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# Place, pipelines and political subjectivities in invisibilized urban peripheries

Sophie L. Van Neste 

## ABSTRACT

Place is often made invisible in infrastructure siting conflicts; this seems particularly the case in the rural–urban fringe and the in-between city. This paper analyses how collectives struggle to give place visibility in debates over large fossil fuel infrastructure projects, in two cases of pipeline opposition. It then focuses on mobilizations in urban peripheries, regarding which there is an enduring assumption of homogeneity in place attachments and in motives for political engagement. Mobilizations in the peripheries of Montreal (Canada) and Boston (USA) metropolitan areas are analysed in the challenges of arriving at a diverse ‘sense of place’. The meanings of the pipeline threat among activists differ in the context of different relations to place in everyday life and in former conflicts, which affect their shared discourses and individual encounters – experiences of colonial urbanism, farmers’ relations with the land, practices of land conservation, as well as relations with the state, grassroots and environmental organizations. Scholarship on the politics of place and the work of Hannah Arendt are used to conceptualize the (trans)formation of political subjectivity when struggling to give visibility to place, and to a diverse sense of place, in the urbanized society.

## KEYWORDS

place; political subjectivity; infrastructure; urban fringe; in-between city; urban peripheries

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## INTRODUCTION

Critical urban studies scholars urge one to look at the conditions of urbanity and the dynamics of political action in spaces that are recurrently threatened by (and adjacent to) new infrastructure projects (Arboleda, 2016; Qviström, 2010; Young & Keil, 2014). For Arboleda (2016), urban politics occurs as much through the territorialization of infrastructure and provision of energy as it does in the dense city areas extensively studied by urbanites. The work done on urban peripheries – whether coined as being on the fringes (Qviström, 2010), or the ‘in-between city’ (in German *Zwischenstadt*; Sieverts, 2003) – suggest that these sites, as places of inhabitation and history, are rendered invisible in infrastructure decision-making processes. While they are more likely to receive the infrastructure needed to support our urban lifestyles, they simultaneously hold a marginal position in the governance process. The present paper looks at the struggle to make place visible in urban peripheries.

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The objective is to understand better the difficulties of providing visibility for place in the infrastructure politics of urban peripheries. More specifically, of interest here is the difficulty of arriving at a *diverse* 'sense of place' in these conflicts, with different place subjectivities recognized and taken into account. Urban peripheries have been recently discussed as a locus of urban politics which deserved much more attention. They continue to be understudied and under problematized in terms of agency and political engagement. Scholars studying environmental politics have also pointed to emerging political subjectivities in place/infrastructure conflicts experienced by a diverse public (Groves, 2015; Willow & Wylie, 2014). These two strands of literature allow one to reframe old questions on political action when confronted with a subordination of place to large infrastructure, particularly when it comes to understanding and qualifying the enduring challenge of giving visibility to place and to the diversity of place attachments in urban peripheries.

These issues were studied in the investigation of two cases of pipeline opposition in Quebec, Canada, and in the US state of Massachusetts. Over the last two decades, the extraction and transportation of fossil fuels have grown rapidly in North America. As a result, the presence of energy infrastructure in inhabited areas has expanded significantly as well. Pipelines are vigorously opposed by environmentalists, who target them in their campaigns against climate change and fossil fuels. These campaigns are especially supported by groups and individuals who focus on the harm done to the places these pipelines cross.

The paper is structured as follows. It first discusses the difficulties of political participation in spaces of future infrastructure siting. The characteristics of urban fringes and in-between cities and how they shed a light on processes of place invisibilization are addressed. The literature on environmental politics and colonial urbanism in Canada is also introduced to understand better the harm done in processes of place invisibilization. The process of securing a public sphere to voice different relations to place is then discussed. The methods and cases are next presented to finally present and contrast the two pipeline opposition cases.

## THE INVISIBILITY OF PLACE AND PLACE DIVERSITY IN URBAN PERIPHERIES (OF THE GLOBAL NORTH)

There is a renewed interest in the politics of urban peripheries. This section introduces contributions that present the invisibility of place and of power differentials in urban peripheries. It focuses on key processes described by scholars to explain the qualification of urban peripheries as 'non-places' and their association with a lack of agency. This introduction leads to a discussion of the politics of place from the urban fringes and of its contribution to the formation and transformation of political subjectivity in urban peripheries.

The notion of rural–urban fringe is far from new. It has been discussed since the 1930s in both geography and rural studies, at first, with regard to the pressure put on agricultural land by urbanization (Bryant, 1995; Gant, Robinson, & Fazal, 2011). In the literature on the rural–urban fringe, attention has been put on macro-processes of uneven development because of which certain urban fringes face similar conditions than peripheral regions. These processes have differentiated impacts on territories in the fringe, providing unequal opportunities and living conditions. Regarding these works, Bryant (1995) criticized the fact that local actors were seen as being passive or reactive to these processes, as if they were not participating in the heterogeneous and culturally differentiated production of the rural–urban fringe territories. More recently, scholars have also emphasized how much the history of these spaces is often invisibilized. For Gant et al. (2011, p. 267), these 'edgelands are classic "non-places" ... , they are anonymous and lack identity'. Yet, they often carry the history of functions excluded from the central city in different periods. Qviström (2010) emphasizes how these hybrid landscapes carry with them legacies of the past planning and siting decisions, which continues to be part of people's everyday lives. The history of the settler colonial states adds a deeper layer to the invisibility of place history and of power

differentials in the urban fringes. Canadian colonial urbanism especially formalized an apartheid-style rule where Indigenous communities were forced into reserves outside cities, 'pushed in the margins of the emerging settler society', as Tomiak (2011, p. 168) explains. The precarious status of life both in- and outside reserves is a constant reminder of the violence of this colonial policy pushing them out of the city. Resource extraction and pipeline expansion impose a second layered oppression through infrastructure on their claimed and inhabited territories on the 'urban frontier'. Indigenous struggles against pipelines are, as Kipfer (2018) argues at length, struggles against a multilayered oppression visible in the interface of place and urbanization.

