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From planning to spatial foresight in Quebec : what future-telling means in a context of sub-regional governance. The case of “Vision 2031”.

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Résumé

Depuis l'adoption de la stratégie générale de développement durable en 2006, l'élaboration d'une vision stratégique pour l'aménagement du territoire est désormais obligatoire au Québec, notamment pour les Municipalités Régionales de Comtés (MRC), chargées de la rédaction d'un Schéma d'aménagement et de développement (SAD) supra-municipal.

En se focalisant sur le processus de réactualisation du SAD de la MRC de Rivière-du-Loup entre 2009 et 2013, cette recherche consiste à étudier ce processus de planification stratégique, et la place qu'y tient l'anticipation, notamment pour ce qui est de la gouvernance territoriale. Durant quatre années, cette MRC a en effet coordonné une coalition infra-régionale réunissant des acteurs publics et privés dans une démarche transversale et intégrée labellisée « Vision 2031 ». Vision 2031 a pour

particularité d'avoir ouvert le processus décisionnel à la société civile, en plus des habituels experts et décideurs du territoire.

Un tel projet traduit une recherche de renouvellement des pratiques : la recherche d'une planification plus prospective, d'une planification plus transversale, et, enfin, une action publique plus collaborative. Spatialiser les enjeux permet en effet de les rendre plus transversaux, et d'ouvrir la responsabilité du développement, jusqu'alors réservée aux décideurs, à l'ensemble de la communauté territoriale. A un moment où les institutions publiques voient leurs marges d'actions fragilisées et dans un contexte de remise en cause des modèles hiérarchiques d'action publique, ces nouvelles démarches de prospective territoriale traduisent l'émergence d'un nouveau mode de régulation publique infra-régional : la gouvernance par le futur.

Mots-clefs: Gouvernance, Prospective, Planification stratégique spatialisée, Aménagement du territoire, Québec, Municipalité Régionale de Comté

Abstract

Since the adoption of the sustainable development policy in 2006, a strategic vision is now required for planning proceedings in Quebec, especially for Regional County Municipalities (RCMs) in charge with a supra-municipal *Schéma d'aménagement et de développement* (SAD).

By focusing on the renewing proceeding of the SAD of Rivière-du-Loup's RCM between 2009 and 2013, this research analyzes the process of shaping such a strategic vision for planning, and the place of this vision in the management of a sub-regional governance. During four years, this RCM led a sub-regional coalition of both public and private actors in a cross-cutting and joined-up process (called "Vision 2031"). Vision 2031 involved more than experts and decision-makers: it opened its future-oriented process to the civil society.

Firstly, it expresses a shift from retrospective knowledge building to a more forward-looking knowledge building. Secondly, it translates a switch from sectoral planning to a more cross-cutting planning. Thirdly, it highlights an on-going process towards more collaborative ways of proceeding. Being spatial make issues being horizontal, and imply that the responsibility of the development does not stem only from the decision-makers but from all the sub-regional community. In other words, in a context of challenging public institutions' political capacity and crisis of top-down model of management, such new spatial foresight proceedings highlight the emergence of a new type of sub-regional public regulation: a governance by the future.

Key-Words: Governance, Foresight, Strategic spatial planning, Planning, Quebec, Regional County Municipality

Introduction

The production of forward-looking knowledge and narratives are nowadays commonly used in the policy process in Europe and Canada (Lavallée, 2001; Rio, 2015; Petit Jean, 2016; Lardon, Noucher, 2016; Le Berre, 2017), especially in planning, and more particularly through the increasing practice of *strategic spatial planning* (Böhme, 2002; Motte, 2006; Proulx, 2008). In Quebec, spatial forecasts and foresight exercises have flourished since 2006 and the Sustainable Development Act, both at the provincial, the regional and the local levels. This recent interest for spatial anticipation – what is called “*la prospective territoriale*” in France (Durance, Godet, Mirénowicz, Pacini, 2007) – brings into light a technique of forward-looking expertise born at the end of the World War II in order to prepare spatial and economic planning (Guiader, 2008; Andersson, 2012). This kind of foreknowledge is supposed to be a decision-support tool to take strategic options, leading to the formulation of a spatial vision, in the field of economic planning. It implies drawing different scenarios of futures, based on local strengths and weaknesses, which are used to shape *a vision* of development, shared among economic and political actors of the territory (Gouvernement du Québec, 2010, p.8).

This paper focuses on an original spatial foresight exercise called “Vision 2031”, driven by the Regional County Municipality (RCM)¹ of Rivière-du-Loup, in

1 “Municipalité Régionale de Comté” (MRC) in French.

Quebec, between 2009 and 2013. The goal of the paper is not to draw a general portrait of planning in Quebec but to describe a case, singular in some aspects, but also taking part of a general context of politics and reflecting some changes in planning in Quebec². During four years, this Regional County Municipality led a regional coalition gathering institutions and citizens, in a cross-cutting and joined-up process of shaping a vision for the future development of its territory. Through horizon scanning and foresight, the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup monitored and explored social, economic, environmental, and technological changes in its area (MRC de Rivière du Loup, 2013a). The fact that the exercise “Vision 2031” includes more than economic experts, statisticians, and sectoral advisers, and opens its visioning process to the civil society, seems to express a shift from sectoral and top-down planning to a more spatialized and relational planning, that is to say, to what Healey calls the “*collaborative planning*” or the “*communicative planning*” (Healey, 1993, 1997). With this in mind, the study of such a process of futures visioning, and of the implementation of a future-oriented strategy in planning policies, aims at achieving a better understanding of the processes and the effects of spatial foresight in the planning process. In doing so, we would like to understand the link between future-telling, planning and governing.

