areas, and, implicitly suggesting regulation by the market.
Regionally, the discourse on climate change adaptation is integrated into the land planning discourses as well as environmental planning discourses. The land planning discourse present adaptation to climate change as a regulatory issue which, through a tightening of planning regulations for landowners located in hazardous areas, allows to frame protection of shore and infrastructure located in those areas. Adaptation becomes a responsibility of private owners within a regulatory framework that identified structures that can be built to protect the land from erosion and flooding.

The other regional discourse is an environmental discourse carried by integrated coastal zone management organizations. It presents the space of the estuary as a natural space transformation under the impact of climate change. These would be amplified by the degradation of coastal ecosystems. The adaptation is presented ambiguously, private and public, individual and collective. This ambiguity passes mainly through the naturalization of coastal ecosystems, public and collective actions so that they can play their role in the control of coastal erosion. Although this environmental discourse emphasizes consultation and interventions to restore the coastal ecosystems, they do not disqualify many individual land protection interventions in coastal areas. Indeed, although this discourse describes artificial interventions such as walls as interventions whose long-term effectiveness should be questioned, it still offers a set of good practices in connection with these interventions. This double discourse reflects a desire for efficiency where private owners, due to extreme weather events, will promote interventions that aim to block the water and its effect on their property. In the case of NDP, where most of the coast is built and artificialized, this discourse is spatially expressed through an intervention to replant native species in the marshes of the north-east bay. This action is taking place in the area where the private appropriation of the coast is almost absent. This procedure thus leaves a blur to focus on interventions in the artificialized area even in the public part of the coast under high water.

Conclusion: (re)production of space of tourism in context of climate changes

Our objective was to explore how tourism development discourses and climate change adaptation discourses were involved in (re)producing tourism space. We analyzed national, regional and local discourses and their effects on the production of the tourist space of the community of Notre-Dame-du-Portage. Because of the exploratory dimension of the research we limited the scope to those discourses and used a basic threefold space matrix: absolute, relative and relational spaces as internalized relations of every social space and social moments (Harvey, 2010).

Going back to the idea of the production of the NDP's tourist space, it is prominent to note that the different discourses on development of tourism in this area, as well as those on adaptation to climate change, presents a relational space through a strong dialectic between non-market tourism resources (eg. the view, the heritage, the St. Lawrence, the coastline under the high water, etc.) and private action, mainly in land ownership and its ability to transform non-market tourism resources into exchange values in the relative space produced by economic flows. This
dialectic illustrates the development of tourism as consumers area that relied on cultural and symbolic distinctions, through the land market (Overton, 2010). However, in our case, this private land ownership of the coastline, limit collective action and public adaptation to climate change.

Public action focuses on protection of the ambiance elements (architectural integration policy, protection of views towards the river, identification of access to the "public" area of the coast [down the high water marks]) but these measures, to ensure the reproduction of non-market tourism resources, also lead to greater monopolistic scope of land ownership. Internalized values in the relational space discourse make it possible to fix economic flows of relative space in the absolute space. This situation where more nonmarket resources that make this space attractive are well protected, the more land position is valued as rare and desirable. This reinforces the material and individual practices of land protection, mainly the erection of walls, to address erosion and rising sea levels.

So the measures in place to mitigate the private appropriation of the coast, measures to maintain the tourism quality and attractiveness offered by the St. Lawrence and its coastline, justify the investment of economic and symbolic values to protect land position. Protecting the quality of the tourism ambiance (re) produces the space of coastline in NDP as a unique place capable of transforming this ambiance into exchange values, through the land market. This situation creates a feedback loop where protection and ownerships are self-feeding. In this context, the current discourse on climate change adaptation transforms the space into a risk area that carries a latent threat to land, justifying the actions of individual and private adaptations that protect the land in the short term rather than in a concerted public manners. In addition, these private adaptation measures such as protective walls are in place despite the fact that the effectiveness of these has not been demonstrated and in many cases these approaches could aggravate the situation. Tenure of space and its tourism development through private land ownership by second home market is never challenged in the analyzed speech, suggesting that these loops of production and (re) production of space by tourism will be dominant until the next extreme weather event.

References


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