In the urban studies literature, the status of urban peripheries as being on the 'margin' and 'fringe' is being reinterpreted (Sieverts, 2003; Young & Keil, 2014). Sieverts (2003) used the term 'Zwischenstadt' (in-between city) to denote these spaces of heterogeneity and hybridity – where open space interpenetrates with infrastructural networks and built forms of different uses and density. Sieverts (2003) argues these are now spaces where the majority of mankind lives, although they do not fit the aesthetic and planning norms of 'the city'. Developing on the in-between city, Young and Keil (2014) focus on the recurrent siting of hard infrastructure in hybrid and disconnected spaces outside central neighbourhoods and affluent exosuburbs. They describe the in-between city as having no memory. The fact that a place is made invisible is related to 'the function it performs for the broader metropolitan system of whose contradictions it is a product' (p. 6), but whose inhabitants experience its consequences, including the uneven impact of urbanization and low political participation. The focus here is not specifically on one of these two concept or type of spaces (the fringe or in-between city), but rather in the similar political processes observed in them. Young and Keil characterize the in-between city as 'a political vacuum', while Bryant (1995) states that 'local agency in the urban fringe is seen almost entirely in a negative light because of the presumed inability of local actors to take account of the broader interests of society' (p. 256). The association of political action in the fringes with 'defensive elitism' (Bryant, 1995) and selfish and inward-looking modes of inhabiting clubs (Charmes, 2011) still currently seems to participate in the invisibilization of unequal opportunities and legacies of urbanization in urban peripheries, as well an invisibilization of the diversity in forms of political engagements in the fringe. A call to open the black box of place attachments and political engagements in urban peripheries was made recently in the French urban studies literature (Faburel, 2018), in the post-suburban literature (Phelps, Vento, & Roitman, 2015) and with regard to the locus of urban politics more generally (Rodgers, Barnett, & Cochrane, 2014).

## VOICING PLACE SUBJECTIVITIES DURING CONFLICTS

Aside from the particularities of the urban fringe, place/infrastructure conflicts have long been analysed in rather simplistic categories that tend to disregard the political subjectivities of participants speaking from the point of view of place. The commonly used pejorative expression 'NIMBY' (not in my back yard) is a loaded term associated with selfishness and emotionality (Devine-Wright, 2009), and one that does not pay tribute to the individual and collective effects of place stigma (Groves, 2015). Bickerstaff (2012) argues that distant people and events in place/infrastructure disputes are made invisible by the discursive structuring of conflict as local opposition, with predefinitions of the affected community and relevant public. Research shows that the NIMBY attitude can be constructed and reinforced through regulatory and political processes that surround infrastructure. It can be bolstered by state procedures that highlight residents who are directly and materially affected, and through expectations of industry and mediators dealing with the public (Inch, 2012; Salomons & Hoberg, 2014; Walker, Cass, Burningham, & Barnett, 2010). These processes restrict the range of political subjectivities associated with place in infrastructure debates. The absent or invisibilized public, as discussed by Bickerstaff (2012), relates to the unacknowledged historical trajectories of place, and how they affect individuals wishing to participate.

Projected infrastructure raises conflicts that can reveal the diversity of place attachments and political engagements on the urban fringe, as well as potential encounters. Willow and Wylie (2014) suggest that place disruption caused by fossil fuel expansion has created new connections, or at least similar experiences, between different groups. They note that in the ‘fracking communities’ disturbed by shale gas extraction in the United States, there was a common ‘experience of environmental degradation as a hallmark of changing social positions’ between middle-class Americans and Indigenous communities (p. 230). When a new infrastructure project is announced (with possible impacts and risks to places), it can dramatically affect the capacity of individuals to deal with uncertainty. Groves (2015) coins this process the ‘colonization of attachment’ through which ‘the capability for domesticating a future sustained by place attachment is threatened’ (p. 868). Place attachment ties humans individual and collective capabilities to the biophysical world. It provides a secure space that is essential for political agency and involvement in the world. For Grove, this remains underrecognized in infrastructure decision-making processes.

The present paper argues that the recognition of agency in urban peripheries is related to a recognition of place attachments. The urban fringe and in-between city are read as places relationally constituted of ties and attachments between humans and non-human (Pierce, Martin, & Murphy, 2011). As Pierce et al. (2011) explain, places, although they are experienced as having history and a certain permanency (Harvey), are dynamically evolving constellations, socially and politically constructed, in processes coined by Doreen Massey (2005) as ‘bundling’:

bundling proceeds through individual people’s (conscious and unconscious) acts of selecting or choosing raw materials, or elements, which comprise places in their experiences (akin to identifying constellations among the stars of the night sky). This selecting is always informed by social process. (Pierce et al., 2011, p. 59)

and by differentials in power. The ties (‘bundles’) that are constitutive of people’s experience and representation of the fringe are not always recognized by actors that have granted power over its transformation (in the present case, the state and promoters of infrastructure). Place-making can lead to explicit formulations of ‘place frames’ by collectives, which are strategically formulated representations of places during conflict. These place frames are negotiated between actors and involve acts of inclusion and exclusion. The content of these place frames relates not only to the place ‘bundles’ but also to the opportunities and constraints given by the framing of issues by the institutions and activists’ opponents, and by the particular arenas and networks in which they interact. This framework of the politics of place-making will be used to understand the constraints and opportunities to voice particular place concerns and attachments. It enables the understanding of the process of gaining visibility and agency to urban peripheries. The second objective of this paper is to understand how the process of mobilizing for place in the urban fringe participates in the formation and transformation of political subjectivity, and its anchorage in a more or less ‘diverse’ sense of place. To understand this, this paper builds on the work of Hannah Arendt.