Theoretically, this paper articulates a neoinstitutionalist approach of governance, with a cognitive approach of public policy instruments. Firstly, the

2 It is what Jean-Claude Passeron and Jacques Revel call “*la pensée par cas*”. See Passeron, Revel, 2005; Hamidi, 2012.

study combines historical neoinstitutionalism and sociological neoinstitutionalism (Hall, Taylor, 1997; Gazibo, Jenson, 2015, p.186-196). The historical perspective helps to understand how and why the RCM has developed future-oriented narratives, and what effects this institutionalization has produced on discourses and practices. The sociological perspective helps to understand how these narratives provide frameworks of meaning and models of action on which actors can act. The aim is above all to study future-oriented narratives as instrumental mechanisms of institutionalization and political capacity building for regional spaces. Secondly, with regard to this process, political capacity is not limited to an institutional dimension, it also has a cognitive and discursive dimension (Pasquier, 2012, p.42). By analyzing foreknowledge as a political story-telling, we would like to put the stress on the *politics of meaning*, because discourses are themselves forms of action, and not only the ornaments of politics and social behaviours (Fischer, 2012, p.viii). Indeed, any anticipation has an utterance dimension, that is to say involves a *rhetorization of reality* (Faure, 2011, p.77) and confers an *order of meaning* (Fischer, 2012) both on present actions of local actors and on the indeterminate horizon of the future.

Methodologically speaking, this research focuses on the process of shaping such a discourse and the place of this discourse in the management of a regional governance, by analyzing different planning, strategic and communication documents of the RCM in addition to several semi-structured interviews both in the

RCM of Rivière-du-Loup, the Government of Quebec, and other regional institutions making such forward-looking exercises. So the method combines a document and literature review and semi-structured interviews. This survey has been made during a stay in Quebec from August 2013 to December 2013, in the frame of a more global research on strategic spatial planning in Quebec. The first step of the survey consisted in achieving a better understanding of the regional history of planning and future-oriented expertise in RCMs. The second step was based on a discursive analysis of the documents and the speeches collected, to identify the different forward-looking narratives, their evolution and their implementation.

1. The Regional County Municipality, an intermediate level of planning

The creation of the RCM scale is the result of three dynamics: a need for regional planning resulting from the crisis of the mid-seventies, a loss of efficiency of the top-down planning approach (Proulx, 1996; Sokoloff, 1984), and a movement of decentralization and regionalization of the provincial State (Gouvernement du Québec, 1983a). Regarding the planning process, the RCM's mission is to build and coordinate a supra-municipal coalition to foster the local development. Regarding the forecasting and visioning process, RCMs did not invest quickly their potential for being a pertinent level of anticipation, but have developed progressively this capacity since the mid-2000s.

1.1 A knowledge production scale for planning, born between devolution and rationalization

The system of Regional County Municipalities is introduced in 1980-1981, following the Law on Development and Urbanism (1979) to replace the former Counties (set in 1855). The context is dual. Firstly, since 1975, Quebec is struck by the negative economic repercussions of the global hydrocarbon crisis. The dynamic of unemployment, particularly strong in peripheral regions, highlighted the weakness of the hierarchical and centralized nature of the planning model structured during “the Quiet Revolution”, and reinforced local-peripheral protests against the provincial centralization. The late 1970s and the beginning 1980s match in Quebec an “agenda building” on decentralization of both the planning process and the state-led policy making, combined with the end of the Keynesian top-down development model (Lévesque, 1981). Secondly, while at the local level the economic crisis helps the strengthening of regionalist mobilizations, the crisis also stirs up the sovereigntist tendencies of the State at the provincial level, carried by the sovereigntist *Parti Québécois* in power since 1976. If peripheral regions estimate that the crisis is the result of a too much centralized policy making process, the provincial State estimates it as a result of an insufficient autonomy of Quebec inside the Canadian Federation. So, on the one hand, the birth of the RCMs stems from a decentralization agenda, but on the second hand, it also stems from a sovereigntist agenda.

“Spatial planning and decentralization in Quebec have historically been linked to the issue of sovereignty [...] Since the White Paper on decentralization of 1977,

the Regional County Municipalities have been set up in order to define and implement development plan at the local level. But this transfer of responsibility was part of the desire to make Quebec a nation.”³

Thus, ninety-five RCMs were set up in the frame of the Law on Development and Urbanism of 1979 and its sovereigntist decentralization vision. The RCM of Rivière-du-Loup has been established in 1982, and is composed of twelve rural municipalities and one city centre⁴.

