

Pipelines and risk management from the urban fringe

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In urban fringes lie spaces characterized as 'in-between cities' (Sieverts 2003), areas where different uses overlap with multiple infrastructure axis directed toward urban cores. They are shadow areas of metropolises, with conflicting ideals for the place, while they face challenges to deal with risks and vulnerabilities (Keil and Young 2009, Dembski 2013). In a fringe of the metropolitan area of Montreal, citizens mobilize against a pipeline to transport oil from tar sands, located next to existing railways, highways and gas pipelines. This pipeline is debated in a neoliberal context of federal deregulation and increased responsibilities of civil security and environmental protection transferred to local authorities, without corresponding resources. People have in mind the recent explosion of a train transporting crude oil and killing 47 persons in 2013 (Lac Mégantic), event to which a sense of a loss of control and ontological security (Jasper 2007, Giddens 1984) is associated.

This communication presents the networks through which activists and local state authorities have assembled mobilization from the urban fringe, building risk awareness and raising the expectations for the involvement of the political leader of the greater metropolitan area. The hypothesis is that such networks made possible the expression of a new political voice for these urban fringes, new patterns of metropolitan governance and risk management. In the end, however, the central metropolitan authority retained control and gave its benediction to the project while several elements of risk prevention and risk management were still, for municipal actors and activists from the fringe, crucially lacking. But actors from the fringe continue to contribute actively in pipeline debates, promoting more radical actions from municipal authorities across the metropolitan area and the whole province. The analysis is based on direct observation, discourse analysis of debates and documents, press coverage and (currently) twelve semi-focused interviews.

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