## THE FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITIES

For Arendt, what is most at stake in political action is not the resulting achievement (which is always unpredictable), but the setting into motion of something and, more crucially, of somebody. This beginning happens *when we speak and act in the public realm*. For many, the formation of political subjectivity is not explicitly related to moments of sharing in public (Boudreau, 2017; Mama, 1995). Arendt argues that it is in acting/speaking in a space of appearance that political subjects are born and revealed (Allen, 2002).

For Arendt, the public realm, in its most basic sense, is ‘sheer human togetherness’: ‘Action and speech need the surrounding presence of others no less than fabrication needs the surrounding presence of nature for its material’ (Arendt, 1998, p. 188). This requires a securing of the public sphere, in two ways. The first prerequisite is the space of appearance. It is where words and deeds are shared in the ‘widest possible publicity’ (p. 50), and that humans tend to want to organize and ensure a form of organized ‘remembrance’. This serves as a safeguard for the space of appearance (defined as a web of relations between people living together where they may act and speak), revealing their distinctiveness. For Arendt, this is a crucial condition for political action.

The second prerequisite for the existence of the public realm is the pursuit of plurality with regard to a common world:

the reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself. ... Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position. (p. 57)

The public sphere is preserved when a diversity of distinct humans, through their own burgeoning subjectivity, are ‘concerned with the same object’, a form of ‘commonality’, instead of being individually imprisoned in their own singular experience (pp. 57–58).

The work of Arendt allows one to identify two processes in the formation of political subjectivity in relation to place. First, a struggle for a space of appearance. The space of appearance is not simply a physical, territorial or formal political space. It is considered to be a primary web of relations and meanings that define the appropriate ‘public’ in debates. For subjects to act politically, and through it become somebody, they need a space in which their acts and deeds can ‘fall into an already existing web where their immediate consequences can be felt’ (p. 184). The struggle to ensure a space of appearance is a process of humans acting *together* (there is a collective component emphasized by Arendt in her vision of power) that ensures a space for this distinctiveness to be heard. The argument in relation to place is that *by securing a space of appearance for place and by giving it visibility, distinctive political subjectivities are revealed*.

## STUDYING TWO CASES OF PIPELINE OPPOSITION

This paper studies the voicing of place subjectivities in two cases of pipeline opposition in North America. In Canada, the author studied opposition to two pipelines in the province of Quebec between 2013 and 2015 (Line 9B from Enbridge and East energy pipeline from TransCanada). In the United States, the author studied conflicts around a (now) abandoned project of a new high-pressure natural gas transmission line that would have brought gas to New England (the NED pipeline from Kinder Morgan). In both these cases, the regulatory framework was contested, as well as the extraction of the resource itself.

While the federal energy regulatory structure is similar between the Canadian and US cases, the local democratic institutions are quite different. In Massachusetts, activists used town meetings (direct democracy), which have no true equivalent in Quebec. The particular evolution of fossil fuel opposition in Quebec has made municipalities important arenas in the voicing of concerns, however. After a train transporting crude oil exploded, costing the lives of 47 people, in Lac Mégantic in 2013, municipalities started creating risk-management committees and allied themselves with other citizens to demand greater provincial and federal vigilance on fossil fuels’ circulation. Resident organizations made municipal councils adopt resolutions against pipelines or for the better regulation of pipeline risks, which, if not discussed and adopted by means of direct democracy, followed a very similar pattern to the town to town grassroots mobilization in Massachusetts. In both Quebec and Massachusetts, activists used both the tactic of local resolutions, and marching along the proposed pipeline route.

In the territories crossed by the pipeline, the proposed route would mean several impacts. First, it affects the right of way which would need to be maintained (a 15-m-wide treeless corridor which would be doubled during construction), this has aesthetic and ecological consequences, especially in terms of natural habitat fragmentation. The pipeline can also pose risks to water quality in the case of damage or leaks. These projects also require compressor stations that bring their own impacts (pollution from the use of chemicals, though the science on this is still progressing, emergency risks and noise issues). The perception of risk relates not only to the probability of a risk of failure (such as a leak) but also to the faith in institutions when it comes to limiting, controlling and managing the possibility of failure (Kasperson et al., 1988). Not to be overlooked are also the impacts of fossil fuel expansion on climate change, which were also a crucial part of the concerns.

The struggle to give place visibility is a collective one which the author studied through the efforts of civic actors attempting to be heard in the regulatory process, and through the campaigns they set in motion. The second struggle to recognize difference in place subjectivity is better captured through accounts of the experience of the mobilization by individual activists. The fieldwork consisted of participation in rallies and protest events with activists, with nine and 12 informal interviews, respectively, conducted while walking, plus 12 longer interviews for each case and a press coverage. The author also conducted a discourse analysis on the transcripts of hearings, town meetings and parliamentary commission, and on complementary documents and videos cited. In the interviews, activists were asked about their motivation for opposing the pipeline, the history of their involvement, their relationship with the places affected, their interactions with groups and individuals as well as the state regulatory process. The author focused the fieldwork in areas in the urban periphery; the first case is closer to the in-between city type, trapped in infrastructural networks between Montreal and Ottawa, and the second of the rural–urban fringe type, constantly ‘threatened’ by anticipated new projects, but still very much a residential frontier with much conservation land, in the periphery of Boston. Both areas studied are located at the extremity of a metropolitan area, 55–75 km (about an hour’s drive) from urban centres.