According to this more global view of regionalization and rationalization of the development, RCMs’ main mission is to organize the dialogue between local actors of planning at a supra-municipal level (Lévesque, 1979; Gouvernement du Québec, 1983a, 1983b). The Law on Development and Urbanism translates this shift to a more localized planning, by putting the *Schéma d'aménagement et de développement* (SAD) of the RCM at the heart of the planning process (Saint-Amour, 2000, p.343)⁵. Therefore, although RCMs were not thought as a political level, they

3 Interview with a special advisor at the Ministère du Conseil Exécutif, Quebec Government, October 2013.

4 Today, thirteen municipalities belong to the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup, which is in the perimeter of the administrative region of the Bas-Saint-Laurent. Rivière-du-Loup is 210kms far from Quebec City and 430kms far from Montreal. This region is considered as a peripheral region, which means that it is at the periphery of “the inhabited Quebec”. Its economy is mostly based on the third sector (70% of the active population of the RCM). Rivière-du-Loup is especially a touristic cross-road between Quebec City, the Saguenay and the Gaspésie: therefore tourism is an important aspect of its economy. The secondary sector is the second pillar of the RCM’s economy (18% of the active population) but the primary sector is quite strategic (9% of the active population) comparatively to the rest of Quebec, which means that it is a “resource region”.

5 RCMs were initially conceived as the “local” scale of a higher regional level, which would have been called Conseil régional de concertation et d’intervention (CRCI). CRCIs had never been created as such, but almost ten years after, the relatively similar Conseil régionaux de concertation et de développement (CRCD) are set in 1992.

were nonetheless political. Their political legitimacy did not strictly come from the election, but from their role of territorial consultation. And their role of local expertise building proved to be a key function for planning (Proulx, 2008, p.40). Therefore, we can say that the instrumental role of the SAD is historically important, and that the political role of this document is not obvious but implied by its consultation process and its strategy formulation.

The two first SADs are published in 1985. Most of the first SADs have been published between 1986 and 1990. 1988 is the climax of the first generation of SAD: 60 RCMs published their first *Schéma d'aménagement* during this year. The RCM of Rivière-du-Loup prepared its SAD in 1987 and published it in 1988.

Figure 1: Timeline of the planning documents of the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup

	Adoption	Signification	Avis
Génération 2			
DOR	1994-11-23	1994-12-12	1995-10-12
PSADR	2004-05-20	2004-09-27	2005-01-19
SADR	2013-10-03	2013-12-11	2014-04-10
Entrée en vigueur du schéma révisé			-
Génération 1			
SAD	1987-02-19	1987-02-28	1987-05-17
Entrée en vigueur du schéma			1988-06-09

Source : Gouvernement du Québec, 2017

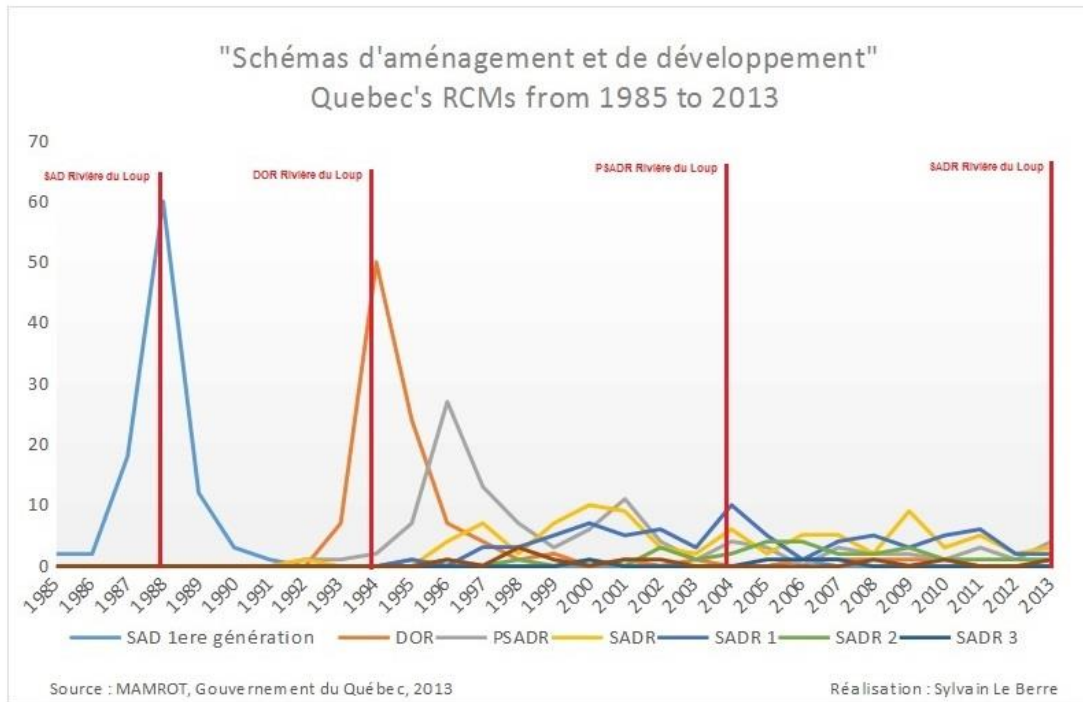
The Law on Development and Urbanism stipulates that a SAD has to be renewed each five year after enforcement. The first step of the updating process is the formulation of new objectives in a *Document sur les objets de la révision* (DOR) and the second step is the proposal of a *Projet de schéma d'aménagement et de développement révisé* (PSADR). The third step is the completion of the *Schéma d'aménagement et de*

développement révisé (SADR). Most of the DORs have been made between 1993 to 1996. The RCM of Rivière-du-Loup made its DOR in 1994-1995. Ten years after, the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup published its PSADR (2005) and completed its SADR in 2013 (which is not yet in force). Because of a lack of expertise capacity and back-and-forth of the Government's strategy on the scale relevant to the economic development, the activity of RCMs' planning publication is declining since the end of the 1990s⁶, whereas "*one of the principal missions of the RCM is to keep updated the planning documents*"⁷. As we can see on the diagram below, from 1996 to 2013: 60 SAD are published in 1988, 50 DOR in 1994, but less than 30 PSADR in 1996, and never more than 10 updates each year from 1997 to 2013.

