



Digital Identity Construction Of Environmental Movements Through Media Access:

The Anti-Nuclear Movement In Belgium and The Anti-Gas Line Movement In Canada

GRÉGOIRE LITS (ULB, UCL) @GREG_LITS

NADÈGE BROUSTAU (ULB, UQAM), @NBROUSTAU

21/08/2019, ESA MANCHESTER

UNIVERSITÉ LIBRE DE BRUXELLES, UNIVERSITÉ D'EUROPE

ULB

General context of the research

- ▶ Part of a research supported by a grant of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC)
 - ▶ Insight Development Grant led by Olivier TURBIDE (University of Quebec in Montreal, UQAM) and Nadège BROUSTAU (Free University of Brussels, ULB; UQAM)
 - ▶ « News event and information flow in the era of web 2.0: journalists, public relations professionals and citizens »

▶ General goals of the main project

1. Understanding the information flow between journalists, PR professionals and citizens in the social web context
2. **Understanding how a public debate evolves throughout this flow**
3. **Exploring how actors use online medias to build and fix their public roles in the debate**

Focus on social movements access to (social) media

- ▶ Main research questions:
 - ▶ How do environmental activists and Social Movement Organisation (SMO) gain access to social and traditional media?
 - ▶ How do social movement organisation (SMO) use social media to shape their identity?
- ▶ Theoretical considerations
 - ▶ Understanding activist media practices as relational (Rudig 1990). Media practice must be understood in the system of relations that surrounds the social problems under scrutiny (Lits 2015).
 - ▶ Focus on “new” locally anchored environmental contestation movement.

Main hypothesis based on literature

- ▶ The media practices of local envir. contestation movement differ from more traditional actors (private company, "old" SMO, political actors)
 - ▶ No or almost no strategy of individualisation of image. Collective dimension more important in image construction (Gamson 1991, Pleyers 2010)
 - ▶ Not depositary of a stable identity. Goal is to build new identities (Polleta and Jasper 2001) ≠ SMO with long history.
 - ▶ More anchored in the "deliberative turn" (Blondiaux 2008), more democratic, more prone to use "dialogic" PR strategies (Yates 2015) (vs. diffusionist strategies)
 - ▶ More prone to use social media (more dialogical) than classical PR strategy to gain access to the public sphere

Methodology

- ▶ Main goal : Comparison between institutional and industry online communication AND grassroots movements' online communication to see how they build their respective roles in the public controversy
- ▶ General approach: hypothetico-inductive
- ▶ Method : Content and « socio-semiotic » analysis
- ▶ Analysis grid with 3 dimensions :
 1. Argumentative dimension
 2. Rhetoric stances adopted by the actors (including visual tools)
 3. Professional aspects of their communication (including navigation tools)

Two cases studied

► Gas line project in Quebec, Canada

- 2017-2019
- 782 kilometres in Quebec and Ontario



► Nuclear debate in Belgium

- 2017-2019
- Nuclear phasing out and security of supply (black-out)



Corpus

Websites and social medias of institutions, industry and protest groups

Gas line project in Quebec

- ▶ Websites (Gazoduq, GNL Québec, Energie Saguenay, Action Boréale, Equiterre, Greenpeace Canada, Fondation David Suzuki...)
- ▶ Blogs (Coalition Fjord)
- ▶ Facebook (Coalition Fjord, Gazoduc Parlons-En, Eau secours, Collectif du Bas-Saguenay, Greenpeace Canada...)