## GIVING VISIBILITY TO PLACE IN THE OPPOSITION TO PIPELINES IN QUEBEC

The regulatory and political context is important to understanding pipeline opposition in Quebec. While there was a sharp increase in the number of pipeline proposals to transport the crude oil produced in Alberta, federal safety and environmental assessment procedures were reduced by the conservative government in 2012, with a more restrictive participatory process (Salomons & Hoberg, 2014). Environmental organizations denounced this drawback. When the devastating Lac Mégantic accident occurred, public mistrust over the state’s capacity to regulate oil transport escalated. These events shifted the conventional reading of local opposition to infrastructure away from the more trivial ‘not in my back yard’. It provided a context where collective efforts to give visibility to place were facilitated. For each of the three campaigns presented below there were different understandings of the politics of place in relation to pipelines. While place subjectivities were different, there was nevertheless a similar focus on *giving place visibility*.

### The ‘Directly Affected’ Campaign

When the federal environmental impact assessment procedure was modified in 2012, the National Energy Board (NEB) was given the power to set the agenda for topics to be discussed at public hearings on proposed pipelines. The climate change impacts of increased oil sands extraction were explicitly excluded from the list of topics. Additionally, only experts, whose expertise had to be proven via their curriculum vitae and after filling out a 10-page form, and

those 'directly affected' were allowed to participate (with a very narrow spatial definition for the category of those 'directly affected', i.e., only people living in a 1 km zone around the proposed pipeline). In this context, environmental non-governmental organizations (NGOs) wished to emphasize the discarded climate change issues related to pipeline expansion. A letter writing campaign to the NEB on climate change was organized. A local focus on the places threatened by pipelines seemed to them to participate in depoliticizing the issue and allowing for a focus on individual monetary compensation.

A grassroots organization called Climate Justice Montreal had a different take. The group was created in 2009 at a gathering of young Canadian climate change activists held in Ottawa. Inspired by the global climate justice movement, they wished to fight for climate justice where fossil fuel infrastructure was being proposed and where it impacts the most disadvantaged communities. Kathy, an activist from this group, also emphasized in an interview that from their perspective, the environmental movement was too centralized and was disproportionately led by professional NGOs. They wanted to make it more grassroots, and better connect it with local struggles in a wide network for climate justice.

The 'Directly Affected Campaign' they set up for the public hearings on the Enbridge reversal aimed at showing how everybody was in fact 'affected': 'Our communities, our food, our water, our air, and our future are all impacted by the flow of Tar Sands oil across Canada' (Justice Climatique Montréal, 2013). A social media campaign was organized where pictures of individuals with notes on how they were 'directly affected' were posted. At the same time, the group denounced the constraints against participation at the NEB hearings. A total of 22 activists disrupted the hearings, saying they were there to speak on behalf of those directly affected, but who had not been allowed to do so. A story was recited in turn (*M. Enbridge and the Flood*), which told the tale of a farmer, an Indigenous community and an old woman living in the city threatened by the impacts of the Enbridge pipeline. The TransCanada pipeline hearings were also disrupted, which led to their postponement.

### Walking for Mother Earth

Healing Walks have become recurring events in Alberta in the struggle against the Tar Sands. 'It was conceived of as a ceremonial walk of prayer, to be coordinated by First Nations' (Cardinal, 2014, p. 130), appealing to people from different places to come witness the harm done to First Nations communities and express their solidarity.

In Quebec, a 'People's Walk for Mother Earth' was organized in a similar spirit in the communities to be impacted by the pipeline. It was organized not by First Nations communities, but by members of resident associations (against shale gas and pipelines) and a group of former students engaged in the 2012 student strikes. The 34-day march held in 2014 followed the projected route of the TransCanada pipeline. Montreal youths and students were majoritarily the leaders and most devoted walkers (15–20 walked most of the path and were joined by daily walkers, making for 20–50 each day). Walkers appreciated the rural landscapes they crossed, and the local connections they made. In the last part of the march, they crossed the long eastern industrial periphery of Montreal. A press event was planned at the oil refinery, where a leader made a speech emphasizing Indigenous land dispossession, citizens feeling of disempowerment with regard to pipeline expansion in their towns, and the incoming tar sands to be refined in the community of East Montreal already suffering from environmental injustice. The event was covered in major Montreal newspapers.

By naming the rally the 'People's Walk for Mother Earth', the organizers meant to embrace the diversity of nations in Quebec and acknowledge the long struggles of First Nations peoples. Collaboration with First Nations was, however, limited, as only two Indigenous activists participated directly in the walk. However, the Kanehsata:ke Mohawk community welcomed the



walkers for the final destination (thanks to the friendship of members of the community with their neighbouring activists – a topic discussed below), and the walk ended very symbolically in the community with ceremonial chants, speeches and a press conference. Mohawks from Kanehsatà:ke were among the leaders working for the ‘Treaty Alliance against Oil Sands Expansion’ in 2015 where Indigenous groups across the country joined to ‘officially prohibit and agree to collectively challenge and resist the use of our respective territories’ for tar sands expansion (Treaty Alliance, 2015).

### ‘Coule Pas Chez Nous’

In addition to these campaigns, non-Indigenous resident committees against Enbridge and TransCanada Pipelines created a campaign called ‘Coule pas chez nous’ (Don’t spill in our home) in 2014, whose main goal they described as a ‘territorial defence’ against fossil fuel infrastructure. More specifically, in its official presentation, the mission of Coule pas chez nous was to mobilize against non-conventional fossil fuel projects when they affect quality of life, sense of safety, the sustainability of ecosystems and water quality.