6 The evolution of the documentary production and the political capacity of the RCMs seems to evolve according to the strategic changes of the provincial government (particularly in terms of decentralization and regionalization), of the political agenda (sovereignism, territorial reform, rationalization of public policies) and of the territorial dynamics (territorial competition, evolution of institutional configurations).

7 Interview, agent of the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup, November 2013.

Figure 2: Timeline of SADs and renewals in Quebec's RCMs (1985-2013)



1.2 The strategic, collaborative and forward-looking turn of the mid-2000s

Although Quebec Government's forward-looking planning has been very popular during the Quiet Revolution and the 1970s in Quebec (Lavallée, 2001), the 1980s context favours a less top-down, less forward-looking and more localized planning (Mazangol, 2002, p.5). *"The hopes of managing the future which led the first wave of future-oriented studies appeared unrealistic, the results obtained meagre or disappointing. This approach suddenly appeared to be too long and unproductive"* (Lavallée, 2001, p.297). By the way, the first generations of RCMs planning documents consisted in a simple review of demographic and economic trends, in an inventory of equipments and infrastructures to be produced, but very few had truly a future-oriented vision. In fact, regarding visioning and even the operational aspect of planning, urban plans and sectoral plans had more influence (Proulx, 2008, p.40). Furthermore, in the late 1980s, the "socio-economic summit" formula, favouring local consultation for short-term action, is even preferred to scholarly planning and long-term forecasting (Proulx, 2008, p.41). Although these local and regional forums addressed issues that could be described as forward-looking, they were mainly aimed at connecting decision-makers than shaping long-term future. In other words, the idea of future-telling was absent from most of the first generations of SADs.

But at the beginning of the 2000s, in Quebec, the way of making policies is renewed around three axes: spatial planning, public debate and sustainable development (Gauthier, Gariépy, Trépanier, 2008). The Sustainable Development Act of 2006 takes part of this change and has greatly contributed to changing the

approach of anticipation at the regional level. Indeed, the notion of *sustainability* brings a new interest for long-term visioning (Fourny, Denizot, 2007). Ideas such as long-term visioning and spatial cohesion are clearly highlighted by the Sustainable Development Act:

“Sustainable development is based on a long-term approach which takes into account the inextricable nature of the environmental, social and economic dimensions of development activities.”⁸

The first issue of the resulting Governmental Strategy for Sustainable Development (2008-2013), subtitled “A Collective Commitment”, is called “Develop Knowledge”:

“Knowledge is the preferred tool for encouraging endorsement of sustainable development values and principles and making enlightened decisions [...] The development, acquisition and dissemination of knowledge and scientific, technical, traditional and popular experiments and experience require awareness, training, research and innovation. Thanks to this knowledge, it is possible to act efficiently and responsibly to rouse the public’s interest and stimulate its commitment.”⁹

To complete this objective of collective knowledge production, the second issue of the strategy puts forward the idea of foresight:

“In foresight, Québec must also adjust to demographic changes by adopting innovative measures designed to foster economic prosperity and demographic balance, notably through catalyst projects creating wealth. It must develop its

⁸ Sustainable Development Act, Title 1, Chapter 1, §2, Quebec, 19 April 2006.

⁹ Government Sustainable Development Strategy, 2008-2013, Government of Québec, [2008] 2013, p.19.

land and natural resources responsibly, using an integrated management approach."¹⁰

Here, the term "foresight" does not refer to the practice of *foresight* as such, but simply to the importance of anticipation: of future-visioning. To achieve this vision in the field of planning, the Government publishes a document entitled *La vision stratégique du développement. Guide de bonnes pratiques sur la planification territoriale et le développement durable*. In this document, Quebec promotes the practice of collaborative future-visioning in order to formulate a "strategic vision" for the development of the territory:

*"The strategic vision is an explicit representation of a desired future, both rational and intuitive, inclusive and forward-looking. Speaking to all the stakeholders of the community, it proposes a convergent and coherent framework for the implementation of a shared ambition. [...] It is a comprehensive picture of where the community wants to be in a long-term planning horizon, in 15 to 20 years or more."*¹¹

The Sustainable Development Act and Strategy have three main consequences for planning and forecasting. Firstly, they highlight a *strategic turn* (Côté, Lévesque, Morneau, 2009): as in Europe, the idea of planning is now more related to the formulation of a spatialized strategy of development, whereas it was before focused on a simple review of the local infrastructures and a land-use approach (Motte, 2006,

10 Government Sustainable Development Strategy, *ibid.*, [2008] 2013, p.19.

11 Gouvernement du Québec, *La vision stratégique du développement. Guide de bonnes pratiques sur la planification territoriale et le développement durable*, rédaction Guillemette E., Direction générale des politiques du Ministère des Affaires municipales, de l'Occupation et de l'Aménagement du Territoire, 2010, p.8.

p.26). Secondly, they also translate a *collaborative turn* (Healey, 1997, Douay, 2008): planning is now based on a more collective approach and long term subsidiarity. And to achieve these strategic and collaborative turns, the visioning process is put forward as a collective process of formulation of a future-oriented strategy. In Quebec, this frame does not refer clearly to the techniques of *strategic foresight* (Godet, 2007) or of “*la prospective territoriale*” (Loinger, Spohr, 2005; Cordobès, 2013) themselves but to a more general idea of anticipation of development’s trends and of the future of the territory. Consequently, we can nonetheless speak thirdly of a *forward-looking turn* in planning, at the end of the 2000s.

