Working at the regional level: communicating for adapting to climate change

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Introduction

▶ Experimental research-action: developing a strategy for helping mid-size, regional and multi-city entities to adapt to climate change.

▶ A particular region of the southern part of Québec Province [the MRC Memphrémagog]. Ouranos, Mitacs, MRC, Centre Sève, Observatoire Ivanhoé Cambridge, 2017-2020. https://www.ouranos.ca/en/

▶ Two co-researchers: a geographer and urban planner specializing in vulnerability analysis (Isabelle Thomas); a practical-philosophy professor: environmental governance centering on communication processes (as co-construction) and ethical-political issues (Alain Létourneau).

1. Theoretical background: communication as organizational, narrative and active

- Communication as organizational, especially if (Putnam & Pacanowksy, 1983; Cooren & Taylor, 1997; Taylor, Cheney & Seibold, 2001; Brummans et al., 2014), we consider the need of organizing to gather and assimilate knowledge; both expressing that need and the steps taken to organize will happen through communication.

- Communication also means a lot of specific acts; it happens in storytelling, in acts or language (to listen being a part of it).

- Communication is also seen as interaction, as the site and means of creating common sense and to express motivation.

Values and network participative governance

▶ Value attribution is also a key element. This means to be able to pass from prizing to appraisal (Dewey, 1939). Ethical choice on the value of the relationship of the human communities with their environment to be sustained. Specific issues will come with potential value conflicts or tension.

▶ The idea of network governance (Evans, J.P., 2012; Young, O., 2013; Paquet, 2011). We do not have to choose between abandoning the states and government, relying exclusively on the market on one side, and imposing everything from the top to the bottom in a states-only perspective (Létourneau, 2015). Network and participative governance recognize that power is something distributed in society, and wants to take advantage of that situation.

Governance networks as a complement to political offices

▶ The political decision maker is never alone. Decision happens on the basis of a plurality of elements, among which the actors and their intervention certainly play an important part. But access can be organized, and not proceed first on the basis of happenstance or monetary power.

▶ Crucial link between environmental governance and a democratic and practical political philosophy are of crucial importance (Young, 2012; Dryzek and Dunleavy, 2009.