The Coule pas chez nous campaign quickly gained a high visibility and independence from environmental NGOs, thanks in part to ties with a former student leader who helped with funding.<sup>1</sup> To manage the large donations, a foundation with specific decision-making rules was created to ensure that resident committees (locally based and volunteer groups) could decide on the citizen projects funded within Coule pas chez nous campaigns. With this 100% citizen-based organization, resident committees had the resources to have their own voice, independent of environmental NGO partners (even while still happily collaborating in a broader united front for an energy transition). For its leaders, providing visibility to resident committees also strategically aimed to universalize ‘concerned citizens’, that is, anyone, ‘not a specific profile of people with environmental hobbies’. In this regard, the person who spoke on behalf of the movement was crucial, as this leader from the campaign explained.

The point is not to let environmental groups be the spokespersons whenever fossil fuels or greenhouse gases are spoken of in the news, which is often the case, although this is changing. ... When they come to attack us, they won’t be able to say, “It’s just a bunch of this or, a group of that”. There will be all kinds of people in front of them: seniors, children in strollers, pregnant women, all kinds of people, so they can’t discard the movement from any angle. It’s going to be workers, not necessarily *BS*<sup>2</sup> but it’s going to be *BS* too, the whole society will be in front of them.

For the group Coule pas chez nous, what seemed to universally concern any citizen was his or her tie with land and place.

### Encounters in the In-Between City

These campaigns to give visibility to threatened places succeeded and involved actors with different experiences of the place/infrastructure interface. A public sphere was created for place-positioned actors to speak up, and on the level of discourse at least, it successfully allowed for diversity and plurality. In the experience of activists, however, whether and how the emphasis on giving visibility to place successfully fostered encounters and solidarity across differences in place subjectivity remains to be considered.

The area studied more closely could be coined an ‘in-between city’. It is located in the north-west periphery of the greater Montreal region. Situated at the limits of the urban growth perimeter, much of the area is agricultural land, but has seen great population growth in recent years (ISQ, 2016). Situated between Ottawa and Montreal, the region is crossed by three national

highways, three pipelines and two railways. The mix of agricultural and residential uses in addition to these large infrastructure projects require cautious planning in terms of risk and transport management. On the other side of the Ottawa River are the Kanehsà:ke Mohawk reserve and territories. The tense relations and the lack of acknowledgment of their land reached high visibility during the 1990 Oka crisis, when a sacred part of their unacknowledged territory was earmarked by the town of Oka for a new golf course. Protests followed, starting with peaceful road blockades and evolving into violent repression and altercations. The conflict lasted 78 days and left an indelible mark on relations between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples throughout Canada and beyond (Simpson & Ladner, 2010).

This area is thus charged with history and infrastructure. It was host to two of the most active resident committees fighting the pipelines in the Montreal region from 2012 to 2014. One association received support from planners worried about risk management. These planners themselves participated actively in the municipal campaign and informally in helping resident campaigns. Non-Indigenous resident associations also developed close relations with farmers and Indigenous communities who were formerly distant and in tense relations with the environmentalist networks. It started with the activists' desire to invite them to their events and recruit them as allies. What first seemed relatively straightforward became a brokering act that was far more complex and transformative than they had imagined.

Lucie is one of the founding members of the western resident committee. She became involved in the fight against the Enbridge pipeline only a few months after having moved to the area. She had concerns regarding her new home and how her water supply would be affected. Unemployed at the time, she devoted much work to her group's involvement in the NEB hearings (being in the few resident groups that successfully met all the requirements to be heard, as she lived in the 1 km zone). After the hearings, they realized how absent the farmers were in the pipeline opposition, although they seemed directly affected. The previously existing pipelines restricted their activities on their land with very little or no compensation at all. She contacted several farmers to invite them to the next events. The first responses were harsh. 'My first contact was very difficult, by phone, he almost screamed at me.' Others she went to see in their home, to 'try to understand their experience and worries a little bit better ... and see what they were experiencing. It was horrendous how they were treated by pipeline companies'. Several of the farmers she met were defensive because of their mistrust of environmentalists, who they felt had not been on their side historically, pushing for bylaws that restricted their activities on their own land. One of her fellow activists involved in an adjacent town also met with the farmers to try to rally them to oppose the pipeline and not just the pipeline that was to fall on their fields. He commented:

Farming, that really is another world. They're certainly something. They're in their own bubble. They are really difficult to ... they're not easy to work with. They are both stewards of the land, but it seems, some of them also have retrograde ideas, it's difficult, it's another world. We are trying to build something long term. We don't just distribute flyers for example, and then leave thinking the job's done. It doesn't work like that. They know we're newcomers. They can't tell whether it's sincere or not. So, if they see us over the long term, we can build better ties. This is what I have been doing, for the past year.

Lucie's group became more attentive to the particular needs of her neighbouring farmers and oriented much of the group's efforts around them. The first effort was to respond to their desire for independent expertise – while the farmers she met did not trust the information from the company, they also did not trust the environmentalists. The second effort was to help them defend their rights over the use of their own land and water. Lucie's group recruited an independent engineer from the United States to come talk about pipeline risks and surveillance, and a land-owner's rights legal organization. No farmers came to the events. Despite the lack of traction

with the farmers, this effort served the opposition movement generally, furnishing the only independent experts in the field of pipeline safety, who could support some of their claims. Lucy was grateful that she came to a better understanding of the neighbouring farmers' perspective, and vice versa, although this relationship had not been easy.