In legal terms, before 2011, RCMs were not strictly concerned by the Sustainable Development framework. But the Government foresaw to implement progressively this agenda in all areas and institutions of public action; and, moreover, the legal framework of planning was directly concerned by the law. Therefore, despite this non-obligation of compliance before 2011, RCMs quickly adopted this new regulatory and strategic framework (Marchand, 2015, p.6). In order to provide a legal framework for this evolution, the Government adopted in 2011 the *Avant-Projet de Loi sur l’aménagement durable du territoire et l’urbanisme*. In this document, the Government conferred on the RCMs the responsibility to produce “*a strategic vision statement*” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2011, p.9) for the cultural, economic, environmental and social development of their territory. And what could be better than the *Schéma d’aménagement et de développement* to do it? And indeed, 50%

of the RCMs had adopted a strategic vision of sustainable development before 2012, according to a survey of the Government (Gouvernement du Québec, 2012). Moreover, some recent updates of SADs are clearly inspired by conceptions of “*la prospective territoriale*”, or at least by a future-telling approach, as in Rivière-du-Loup. And furthermore, there is a recent regional movement in Quebec of future’s visioning exercises: “Gaspésie 2025” in 2001, “Saguenay 2025” in 2005, or more recently the strategic plan of Abitibi-Témiscamingue in 2013 and “Outaouais 2030” in 2014 (Lafontaine, 2001; Proulx, 2016; Robitaille, Chiasson, Gauthier, 2016). Although this development is a consequence of the Government’s agendas of decentralization and rationalization, the provincial administration is not very involved¹². Indeed, whereas the concept of visioning is put forward by the provincial administration, Quebec has actually little interest for the “*prospective territoriale*” in itself (Le Berre, 2017, p.497-500). Therefore, despite the fact it is now a legal obligation, this regional movement of collaborative spatial foresight stems mostly from a regionalist agenda, or at least from a regional governance building process, as in Europe (Albrechts, Healey, Kunzmann, 2003; Haughton, Counsell, 2004; Haughton *et alii*, 2010).

2. Storytelling political capacity between planning and governance: the case of “Vision 2031”

12 The provincial administration just controls the conformity of planning strategy and documents of RCMs with the Government general strategy.

This general context impacts the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup. In the perspective to renew its *Schéma d'aménagement et de développement*, the RCM started a strategic visioning process in 2009, called "Vision 2031". This project implied lots of citizens and stakeholders throughout the territory, and was thought to be a cognitive tool for the production of the RCMs' SADR. The goal was also to gather inhabitants and stakeholders in a same visioning process to foster the cohesion and the identity of the community. More than just making a scholar planning exercise, the aim of such a project is to join people with each other, to get out of the silo logic of policy making, and to fill the gap between decision-makers and citizens. It is also a way for the RCM to be at the heart of the future-shaping process. Thus, it is a way for this intermediate and not very powerful institution to invest a new role in the context of multi-scalar governance (Marks, 1993, p.391-410): a mediating role between all the regional stakeholders. In other words, this type of approach has clearly a political dynamic. Being the heart of the future-shaping process means being central in the policy-process.

2.1 Storytelling a new type of planning

In February 2012, the official strategic vision 2011-2031 is adopted by the council of the Regional County Municipality (MRC de Rivière du Loup, 2012). The discursive analysis of the vision statement of the SADR highlights two main narratives: a rhetoric of governance and partnership, and a rhetoric of strategy and innovation.

Figure 3 : Rhetoric of governance and partnership
Strategic Vision of the RCM of Rivière du Loup (2011-2031)

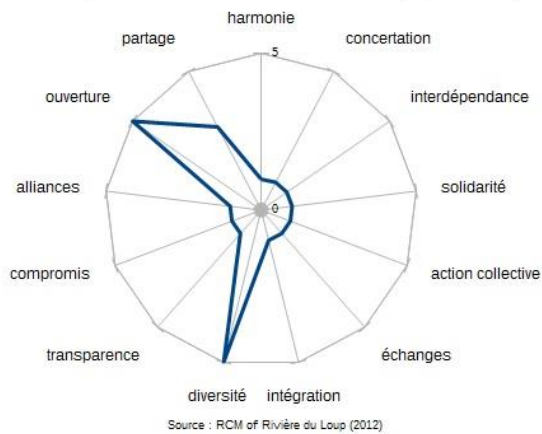
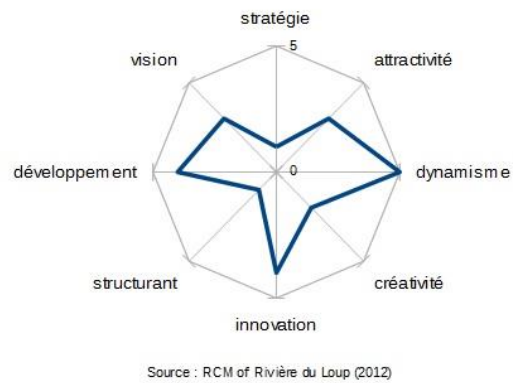


