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CENTRAL NEIGHBOURHOODS REVITALIZATION AND TOURIST BUBBLE: FROM GENTRIFICATION TO DAILY LIFE TOURISTIFICATION IN MONTREAL

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INTRODUCTION

Urban revitalization, rehabilitation, renewal and (re)development of built environment render spaces more attractive for private investors, tourists, workers and for the middle and upper classes. This objective is clear in most public planning initiatives although different stakeholders may not be looking for the same “side effects” on local populations (i.e. gentrification). Through different programs, projects and policies, rundown areas get a facelift and social mix, considered a value in urban planning, increases (at least in the beginning). The arrival of new residents and tourists with greater consuming power is also seen as positive, favouring commercial diversification in areas often identified as food desert. With new activities and increase property values, fiscal revenues for the city increases facilitating reinvestment into communities. Urban regeneration is thus seen as good for everyone, including poorer residents because ‘who doesn’t appreciate improvement of its living environment?’ Unfortunately, the high price paid by people pushed away by gentrification processes is too often concealed.

In our previous and current studies,¹ neighbourhoods under study were staged, secured and standardized to provide an experience, a landscape, a way of life, thereby producing spaces² that conforms to the needs of capital³. There, transformation excluded marginalized populations and poor residents. Traditional private rental market (relatively affordable) is shrinking and replaced by a new one, with higher rent and less protection for renters in a dynamic of commodification of housing for small and big investors who target middle and upper middle classes contributing to speculative bubbles. Besides, our works highlight a new phenomenon that deserves further study: practices and discourses surrounding both residential

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and tourism developments (or revitalization) are basically the same. In other words, the new housing market shows an “hypercommodification of urban life”⁴ where potential residents are targeted as if they were tourists of their own daily life, what we call the daily life touristification.

Starting from daily life touristification theoretical framework, this paper will revisit previous works on Montreal’s *Quartier des spectacles* (a cultural district) and Griffintown (a private development on a rundown area). We assume that urban planning tools allow if not encourage daily life touristification. By way of conclusion, this paper will discuss how urban planning practices should go beyond these neoliberal approaches.

DAILY LIFE TOURISTIFICATION

Touristic and daily life territories co-construct themselves. Touristic spaces – conceived for visitors – are rarely disembodied from host societies and individual practices of the visited (practices of producing, exchanging, feeding, clothing, educating, etc.). From a socio-constructivist perspective, a territory is “an economic, ideological and political (therefore social) space appropriated by groups, which gives them a particular representation of themselves, their history, their singularity”.⁵ Thus, appropriation leading to territoriality is framed by sociopolitical and cultural structures at different scales. Cultural structures are the dimension on which Klein insists in his definition of territory, “a delimited space, shaped and occupied by a community, which is both instrument and medium of its reproduction and acts as the cement of the social bonds between those who occupy it.”⁶ From the individual perspective, the different layers and flux of feelings, memories and identity⁷ are part of territoriality, itself linked to daily activities⁸. Different people (individually and collectively) – with their own interests, capabilities and abilities – are sharing more or less fairly the power to act on their territory. In turn, territories spur economic and socio-spatial practices of people that inhabit or visit it. Our interested is in the how tourism (or spectacular) territoriality and home (or daily life) territoriality overlap, influence each other, even blend. Here, home is understood as a collection of significant spaces⁹ which are geographically fluid between the dwelling and surrounding spaces, what is sometimes called home territory¹⁰.

This critical analysis of daily life touristification and its gentrifying dynamics use Lefebvre’s¹¹ triad conception of space, focusing on the conceived space, dominant in a society, and the lived space which includes the physical space through the symbolic use of its artefacts. Without neglecting the materiality of the perceived space, we first seek to understand how symbolic construction, renewal of values, new spatial practices including dwelling (to dwell) and the discourses of dominant actors, produce urban spaces where the boundaries that separate the “touristic” from the “daily life” are increasingly blurred. Second, we want to explore how planning tools may contribute to it. Cities play a central role in the expansion of the neoliberal productive model, based on the flexible accumulation of capital by processes of creative destruction¹². At the same time, cities’ growth result from this expansion. In other words, “process of city making (...) is both product and condition of

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ongoing social processes of transformation in the most recent phase of capitalist development”¹³.