Eric is the founding member of the northern area resident committee. He heard of the Enbridge pipeline reversal project in his area – the first pipe to bring oil sands fuel to Quebec – through his involvement in a provincial political party. He created in response a resident committee against the exploitation and transportation of tar sands fuel. By expanding his local connections, he first developed acquaintances with members from the neighbouring Mohawk community while attending a local event. In his area, relations had already been developed between the Kanehsatà:ke Mohawk community and the non-Indigenous community during their communal opposition to niobium mining in their area. While the group was not active anymore, members still met at casual environmental events. After this first opportunity, Eric and members from the Kanehsatà:ke community spoke about organizing an opposition event to Enbridge together. This event was framed around the fight against climate change and in defence of Mohawk territorial claims. Eric was uneasy at first with this mix of claims, as he recalls:

In the preparation of all that [joint mobilizing event], there were difficult moments because the real issue they saw was, yes, climate, but mostly it was about the territorial claims they wanted to put forward. And I just didn't get it. It's not about territorial claims I thought then ... let's not shuffle the cards here.

Although it was not obvious to him at first, Eric explained how he came to understand how the territorial offences to native communities were constitutive, for them, of the climate struggle and of the fight against the expansion of fossil fuels. Fossil fuel exploitation destroyed native communities' places of livelihood in Canada and Mohawks worked in solidarity with natives across the country. In the Montreal region specifically, the pipeline projects were one supplementary offence to the historical nonrecognition of their territories and the threat to lands and waters they used for fishing and hunting: 'it's a never-ending story of violations and infringements on their agreements with the provincial state, the federal state, the municipality of Oka, the surrounding environment. ... They're in a permanent struggle for their right to exist, their right of being there'. It is through these interactions that Eric came to see the violence of this continuous history of territorial non-recognition. His perspective on areas being threatened by the pipeline was transformed. He tried to facilitate Mohawk involvement in the anti-fossil fuel movement, but was increasingly conscious of the cultural challenges involved:

This is a very fragile issue ... because we want them at the table, part of it all, but it's certain that walking at our rhythm is a constraint. The rhythm isn't the same. It's difficult, very difficult, as much for them as for us. No blame to be laid, it's just to emphasize the fact that the concepts, the ways they see it are completely different from ours. And it's difficult just to get to where we would like it to work, or where they might want it to see it work. The meetings, the rhythm of the meetings, the duration, as well as the way the topic is approached, as a whole ... it's incredible.

To build relations Eric said we needed time. 'Now I am not seen as a stranger, I am part of them, they know I have a feeling of attachment. This builds up over time, we need to take the time.'

In the end, these encounters did not lead to formal alliances between resident committees or environmentalists with First Nations (or with farmers), nor to a convergent representation of the places threatened. Nevertheless, through neighbouring relations in the in-between city, leaders of the resident committees developed a deeper understanding of what the threats to place had meant for their neighbours in the past, and how it affected their contribution to the fossil fuel opposition

in the present. This altered their own place subjectivity and the contributions they made to the movement.

## GIVING VISIBILITY TO PLACE IN THE OPPOSITION TO PIPELINES IN MASSACHUSETTS

The US pipeline regulatory review procedure is similar to the Canadian one in that it is steered by a federal agency specializing in energy infrastructure. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) has never turned down any pipeline proposal,<sup>3</sup> and easily oversteps local bylaws.

The first steps of the pipeline project assessment did give visibility to place, however. The owners of the land where the pipeline was to be installed had to agree to the surveying of their land for the company to document its project (this step comes later in the Canadian case). Additionally, most of the towns on the pipeline's path were governed by town hall governments, a form of direct democracy in which town voters come to meeting halls to legislate policy and vote on town budgets, through an annual town hall meeting and additional special meetings held on special occasions. In the first months, these steps granted the resident opponents much clout. Subsequent campaigns to make a space for place in energy politics proved much more difficult. At stake was not only the limits imposed by the regulatory procedure but also how the activists' own strategic framing disqualified the emphasis on place.

### Town Meetings and Opposition to Surveying

One of the first actions taken against the pipeline was to oppose surveying by the pipeline company. The opposition to surveys had a multiplying effect. At information meetings, the hundreds of attendees heard about the many landowners and the number of towns on the pipeline route that had denied access to their properties for the survey. In total, 450 landowners on the preferred route denied access to their land, and hundreds more did the same for the previous preferred route.

Resident leaders then started drafting resolutions opposing the pipeline and votes were held at town hall meetings. In 2014 and 2015, a total of 77 towns halls voted at town hall meetings, on or near the pipeline path between the west end of the state and Dracut, on a non-binding resolution against the pipeline (non-binding because towns do not have effective authority on the issue, but the resolution reflected the citizen opposition). This was a large decentralized movement. In several towns, forests and biodiversity conservation issues were among the biggest concerns. In others, concerns were about the proposed path running through a school back yard, or about the health and public safety issues of compressor stations. For the activists the author spoke to, the special town hall meetings were powerful moments, sometimes with the biggest attendance on record. The overall feeling expressed was anger and surprise that locally important and cherished places had not been considered, with no attempt to avoid them at all when it came to the chosen path for the infrastructure. One leader summarized how their group felt about the selection of the route: 'They look at us like, we're just Google Earth. – Oh, it would be good to have one running through here. But these are homes, these are lives, there are health concerns.'