Figure 4 : Rhetoric of strategy and innovation
Strategic Vision of the RCM of Rivière du Loup (2011-2031)



These narratives reflect both the dynamic of the visioning process and its storytelling. The first step of the project was the creation in 2009 of a joined-up committee, bringing together representatives of the *Centre Local de Développement* (CLD), the *Société d'Aide au Développement de la Communauté* (SADC), and the *Centre de Santé et de Services Sociaux* (CSSS) of Rivière-du-Loup, the *Corporation de Développement Communautaire* (CDC) of the region of Kamouraska, Rivière-du-Loup, Témiscouata et des Basques (KRTB), and finally the Municipality and the Regional County Municipality of Rivière-du-Loup. This kind of supra-municipal committee is not an

innovation, but the rhetoric used, insisting on a partnership dynamic, is new and stems from both the strategic state paradigm (Côté, Lévesque, Morneau, 2009), and the collaborative democracy paradigm (Gauthier, Gariépy, Trépanier, 2008), emerging all along the last decade in Quebec. The second step was a *“Tournée des Municipalités”* of the RCM, consisting in the organization of 8 round-tables gathering local stakeholders on cross-cutting and spatial issues for local development. About 100 people met during these round-tables. In 2010, the RCM also set up a web survey on *“the values”* shared by the population of the territory, and made a synthesis of all these statements¹³. If round-tables fit into the tradition of public consultation, their use combined with a survey on values and perceptions of the future translates a new interest for foresight techniques of visioning (Popper, 2008). It also expresses a growing interest for bringing in the visioning process new actors and new discourses, in line with the growing interest for social innovation (Dandurand, 2005) and deliberative practices in planning (Forester, 1999). In 2011, the third step was the organization of a consultative committee composed by volunteer citizens, in charge with the coordination of 5 public consultations throughout the territory of the RCM. Nearly 350 people participated in these consultations and 27 organizations were involved¹⁴. This type of public consultation is not an innovation in itself. It belongs to the historical role of local consultation of RCMs. But what is new is the involvement of citizens to animate the consultations.

13 According to the RCM, almost 250 people voted.

14 Speech of the agent in charge with the Rural Pact’s development, Responsible for the strategic approach, during the inauguration of the sculpture *“Le Visionnaire”*, 12 September 2013. URL: <http://riviereduloup.ca/vision/?id=vision&a=2012>

In such a process, citizens become *partners* of the public action, beside classic organizations of the policy process (Loncle, Rouyer, 2004), as advocated by the OECD (OECD, 2002).

In 2012 began a new step of the consultation and communication process, through the presentation of the vision in several organizations belonging to the RCM's perimeter. Involving around 500 people, the visioning process of Rivière-du-Loup was clearly claimed as a strategy of regional mobilization and commitment, as the Prefect of the RCM proclaimed during the inauguration of the sculpture *Le Visionnaire*:

*"Beyond the fact that the law requires us to carry out a strategic vision, we have decided to go further with an opened approach, focused on exchange and the contribution of all, especially with the sculpture Le Visionnaire."*¹⁵

Here appears the main innovation of "Vision 2031": the conclusion of the process by the manufacturing of a sculpture called "*Le Visionnaire*", resulting of a specific consultation of the youth (in partnership with the *Commission scolaire*) and the inhabitants through a Facebook page. So, the novelty of this exercise is triple: the mobilization of a new public (the youth), the investment of the symbolic (the art), and the use of a new way of making consultation (a social-network). Firstly, the youth was particularly one of the key public of the consultation and communication process:

15 Speech of the Prefect of the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup, during the inauguration of the sculpture "*Le Visionnaire*", 12 September 2013. URL: <http://riviereduloup.ca/vision/?id=vision&a=2012>

“That was the best part that we managed to do. We have managed to mobilize many young people. By the way, we are still working with the schools: we are setting up pedagogical kits to guide teachers in each school. We are putting this in place [...] so that each teacher can work with his students on their own vision of the future.”¹⁶

Secondly, a wide strategy of communication has been set up through social-networking, but also teaching and merchandising. The RCM financed the manufacture and marketing of tote-bags on which the logo of the project is drawn, video capsules on the web, social media monitoring, and finally the communication on the sculpture project. So, what is new in this planning practice is the combination of new communicational techniques (social media and merchandising) and a new mobilization technique (making a collaborative sculpture). Thirdly, then, the sculpture has clearly a pedagogical dimension but also a mobilizing function¹⁷. Noting that it is difficult for people to appropriate a planning document, the idea of taking art as mediation is intentionally a will to create a unifying object.