This production of space is carried by discourses and space representations which also contribute to the daily life touristification. Dann identifies four types of tourism discourses, which are similar to gentrification/revitalization ones: authenticity, otherness, games/leisure and conflicts¹⁴. These discourses don't solely describe tourism practises but also social control in and of the space, control of what can or cannot be done by tourists and, most importantly in the framework of this exploratory research, what can and should be offered to tourists as well as to future residents/gentrifiers that real estate developers want to attract. Let's not forget that real estate, tourism and events sectors are among private stakeholders preferred development actions. In the search for Barcelona's success or Guggenheim's effect, developers create standardized “tourism bubbles” with basically the same urban amenities¹⁵: a convention centre, a professional sports franchise, huge shopping centres/areas, a casino and architectural landmarks. In these tourism bubbles, public spaces are also conceived in order to answer the needs and expectations of tourists, and take into account their sensibilities regarding aesthetic and safety perception.¹⁶ Public spaces are thus staged, their existing authenticity ‘pasteurized’¹⁷ or a new ‘romanticized authenticity’ is created/invented. The “bubble” image is not used here without meaning: these developments are in some way disconnected from their surroundings, their host communities/cities. These bubbles do not seem about to burst, on the contrary, they even inspired other sectors of activities than tourism to take advantage of the experiential economy such as residential real estate. The “return to the centre” of capital identified by Smith in the 1970s¹⁸ is now done by creating a new “experiential” housing market. Indeed, new residential developments in central neighbourhoods seem to evoke more and more tourists' way of living in luxurious hotels. Obviously, hotel way of life is not new, but this new housing market seems to be based on the same marketing strategies as major hotel groups. And this is taking place with the complicity of public authorities through their planning tools and also because they are the main actors in public spaces redevelopment which are at the centre of their selling strategies. Dwellings' characteristics are overshadowed by sets of exclusive collective amenities, pasteurized neighbourhoods' authenticity, cultural buzz where buyers are not as much part of a local community than consumers/tourists in their own residential environment. Housing is reduced to a commodity for the production of spaces of high market values participating in daily life touristification. The question is then, to what extent there is emergence/existence of this process of touristification of daily life? To what extent this is happening, not only in “spectacular” territories but also in residential ones?

EXPLORING MONTREAL CASES

In the two cases explored here, the *Quartier des spectacles* and Griffintown, the City of Montreal had adopted a particular urbanism program (PUP). This local planning tool makes possible to adapt planning rules to different projects in different contexts with a more or less extended participation of private stakeholders and civil society.

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The *Quartier des spectacles*

The first project for the creation of the *Quartier des spectacles* was presented to Montrealers in 2002. It was generally welcome as a possible trigger for Montreal (re)development and its ‘international city’s image.’¹⁹ The coordination and development of the district were delegated to the Quartier des Spectacles Partnership, a non-profit organization²⁰ with more than 50% of its members coming from the cultural milieu. Other members include non-profit corporate leaders and the president of the local concertation table. Among the two chairmen of the Partnership one is a director of a large private equity firm specializing in real estate, firm also involved in Griffintown (re)development. City of Montreal’s representatives and members of the executive committee attend non-voting board of directors’ meetings. Members of the Partnership were involved in the conception of the two PUP which cover the area (the first one in 2008 for the Place des arts area and the second one in 2013 for the Latin Quarter). Starting as an almost completely abandoned area that was appropriated by marginal populations and symbolizing physical and socioeconomic degradation, the radical redesign of the physical environment, including the creation of the Place des festivals now attracts numerous visitors (5 million during summer) and related services. It also triggered a real-estate boom especially in the construction of luxurious condos²¹. For the year 2017, it is more than 16,000 dwelling units that are in construction or are planned, most of them being small flats in large projects and as condos²².

Surprisingly, *Quartier des spectacles* residents interviewed in previous works didn’t manifest a feeling of invasion of their home territory, despite some irritants arising from festivals activities. For them, the ‘other’, the ‘outsider’ is not the visitor nor the tourist. The other, the outsider is the one challenging the establishment, *is the other resident who criticize the festivals or the revitalization projects and its impacts*. The other is sometimes the City, the bureaucracy and the lack of public consultation on projects that affect them. The other is the developers and its workers who have an impact on daily lives because of construction sites. Finally, the other is responsible for the expropriation of residents and moms and pops shops. Again, the other is not the visitor nor the tourist. The *Quartier des spectacles* is a territory of cultural consumption. Then, do residents identify more with the tourist than with the critical resident?