▶ Adopting a polycentric perspective [with Ostrom, 2005] supposes to recognize that power is not something that is the property of people at one end of the social spectrum. It certainly does not mean that official authorities should have a lesser voice or import.
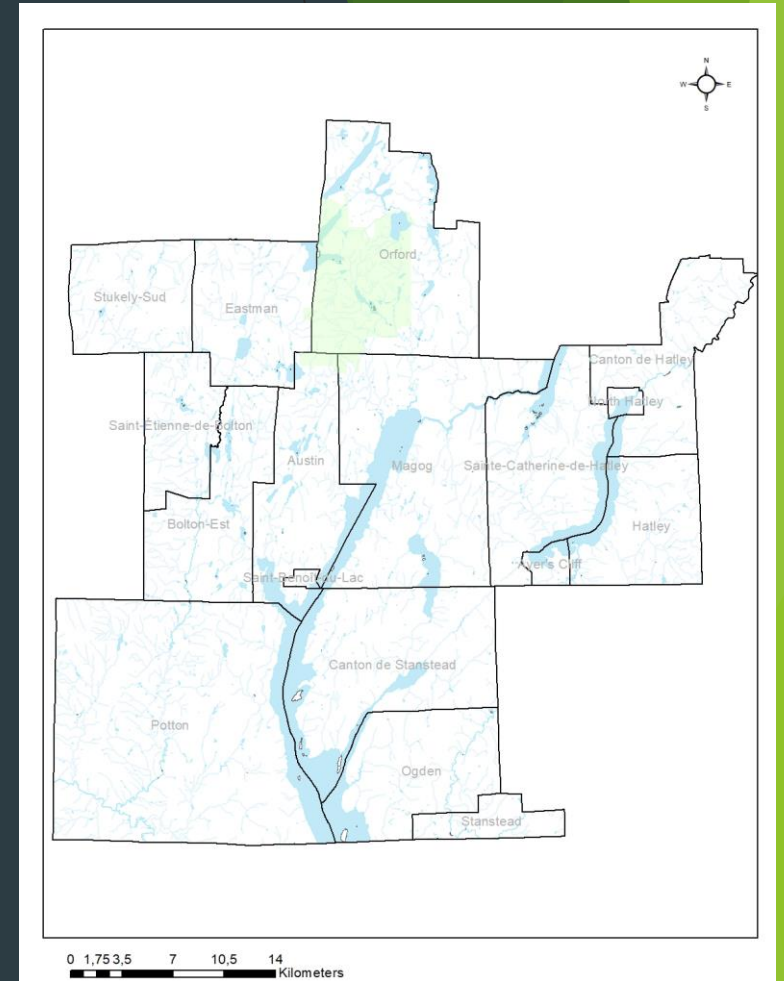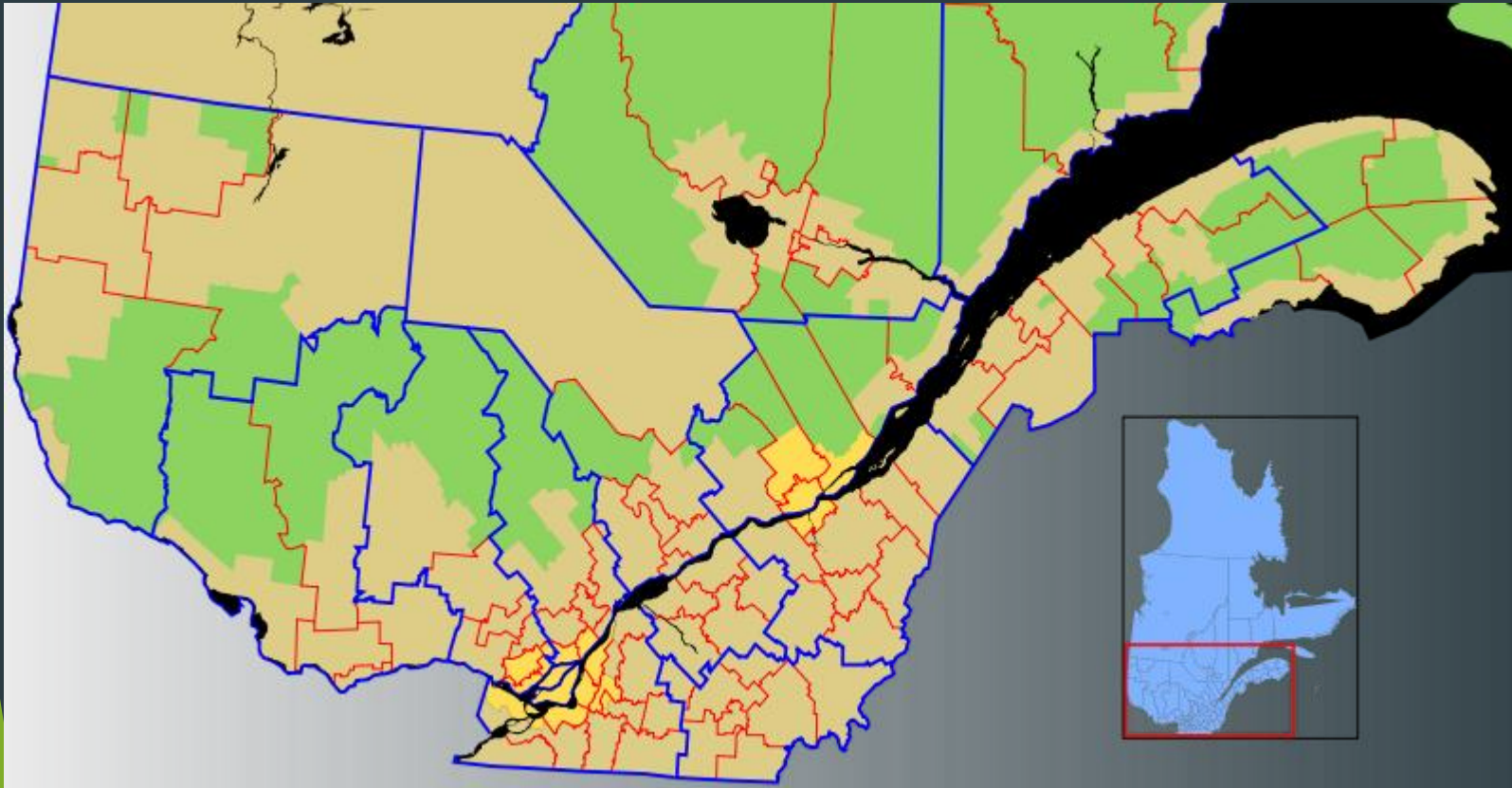
No need to choose between mitigation and adaptation

▶ The large amount of GHGs already present in the atmosphere and the hydrosphere will produce their effect, most probably for centuries to come (IPCC, AR5, 2014), whatever we manage to do in reductions.

▶ Revising our ways to build, renovate and transform urban settings, the servicing infrastructure with the aim of improving their resilience, while accepting the requirements of a mitigation approach that aims to help our countries, states, provinces and cities to diminish their respective GHG emissions in the environment. Example: notion of Low Carbon Resilience (ACT and others).