“In art we find this imaginary, this forward-looking dimension. At the same time, it made it possible to federate all the partners around this object. Through this object you could find all the hopes of partners, including children who were able to see their participation being materialized.”¹⁸

16 Interview, agent of the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup, November 2013.

17 The project “Le Visionnaire” won the regional price and has been selected for the national final of “the Price of rurality”, in the category “Mobilization”, organised by the Government to reward the best projects fostering rural development, as mentioned by the Press release of the 16 September 2014 of the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup. URL: <http://www.riviereduloup.ca/communiqués/?a=2014>

18 Interview, agent of the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup, November 2013.

Indeed, the artist who realized the sculpture based its creativity on the ideas of the youth (resulting of brainstorming in schools) and of the social-networkers (quoting a selection of individual statements on the Facebook page of the project), engraved on the sculpture:

“My interpretation of the demand was to realize a work that can both testify to the strategic vision of the RCM, but also bear witness to the personal visions of the inhabitants. Le Visionnaire is both a sensor and a reflection of the visions of people.”¹⁹

Moreover, it was decided to fit the sculpture just out the building of the RCM, shedding light on the territorial legitimacy of the Regional County Municipality. Then, this object appears as a totem, that is to say a symbolic and federative place for the community (Durkheim [1912] 2008, p.143), which acts as *“a sensor and a reflection of the visions of people”*. This highlights that *“Vision 2031”*, beyond its strategic instrumental function, clearly contains a communicative and legitimating function for the regional community, but also for the RCM itself in terms of politics and polity.

2.2 Storytelling a new mode of government

This narrative on a new inclusive and forward-looking spatial planning appears also as a storytelling of a new mode of government. Three main ideas emerge from this case study, combining discursive and instrumental dimensions:

19 Interview of the sculptor of *Le Visionnaire*, MaTV, online Lezarts TV show, 22 October 2013. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67mvwvBrV8E>

that kind of spatial forward-looking planning is *a collaborative and communicational instrument* for regional animation in a context of an increasing governance building; it is also *a cognitive instrument* useful to share socio-political values and practices throughout a territorial community; it is then *a political instrument* for intermediate public institutions to heighten their legitimacy in a global context of centre-periphery tension and territorialization of policy practices (Albrechts, Healey, Kunzmann, 2003).

To begin with the collaborative and communicational governance, that kind of project achieves the implication of all the planning stakeholders, since the beginning of the visioning process. Thus, the *Commission scolaire de Kamouraska-Rivière-du-Loup*, the SADC and the CLD contributed to the funding of the consultation process, in addition to participating in the steering committee. The regional *Conseil de la culture* also participates in the name of the “*public art dimension*” of the sculpture. The CEGEP of Rivière-du-Loup was also involved by loaning equipments and buildings. Then, the Museum of the Bas-Saint-Laurent was and is still part of the process by including the sculpture in its “*Circuit Public Art*”. Finally, the RCM led the process and financed it, first through its regular resource envelope but also through the budget allowance for rural development. Thence, from the first step of the decision making process (the joined-up committee), to the funding process (a cross-cutting funding) and the strategy formulation process (the collaborative consultations), “*Vision 2031*” is based on a discursive dynamic blurring

the gap between decision-maker and citizen, between citizen and inhabitant, between expert knowledge and children's imaginary, between sectors and territories, with the aim of involving the larger coalition of actors as possible.

“The wealth of the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup comes from each of its communities and their solidarity. [...] The communities of the RCM are aware of their interdependencies. They are cooperative, open-minded, in solidarity, and share their wealth. The municipal organization of the RCM reflects the desire of sharing [...] between communities. They pursue the same vision, to remain a pleasant, liveable, fair and prosperous territory for the generations of today and tomorrow.”²⁰

This all-out actors commitment helps to embody “the community”. It brings it an institutional and a social consistency. This type of commitment has consequently two main political properties. Firstly, it is a process of *territory making*, both in terms of community, polity and perimeter for politics and policies. And territory making is precisely one of the pillars for political legitimacy (Le Bart, 2003, p.147). Secondly, it is also a process of *polity defining*. That is to say, it contributes to defining people of the community, which means to give body to “the subjects” of the polity. Yet again, polity defining is a second pillar for political legitimacy (Hassenteufel, Rasmussen, 2001, p.59). Since the late 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s, there is an increasing consideration on the need for a more porous and opened system bringing into the policy process a much wider range of actors, in a context of a weakening conception of a closed-off territorial system (Rhodes, 1997). This political trend means the

²⁰ RCM of Rivière-du-Loup, 2012, p.4.

opening of sub-national governance systems, implying various styles of cross-cutting partnership (Haughton, Counsell, 2004, p.33): from children to decision-makers, each member of the community is now considered and involved as a potential partner. The discourse putting forward collaborative approaches and the idea of participative democracy emphasize the issue of widening stakeholders involvement beyond traditional elites, and of recognizing alternative forms of knowledge. This new type of spatial planning, based on the storytelling of an opened and collaborative policy-making process, operates as a territorial networking activity and regional identity building (Haughton et alii, 2010). The sustainability concept is again one of the cognitive streams of this process: *“sustainable development debates have focused both on the need for “new localism” discourses premised on the notion that it is local actors who are best positioned to address many of the concerns of sustainable development”* (Haughton, Counsell, 2004, p.34).