It is true that Montreal’s housing market is considerably changing. More and more, new condos are bought by small investors who rent them in a different form of tenure than the classical rental one. “With the shift away from purpose-built rental housing and towards condo-ism as the primary avenue for new rental supply, the city has reduced its ability to control and regulate the provision of rental tenure.”²³ In Montreal’s centre, about 25% of condos are rented at a price higher by 50% of traditional renting dwellings contributing to a radical spatial polarization and fragmentation of the rental market as Rosen and Walks observed in Toronto²⁴.

Griffintown

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Griffintown is a 19th-century working-class neighbourhood that witnessed an abandonment from the 1960 to the 1990s. The City appealed to private investors who have prioritized the clean slate rather than rehabilitation. The first (re)development project for Griffintown was proposed by Devimco, a real estate management company specializing in large projects. The 1.3 billion dollars (CAN) project occupying nearly 60% of the entire neighbourhood was supported by the City of Montreal, which granted a two years land reserve to Devimco and created a PUP in line with the project. The program was adopted in 2008 despite a stormy public consultation (Devimco was involved in the process). This plan was finally abandoned for its gigantism, strong opposition and the economic situation.²⁵ But Devimco was still interested in Griffintown. It should be borne in mind that proposing a disproportionate project is a classic maneuver in the real estate sector to give room for negotiation, to propose a smaller, thus better project. *District Griffin* “now represents the most forward-thinking real estate project on the island of Montreal” according to Devimco. District Griffin, is a three condominium towers offering a living environment testifying of the daily life touristification. This illustrates the concretization of the rise of urban entrepreneurialism that Harvey²⁶ foresaw: public-private partnership in planning; production of an urban space aimed at a specific clientele, the young professionals from the middle to upper classes. But more recently, in reaction to real estate development by several private developers, the city has tried to take over the planning of the sector. To this end, in 2013, it created a new PUP for all of Griffintown with a goal to reach social mix. The process was more transparent and left an important role to the Montreal Public Consultation Office²⁷. Without surprise, actors interviewed perceived Griffintown differently according to their social and economic position. For hotel and restaurant workers Griffintown is a dynamic and flourishing environment in the shadow of the centre. The same can be said for new residents while adding to it an increasing neighbourhood life. On the other hand, long-time residents regret the lack of vision in the reconversion of their living environment. Furthermore, except for hoteliers, actors deplore the lack of aesthetic of the built environment.

Daily Life Touristification

How to attract these customers/residents from middle and upper classes? An ongoing research on promotional material and websites suggest already that marketing departments of large real estate groups have developed a new type of discourses to sell these new residential developments; they evoke more and more the communication of large hotel groups to attract tourists and business travellers putting the emphasis on luxurious amenities and specific territorial resources. Here is one of the so many examples:

<p>The uniqueness of NOCA - LIVE Living in Griffintown West is about enjoying an exclusive access to the waterfront in a quiet area surrounded by lush greenery, next</p>	<p>It’s the perfect balance between modern design and historic architecture, full of light, local artwork, carefully curated furnishings, and stunning views of Montreal from our rooftop decks. The Living Room is at the</p>
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<p>to kilometres of bike paths just a few steps away from the busy streets of Griffintown and the downtown core.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ENJOY - RELAX - MOVE - WORK - CONNECT 	<p>epicentre of the action: with a library, full bar, pool table and vinyl collection, it's a gravitational point for the creative set.</p>
<p>Example 1 : Condos NOCA (https://nocacondos.ca)</p>	<p>Example 2: Hotel William Gray (http://hotelfwilliamgray.com)</p>

The location (in the middle of all attractions for *Quartier des spectacles* and close them for Griffintown) with cultural, entertainment and leisure offer are at the heart of sales arguments. These discourses produce a space that loses its use value in favour of exchange value. Byers are assured of an ultra-consumer daily life close to a tourist one. There is no longer talk about 'classic' conveniences, but the prerequisites become the presence of common entertainment spaces. The landscaping, swimming pool, common lounge, lobby and gymnasium are systematically included in large real estate projects. Advertisements of these projects express a blurred limit between residents and tourists. Names and symbols are also re-appropriated to sell an almost tourist experience to targeted residents. In short, residential dwelling and tourism living are intertwined which also blurs the idea of what can be put in tourism development.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