Through interactions with the public officials, sympathizers and critics, however, town leaders started to feel obligated to tackle 'the bigger picture' around the pipeline. Dora, a woman in her 60s and one of the leaders of the opposition for her town, explained that the media reduced the issues to a dichotomy between place and public good, forcing them to focus on energy politics. Some considered their cause to be elitist and the argument of beauty inadmissible. 'Well, there are more beautiful spots in the country that pipelines go through. So, that's not good enough.' Even though for most of the local activists the threat was about place, what appeared to many

town leaders as ‘the right thing to do’ was to oppose the pipeline in itself, whatever its route, and to promote clean energy. This actually came to be a condition to be part of the core network of town leader activists. Those who only opposed a specific route of the pipeline, a route they would be willing to negotiate, were not welcome in their core network. In fewer than two months, the option of locating the pipeline elsewhere, even locating it along existing utility corridors (which was repeatedly proposed in the first information meetings) became for activists an inappropriate demand.

### The Need for Bigger Picture: Energy Politics and Conservation Policy

The binding discourse of universally opposing the pipeline was tied to the necessity of arguing for energy alternatives. Activists led several campaigns to participate in the energy debates. One of them was to lobby for an alternative and independent study on the possibility of renewable energy and energy efficiency to fulfil the State’s further energy needs that justified the need for a gas pipeline. The demand was granted, and some of the more ‘knowledgeable’ activists were included in the process. The process shifted the debate from a focus on place to technical discussions over energy. In the end, one of the activists (a former retired expert in the field and resident, since his retirement, in one of the threatened towns) who had participated heavily and who had been the most enthusiastic about this alternative study, concluded: ‘It didn’t really matter what any of us did or what argument was proposed, the group that was commissioned knew what the answer ought to be.’ On the concrete approval of the pipeline, it was the federal agency that would have the final word.

In the preparation for the federal agency (FERC) hearing process, the study of past cases was overwhelming: no pipeline had ever been rejected by the agency and FERC could override local bylaws for environmentally sensitive areas. A small part of the group embarked on a campaign to ‘Fix FERC First’, which included lobbying with senators, political leaders and trying to be heard in the large media. The last campaign giving this time more visibility to place was for the protection of public conservation lands on the pipeline path. Some of the activists and conservation groups put hope in an article in the Massachusetts constitution (article 97), which protects public conservation areas. This article could only be overwritten by a two-thirds vote by the state legislature. In this case, the campaign gave place visibility but positioned it in terms of a ‘commonwealth’.

Clearly, the Massachusetts case differs from the Quebec one in terms of the space given to place. If local direct democracy first gave it much visibility, activists were quickly confronted with energy politics. Leaders felt that in that context, emphasis should not be put on particular places in order to avoid a tag of NIMBYism.

### A Space to Fill: The Invisibilized Place Subjectivities of this Urban Fringe

The area most studied is located at the outer fringe of two large urban areas (the Boston urban area on the east and the Worcester urban area in the south). It is directly in the ‘sprawl frontier’ identified by the Mass Audubon (2015) conservation organization. This area has quite a lot of conservation lands (between 30% and 35% of the land, depending on the town), while the average for Massachusetts is 25% – and 14% for the United States as a whole (Mass Audubon, 2015). It is at the limit of the distribution of town meeting governments eastward, larger towns within the Boston metro area being governed by mayor councils. A closer investigation of the pipeline opposition on this urban fringe did not bring the same type of observations as the one conducted for Montreal. There was not much visibility to place and not many encounters across difference. What was emphasized by activists was the feeling of disempowerment from their peripheral position and from the little visible sense of place in the discourses. Among themselves, however, place continued to be a driver of engagement and solidarity.

In the discussions and speeches along the rally walk in this urban fringe, walkers used several examples to show their area seemed to be for the state just 'a space to fill'. One comment often heard was that they passed the pipe through the area because it had low political power in comparison with the wealthy suburbs. Conservation land, activists argued, was either instrumentalized by the state or the company: for some, the state acquired it in order later to be able to pass infrastructure through the region without requiring eminent domain on private land; for others it was Kinder Morgan that picked bigger open spaces not to have to deal with small landowners. One elected representative speaking at the rally recalled the story of villages drowned for the Boston water reservoir: 'I wondered if it could still happen today but hearing about this pipeline project makes me think it could.' This perception of low political power affected the experience of the struggle at the place/infrastructure interface.

One of the only major media coverage (from others than town journals) of this pipeline opposition movement was a text in the New England magazine *Yankee*; two activists proudly mentioned it in interviews. In that reportage, place-based opposition from this urban fringe was given full coverage; it gave a hint at the place subjectivities which were otherwise little heard outside the communities:

This is hard-won land, assembled with deals to build clustered and affordable houses, put together with state money and private donations. ... Thousands of hours of volunteer work, committee meetings, the drafting of state laws, and public investment lie behind the landscape. (Mansfield, 2016)

Effectively, the conservation lands in the area are tied to decades-long efforts and investments from the state, but also from communities and residents' associations having put together land trusts to protect tracts of land, from sprawl and numerous infrastructure and commercial projects. They had successfully opposed in the area a regional rubbish dump, a race cart strip for 30,000 spectators, a regional airport and now a pipeline. In addition, community and individual efforts of place-making lied in the day-to-day maintenance and protection of these spaces, especially under conservation commissions and land trusts managed by residents. Conservation lands are knitted in community networks of volunteering, which attest to other modes of taking care of land.

Some of the conservation land is privately owned, by individuals or families. In some cases, it is a family legacy; in other cases, the land and housing acquired in this forested setting were the product of a lifetime of savings for the individuals. Two respondents spoke of how they moved back to this area to live in the woods with their family and participate in land conservation, even if they personally had to commute long distances every day. However, living there with their conservation restriction put them at a greater vulnerability when it came to infrastructure projects. Private land conservation entitlement means specific arrangements precluding owners from building on the property, or from selling it with such rights. The accumulated tax breaks received for their land conservation over the years had to be reimbursed if they were to leave.