Nuclear debate in Belgium

- ▶ Websites (Forum nucléaire, Stop Tihange, Stop nucléaire, RAN – Rassemblement anti-nucléaire)
- ▶ YouTube (RAN, Bouli Lanners, Greenpeace)
- ▶ Facebook (Stop Tihange, RAN)

Main results for Quebec natural gas line project: a past issue rising again

- ▶ Follows another project that had triggered a huge controversy: Energie Est
- ▶ Between 2014 and 2017, plan to build an oleoduc from the West coast to the Quebec coast: Saint Laurent river directly concerned
- ▶ Public hearings only after the project was already publicly discussed
- ▶ Opposition between political stages: local, regional, provincial and federal
- ▶ Big opposition from protest groups that were created specifically for this issue
- ▶ Project finally officially rejected by the federal government in 2017



a precedent in a media jurisprudence (Broustau, 2018)

Comparison of the actors



Dimension	Institutional/industry actors	Protest actors
Shadows and uncertainty	Management of the risks and of the unexpected	Identification of the loopholes and shortcomings
Common good	Fast economic contribution	Long term sustainability
Communication intended to the general audience	Transparency as a way to gain public acceptance Proofs : documentation, records of dialog with the public	No visible strategy* : - Disperse information - Incomplete or invisible information * apart from the FB of Coalition Fjord (media leadership)
Anticipation of audience reactions	Deactivating critics and fears :Very detailed FAQ, newsletter	Limited call to action: petition, disperse answers to potential questions

- Protest movements take up the arguments of institutional actors for public acceptance and weaken them



LE PROJET ÉNERGIE SAGUENAY



QUEST CE QUE LE GNL?
Régulièrement, le GNL se classe parmi les sources d'énergie les plus sécuritaires et les plus propres et ce qui concerne le respect de l'environnement. Découvrez les propriétés uniques du GNL, une énergie en pleine demande mondiale.



GNL QUÉBEC



GNL QUÉBEC
Créé par une équipe de professionnels expérimentés, le projet GNL Québec est un grand investissement qui puise dans l'expertise internationale dans des projets GNL. GNL Québec a également fait appel aux meilleurs professionnels internationaux et locaux dans les domaines de l'ingénierie, de l'environnement, du juridique, de la technique et, une relation avec la collectivité afin de répondre aux attentes de nos partenaires. Pour plus d'informations, consultez la section « GNL Québec ».

EN SAVOIR

INSCRIVEZ-VOUS À NOTRE NEWSLETTE
Régalez-vous à l'actualité de nos projets et de nos initiatives.