We are witnessing the colonization of the city's symbolic production values in daily life spaces (or home territories) by touristic discourses. In the case of *Quartier des spectacles*, touristified ways of living seem to happen in parallel of the spectacular territoriality while in Griffintown the way of living is sold using a touristified discourse of authenticity and leisure. In both case, imagineering of space envision an international positioning of the city. This short exploration of daily life touristification suggests that "Not only are the spaces of the city opposed to everyday practice and oriented to capital and bureaucratic order rather than lived experience, but the way that the spaces of the city are produced excludes the majority of the city dwellers and their experience."²⁸

The projects presented in this paper were welcome as a spin-off for the redevelopment of rundown areas of the city, participating in gentrification processes pushing away symbolically (more than physically so far) local people. Allmendinger and Haughton highlighted that planning is negatively considered by some actors, because it would slow down economic development, even worsening housing affordability.²⁹ These projects were "well" planned. Although they stimulated economic development, it is true that they contributed to worsening housing affordability, because private interests were prioritized. This was clear in the case of Griffintown where Devimco basically 'wrote' the PUP, leading to a strong local opposition.

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As for the *Quartier des spectacles*, consensus was built by the Partnership, and, although land values are rising, affordable housing disappearing and the area gentrifying rapidly, there are few voices to manifest increasing unmet needs of the excluded, the poor and marginalized populations. This last case raised the question if it is a form of post-politic tactics “used to rein in dissident voices behind the broad political project of reregulation in favour or particular interests”³⁰. In this strategy, tourism, and the tourist as a political subject, are brought in the discourses as an economic resource without discussing and challenging the predominance of the market and speculation as general goals of the redeployment and therefore, projecting and superimposing tourism discourses and practices on daily life of the local residents.

Can planning practice be critical?

The argument could be made that the present crisis exposes the vices of the capitalist system as a whole, and that the realization of a genuine right to the city requires the abolition of the role of private finance, and thus with it the rule of private capital, over the urban economy, and indeed, that of the world economy as a whole. That would be a radical response, one oriented precisely towards the construction of an “urbanism appropriate for the human species’ as envisioned by Harvey (1976: 314).”³¹

To conclude, although its theoretical potentiality for critical planning, we question if PUP is a tool flexible enough to go beyond neoliberal planning. With very limited effect, the new PUP for Griffintown shows the preoccupation of the public administration to include a diversity of uses and population and not letting the control on private developers. In *Quartier des spectacles*, public spaces should have been thought more loosely in order to give people the potentiality of a full experience in their everyday life instead of trying to attract specific uses and users. This goes as much as public spaces in general to experimentation of new form of appropriation, notably to transitory cultural spaces on empty land and buildings for which the city is just starting its first laboratory³². The fact that these planning approaches are not included in PUP or other tools seems to indicate that critical planning is possible but still ‘outside’ the local administration thinking box.

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- ²⁷ The Montreal Public Consultation Office is an independent organization that carries out public consultations for the City of Montreal. Its mandate concern mainly urban planning projects under the jurisdiction of the City of Montreal. <http://ocpm.qc.ca/fr>
- ²⁸ Bridge, Gary. "On M Arxism, Pragmatism and Critical Urban Studies." *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 38, no. 5 (2014): 1644-59. P. 1653
- ²⁹ Allmendinger, Phil, and Graham Haughton. "Spatial Planning, Devolution, and New Planning Spaces." *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 28, no. 5 (2010): 803-18.
- ³⁰ Metzger, Jonathan. "Neither Revolution, nor Resignation: (Re)Democratizing Contemporary Planning Praxis: A Commentary on Allmendinger and Haughton'S "Spatial Planning, Devolution, and New Planning Spaces"." *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 29, no. 2 (2011): 191-96.
- ³¹ Brenner et al. op.cit.
- ³² Montreal has recently accepted its first transitory spaces for artists and community groups in an abandoned building <http://quartierinnovationmontreal.com/en/article/young-project-reimagining-montreal>