After the disappointment of the FERC hearings, activists in some of the rural regions of the state which were still slated to be on the pipeline route reinitiated actions to give visibility to places threatened. A new three-day walk was organized, a replica of Thoreau's cabin was constructed on the pipeline route, and a 'die-in' was performed to emphasize the threat to health and safety of residents. Some of these actions were built on the discursive framing and the people's experience of previous struggles. One area on the pipeline path in the western part of the state was formerly in a nuclear fallout zone from the now-closed Vermont Yankee nuclear power plant. Some of the activists had also taken part in the long opposition to the nuclear plant. They associated energy politics with oppression and risk to the public. Helen, who came from such a place, connected with the anxiety that people felt, their losses and foreseen changes in cherished places with the

gas production and transmission cycle: ‘the fracking, the shipping, everything about it, all these leaks ...’. She was much less shy than other residents to tie place threats to other elements of what she considered a system of oppression. Helen was so affected by the anxiety of these people on the fringe (because of their places being threatened) that she recorded a series of videos of ‘affected homeowners’ and uploaded it to YouTube to give them greater visibility.

In contrast to these actions in the west of the state, leaders of the urban fringe investigated did not politicize their relation to place and to specific places threatened. They focused on the broader campaigns presented above, particularly on organizing a state summit on clean energy issues. Suzy, who was nevertheless involved in these efforts, lamented that the threats to cherished places, and thus the impacts of the pipeline threat into everyday lives, were made less visible because of the strategic discourse of primarily speaking out on energy alternatives. She thus had printed out and installed, for the summit, large bird’s-eye view photographs of the lands crossed by the pipeline. When recalling the experience of the state summit (which was strategically meant to share information and promote a clean energy future), Dora particularly focused on her memory of ‘participants looking at the giant maps of the new pipeline route’:

It was stretched all across the huge lobby and down the hall. There were people taking pictures of where their land was on these maps and crying. I mean, this was a highly emotional summit in addition to giving lots of information. But people were trying to process, sometimes for the very first time, where this falls, and what will be destroyed, etcetera.

While place was less emphasized in words and discourses, it weighed heavily among the activists. It played a key role in sustaining engagement and solidarity and was shared in activist gatherings. The compassion with others whose cherished places were also threatened, became a key component of their subjectivity which explained their sustained engagement, even after the route changed away from their backyard.

For the urban fringes, ecological stewardship is an important part of people’s attachment to place and community. The joint experience of a threat to place and land conservation was emphasized. This did not explicitly include a critical reflection on others who were more threatened or disadvantaged, however. In sum, the particular place subjectivities behind the opposition to the pipeline in this area was not given visibility, reproducing the perception that their region was considered ‘a space to fill’ on the urban periphery.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper investigated how communities affected by anticipated transformations in the landscapes they inhabit struggled to gain visibility to place in fossil fuel infrastructure debates. The disqualification of place activism through accusations of NIMBYism is still a constraint for the voicing of place subjectivities. This disqualification is reproduced by regulatory frameworks surrounding infrastructure, and by a certain framing of issues in the media. The comparison between Quebec and Massachusetts makes it clear that a perception of high risk of oil transport related to the tragic accident that occurred in Quebec facilitated the securing of a public sphere to speak about place, which was crucially lacking in Massachusetts. Despite creative and original campaigns defending place perspectives on pipelines, the actual mix and encounter of different place subjectivities proved difficult, yet it remained significant on an interpersonal level. The contrast between these two cases suggests that the securing of a space of appearance for place (Arendt), that is, ensuring the visibility of place, is important in the development of a reflexivity on difference and privilege among activists.

Urban fringes and the in-between city are characterized by a tension between place history and the perceived threats and stigmas of a colonization of attachment (Groves, 2015), by infrastructure and urbanization. This tension is complexified by the *diverse* history of the contiguous parcels of

land, with patterns of formal land use and colonial control, added to inhabitants' place-making processes, bringing different legacies of past struggles and their enduring impacts. There have been a few stimulating studies on what this fringe or in-between city context means for planners trying to order the landscape and institutionalize new meaning for these spaces in transformation (Dembski, 2013). What these hybrid areas mean when it comes to citizen engagement had been little studied. This paper contributes to documenting such dynamics contributing to the politics of urbanization in peripheries.

Inspired by Arendt, this paper argues for more attention to be paid to the political subjectivities that emerge in the process of sharing in public. Sharing one subjectivity, distinctiveness and place history is a constitutive part of meaningful political engagement. This does not mean that the 'public transcript' (Scott, 1998) and the remembered discourses are what matters most in politics. The grounded and individualized experience of these struggles (in relation to the state and among activists) is key part of urban politics today. This experience of place and of the struggles to make place subjectivities visible includes struggles not only to state regulatory processes of ordering space but also within activists' circles wishing to protect these places. The urban fringe is a particular context where there are important power differentials and discursive constraints to contesting the colonization of attachment. The work of securing spaces where people and their places have an existence and visibility is a struggle the author takes to be a condition for the rebirth and transformation of political subjects, in their overlapping and otherwise invisibilized places in urbanized society.

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## NOTES

1. Former student leader Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois offered the prize he had received for his book on his experience of the student strike to *Coule pas chez nous*. He encouraged viewers on a popular television show to double the amount, and the goal was easily surpassed. There seems to be a connection between the student and the fossil fuel opposition movement in Quebec: many of the most engaged students of the Quebec 2012 student strike transferred their engagement on shale gas and pipeline oppositions afterward.
2. BS is short for 'bien-être social', meaning someone unemployed and receiving welfare payments from the state.
3. Changing market demand has led to companies abandoning pipeline projects before, but never through a refusal by the FERC.



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