An exciting contribution to the economy and the environment

Learn more about the project

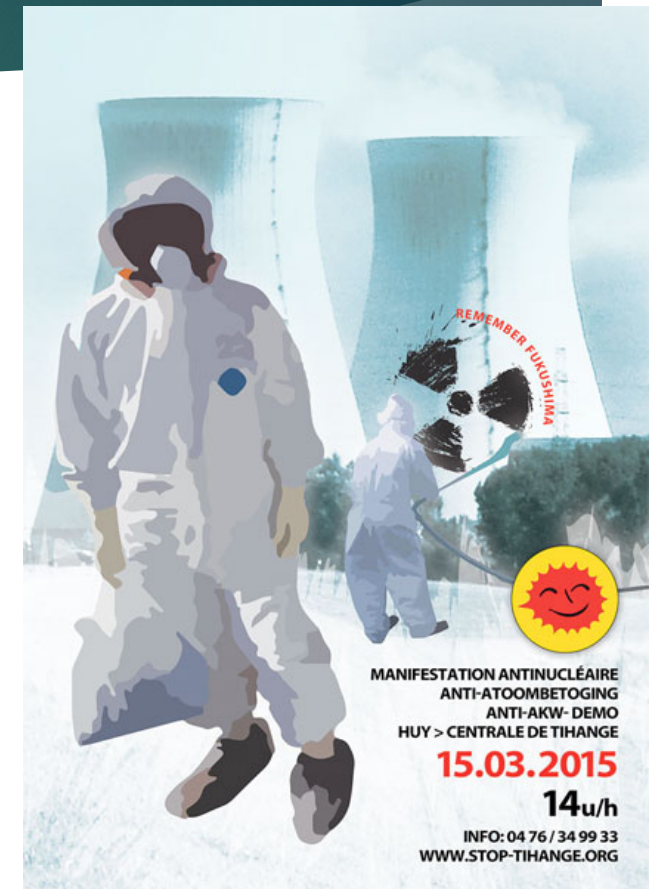


► Same data about the project but with opposite interpretations

- Same mapping of the project
- Same facts about the climate issues

Main results for nuclear debate in Belgium

- ▶ Rebirth of the anti-nuclear mov. In 2014.
 - ▶ Transnational mobilisation (Germany, Nederland, Belgium) - > STOP Tihange.
- ▶ Difference between old environmental SMO (Greenpeace, WWF,...) and the “new” anti-nuclear actors.



Main results for nuclear debate in Belgium

- ▶ 2017 demonstration with 50.000 persons
- ▶ Since then: different (very) small associations diffuse FB or YouTube videos with :
 - ▶ Emotional reaction to different media events (black-out announcement, problem of security in the nuclear power plant, ministry decisions...)
 - ▶ Rational (expert) arguments against nuclear energy.
 - ▶ Very large audience (up to 350.000 views)
- ▶ No direct contacts with journalists specialised in energy question.
- ▶ No links or no joined communication with traditional SMO (Greenpeace)

Example of FB video

- ▶ <https://www.facebook.com/bouli.lanners.off/videos/291705258158726/>
- ▶ Personalisation of the movement -> Bouli Lanners (famous Belgian actor) becoming the face of anti-nuclear (and climate change) activists.
- ▶ After posting videos he has been invited in traditional media (national tv news...).

Conclusion

- ▶ A common issue : what's good for climate/the planet?
 - ▶ From the same premise – e.g. we need to do what's good for climate/the planet -, opposite claims/recommendations
- ▶ Counter-expertise WITHIN the system or also alternative form of communication?
 - ▶ Kind of local group structuration, but without clear coordination
 - ▶ Strong visibility of the cause vs weak identity of the groups
- ▶ Perspectives :
 - ▶ evanescent movements
 - ▶ « tension » between spontaneous protest movements and established NGOs
 - ▶ Contrasted use of online and social medias :
 - ▶ Visit card intended to general audience AND decision makers (project holders) ➡ social acceptability
 - ▶ First and almost aonly gate to the public sphere ➡ mobilisation of citizens **AND** medias

Bibliography

- ▶ Blondiaux, L. (2008) *Le nouvel esprit de la démocratie : Actualité de la démocratie participative*. Seuil.
- ▶ Broustau, N. and Côté, L. (2014) 'Reconfiguration des interactions professionnelles entre relationnistes et journalistes: une analyse du milieu culturel québécois', *Les cahiers du journalisme*, (26), pp. 72–93.
- ▶ Gamson, W. A. (1991) 'Commitment and agency in social movements', *Sociological Forum*, 6(1), pp. 27–50. doi: 10.1007/BF01112726.
- ▶ Lits, G. (2015) *La gestion des déchets hautement radioactifs belges à l'épreuve de la démocratie*. PhD thesis. Université catholique de Louvain.
- ▶ Pleyers, G. (2010) *Alter-Globalization. Becoming Actors in the Global Age*. Cambridge (UK): Polity Press.
- ▶ Polletta, F. and Jasper, J. M. (2001) 'Collective Identity and Social Movements', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 27, pp. 283–305.
- ▶ Rüdiger, W. (1990) *Anti-nuclear movements: a world survey of opposition to nuclear energy*. Longman Current Affairs.
- ▶ Turbide, O. (2015) 'La construction d'images publiques dans le discours politique médiatique. . Qu'est-ce qu'une performance adéquate?', *Communiquer. Revue de communication sociale et publique*, (14), pp. 5–23. doi: 10.4000/communiquer.1624.
- ▶ Yates, S. (2015) 'Relations publiques et gouvernance participative : une vision partagée du « vivre ensemble »?', *Communiquer. Revue de communication sociale et publique*, (15), pp. 107–121. doi: 10.4000/communiquer.1722.