2. The different political regional levels. Especially our MRC

▶ Case of important cities like Montreal, Sherbrooke and Trois-Rivières: plans already adopted.

▶ Not yet the case with the jurisdiction level (MRC) *Municipalités Régionales de Comté*. Typically they comprise many small cities on a given territory, that can be quite large. Lakes, rivers, mountains and plains, cities and valleys, farms and forests. Pilote project.
https://www.google.ca/maps/place/Memphr%C3%A9magog,+QC/@45.2038662,-72.6374872,8.96z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x4cb63839907ec671:0x2a7db846ff7a1cad!8m2!3d45.2285619!4d-72.2066235. And:

▶ http://www.mamot.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/publications/organisation_municipale/cartotheque/Region_05.pdf

3.Ways for cities to develop an Adaptation Plan

▶ Bureaucratic approach sometimes adopted. One study: Daphné Le Templier, *Plan municipal d'adaptation aux changements climatiques : une stratégie mobilisatrice ?* Le cas de la ville de Montréal. Essai de maîtrise, Centre Universitaire de formation en environnement, Université de Sherbrooke, A. Létourneau dir., may 2017, 118 p.

▶ The classical division of labor will produce specific tasks to accomplish for particular actors. Forcibly the question of integrating the new plan into the existing set of plans is going to surface. Still can be done.

▶ Different offices concerned, different timetables, almost exclusively inside the different units of the city managers and between them. As if in the end, the task of adaptation was only a revising of the bureaucracy's list of objectives, instead of being a challenge for the citizens that are going to be affected by climate change.

4. Hypothesis about people's involvement, scence building and its use

▶ Giving people the opportunity to voice their stories + exposing them to other stories and relevant data: awareness will develop progressively.

▶ Historical trends can be substantiated (available data, for instance on floods and low water periods).

▶ Knowledge: mediated by ordinary discourse, stories, images, graphs, charts, maps. It is something that is constructed by actors in interaction.

▶ Climatic projections at the regional level (Ouranos' specialists in climatology). Geographical information systems (GIS); Vulnerability analysis (Thomas&Bleau 2012); maps of flood prone regions.

▶ Complementarity of these tools in the face of complexity. Plurality of scenarios to deal with probability issues. Hybrid approach.

5. Relevant networks for participation

- In a network paticipative governance perspective, layers ares added to representative democracy.

- Organizing that participation in such a way that it becomes conducive to a better policy development.

- Giving a chance to exchanges between "technical experts" and "practical expertise" by developing a dialogue about the science.

- Crucial question: who do we invite, how do we structure participation (trying to enlarge democracy). Coming back to this later.

6. Justifying the appeal to some characteristic persons

▶ A farmer, a forester, a fireman, an engineer in urban planning, a nurse or a doctor working in a retirement home, a homeowner in a flood zone, or a business person operating a Ski station, or a restaurant depending on tourism for, let us say, half of her yearly revenue.

▶ The input of these kinds of people will represent some specific practices and uses, of importance at the regional level.

▶ These actions on which they make a living, are facing risks with climate change. A forest community: not affected as city residents will be, and the same reasoning apply to the farmer; the fireman will have a particular role to play in an emergency situation.

7. Summary of method

- ▶ Tools will be developed and adjusted with the partners. Adaptation can only function if it is by itself an adapting process.

- ▶ A detailed plan for what we call a strategy. The MRC is a partner in the project, they have the power and authority to adopt an Adaptation Plan.

- ▶ A set of priorities will emerge by working at two different levels, joining a diversity of expertise and involvements on the field.

- ▶ Five regional tables regrouping interested people in the following fields: urban infrastructure, agriculture and forest, health, security, tourism. Gather information, situate vulnerabilities and suggest resilient options. Plus a regional table devoted to adaptation (we call it the TRACC, Table régionale d'adaptation aux changements climatiques): integrating these different elements for the emergence of global perspectives.

- ▶ The come-and-go between the TRACC and the tables: a set of shared analyses and priorities to provide the required list of priorities for the Adaptation plan.

Conclusion

▶ Those kinds of research-action processes could obviously be done on a larger basis.

▶ Our goal: make them repeatable/adaptable/transformable.

▶ If similar projects are developing, it would be in the interest of everyone to share results and difficulties.

▶ This conference might be an opportunity to discuss similar projects.

Reference to the project

▶ Alain Létourneau and Isabelle Thomas, *Quelles stratégies pour quels changements climatique ?* Stratégies durables d'adaptation aux changements climatiques à l'échelle d'une MRC. Projet de recherche 2017-2020, Ouranos-Mitacs-MRC Memphrémagog, Centre Sève et Observatoire Ivanhoé-Cambridge.