Then appears the cognitive dimension of the new forward-looking spatial planning. The innovation is not in the content of the planning documents, nor in the identified issues themselves²¹, but in the communication around the planning process. It aims at creating a cognitive frame shared by the most stakeholders as possible. The first goal is to put forward the necessity to harmonize the regional

21 Indeed, the issues and cartography of the SADR are quite classical in terms of territorial diagnosis: demographic and economic attractiveness, urban extension, changes in agriculture and industry, environmental issues, transport infrastructures, public services, etc. (MRC de Rivière-du-Loup, 2013a). And, in fact, apart from a demographic projection until 2031 (MRC de Rivière-du-Loup, 2013a, chapter 2, p.20), few of the statistical data used in the SADR are really forecasting. Most of them are retrospective.

planning documents. Thus, the strategic vision is used by the RCM administration to frame the new *Schéma d'aménagement* (SADR), thanks to the identification of 5 cross-cutting issues, voted during the public consultations: “*quality of life, family, dynamism, innovation, spirit of openness*” (RCM Rivière-du-Loup, 2012, p.1). The first aspect of the cognitive dimension is actually an aim of *rationalization* of the several previous planning documents. The second aspect is an aim of *consensus building* between the different stakeholders in order to harmonize (which also means rationalizing) their different development strategies and representations of the territory. To do so, foresight appears as an accurate tool to reach consensus, because of its long-term horizon:

“If you want to reaching consensus, it is difficult to go down a 20 years horizon. Below 20 years, there is a too great diversity of opinions. It is more complex to build consensus on a 5 or 10 years horizon only. Whereas if you look far into the future, it is easier to reach a consensus”²²

The third aspect is to foster the diffusion of the strategy, in order to help the standardization of the different stakeholders’ strategies of development. For example, the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup created a “*Charte d’engagement*” so that stakeholders act in accordance with the general strategy and objectives of the RCM. Indeed, institutions which ratify the charter commit to act in conformity with the policy-framework and strategic vision of the RCM. But because of its non-obligatory compliance dimension, this guideline is mostly communicational.

²² Interview, agent of the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup, November 2013.

“It is more a communication posture than anything else, because once it is signed, you can hang it on a wall and that’s it [...] You know, everybody is very interested at the beginning of the process in working with each other, but when it is over the old routine gets the upper hand.”²³

And yet, for lack of being better operational, it helps at diffusing and sharing the cognitive frame.

Here appears the political dimension of forward-looking spatial planning. Through these communicational and cognitive devices, it appears that, more than planning in itself, the visioning step is used to steer a fragile regional governance by shaping and sharing a vision of the future. Therefore, we can say that foresight has a legitimizing function. It should be remembered at this point that the strategic visioning process is in principle just a legal first step for the renewing of the *Schéma d’aménagement et de développement*. So the RCM achieved a communication feat in managing to commit a large number of stakeholders to participating and agreeing on the RCM’s planning strategy. This strategy translates a search for a more relational way of planning. It also translates a move to a more collaborative way of making policies. Even if it remains very fragile, this trend puts the light on an on-building “shared governance”. And foresight helps to achieve the institutionalization of such a governance which, in return, transforms the meanings and uses of knowledge. As a result, beyond the classic vision of expertise as a tool for decision-making, forward-looking spatial planning “emerges as a political

²³ Interview, agent of the RCM of Rivière-du-Loup, November 2013.

apparatus of governance that can promote collective mobilization and the exchange of resources. It helps to structure collective action on a territory. In this sense, the development of such a mediating expertise could well be considered, at least in the eyes of public officials, as a response to the context of polycentrism and divided interests” (Cadiou, 2007, p.173).

Here appears a last pillar for intermediate political spaces' legitimacy-building: the capacity to shape shared narratives of the future. In other words, more than expressing a concrete capacity for action, the collaborative production of future-oriented narratives of the future is part of a storytelling of political capacity.

Conclusion

Now, creating knowledge justified only by scientificity is no longer adequate: what matters is sharing and opening the policy process to produce a collective vision of the region. By integrating spatial foresight to a planning exercise, the Regional County Municipality of Rivière-du-Loup made this shift to a more relational and communicative planning, which means that knowledge sharing and networking are henceforth what imply the most (Cadiou, 2007, p.175). The mobilization of knowledge and skills from the civil society takes place in order to increase the viewing angles of the future (Cuhls, 2003). Thus the civil society becomes partner of the knowledge production. By operating as a networking activity, this “*new spatial planning*” (Haughton et alii, 2010) contributes to the institutionalization of new spaces of politics, involving the multiplicity of local and individual interests,

identities and visions. But this process is mainly discursive: if words of planning are changing, the operation of planning in itself has not really changed. In other words, such forward-looking spatial exercise appears as a renewed *narrative* and *order of meaning* on governance and planning, far more from a new type of governance or a new type of planning as such.

But the shift from a hierarchical and sectoral approach of planning to a more spatialized, horizontal, and future-oriented approach is part of a more global perspective, as studied by Haughton, Allmendinger, Counsell and Vigar (Haughton, *et alii*, 2010). Firstly, this “new spatial planning” translates an on-going shift from silo logic to spatial logic, which means that sectoral issues are now more spatialized. Being spatial makes them being horizontal, and implies that the responsibility of the economic development does not stem only from the public government but from all the regional community. Secondly, these new policy narratives bring to light that the authority and political capacity of public governments are nowadays challenged. It underlines more generally the crisis of the top-down model of state territorial management. In other words, forward-looking thinking and guidelines seem to be new types of regulation: *a governance by the future*. Here appears the link between spatial planning, politics of future and governance. Governance is based on a more horizontal management of public policies. Governance is the result of the need to develop new narratives, but also forms of policy regulation and coordination, which break with traditional hierarchical forms and narratives of state control. It means

also that this new type of politics is thus rooted in the weakening of older forms and narratives of regulation. Moreover, its development stems from a specific context of the weakening centrality of public authorities. Regarding this global context, collaborative strategic visioning processes appear as being tools helping public authorities to remain central in the sub-regional politics.

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