Organizational Discourse and Networks Mobilization: A Case Study of the "MigrActive Discourse" in Quebec (Canada)

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Abstract

Mobilizing local and regional actors' networks appears fundamental to the development of a territory plagued by many issues. Therefore the knowledge of mobilizing factors appears to be a necessity. Many of them have been identified, without really taking into account the logic of cooperation networks. Recently, interactions between actors who make up a unique network, appeared to have an ability to mobilize. More precisely, there are mobilizing influences within networks of actors. The best known are leadership and communicative influence. The latter is the object of study in this article. By means of their discourse, some organizations demonstrate their ability to alter the perceptions of regional actors, so they are able to mobilize for collective actions to develop their community. To demonstrate this, the case of the migrActive discourse was investigated. It was born at the initiative of youth organizations in the Saguenay - Lac-Saint-Jean in Quebec, which aimed to change the mindset of regional actors on the issue of youth migration. They wanted to introduce a positive discourse to create cohesion and regional mobilization, so that young people want to settle in the Saguenay - Lac-Saint-Jean.

Keywords: Cooperation network; mobilizing influence; organizational discourse.

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1. Introduction

Over the past few years, the interest for the topic of regional actors' mobilizationhas been increasing among researchers, policymakers and practitioners. This interest is strong since the mobilization of regional actors is seen as a sine qua non for the success of projects dedicated to development [1]. Many mobilizing factors have been searched. Mobilization is believed to originate from the characteristics of social structures, the willingness of people or interactions between members of the same network. These factors are referred to as interactional. They can be either extrinsic (i.e. depending on one's positioning in the network), or intrinsic (i.e. depending on how much influence a given actor exercises within the network).

The latest research in regional development has remained at an exploratory stage regarding intrinsic factors, those which pay attention to the influence as a factor of mobilization [2]. A question and a research hypothesis will be formulated in order to better understand the role of influence in mobilizing networks around issues of regional development. The two main types of known intrinsic interactional factors are leadership and communicative influence. In the latter case, the argument is a mean to influence actors, so that they adhere to perceptions contained in a discourse. The strategies developed for these purposes remain to be known.

This article will focus particularly on the communicative impacts in mobilizing networks of regional actors. The question is how organizations use the influence of their discourse to mobilize their networks around regional development issues. We formulate the hypothesis that the communicative influence would be effective when mobilizing organizations offer a dual strategy, anchoring or reframing their discourse. Thus, the main objective is to study similarities or differences between the discourse of mobilizing agents and that of the actors to mobilize. Two strategies will be analyzed: "anchoring strategy" (appeal to common values) and "framing strategy" (introduction of novelty). A context should be provided to the study. For that, first will be identified an organizational discourse and an "prevailing" discourse, and the influence of one on the other will be analyzed. The case of the "migrActive discourse" in a region of northern Quebec, the Saguenay - Lac-Saint-Jean, will be retained as a typical case.

The migrActive discourse originates from the MigrAction Strategy. It is a regional partnership created September 15, 2003 on the initiative of youth organizations: the Youth Action Coalition-02 (RAJ-02 in French) and three Youth Employment Centres (CJE in French). Their goal was to counter the phenomenon of youth migration in the Saguenay - Lac-Saint-Jean. This partnership has materialized in a specific agreement of regionalization June 25, 2004. The MigrAction Strategy tackles a key aspect of the Saguenay -. Lac-Saint-Jean development. This remote region of Quebec, also termed "peri-nordic" [3], is affected by many issues: attractiveness, land occupancy, living standards, etc. But the migration of young people has been one of the most important over the past thirty years.

Several methods will be used in this research. The first will be to reconstruct the cooperation networks oftheRAJ-02 and of the CJE. Then the steps of mobilization of these networks of cooperation will be defined using a longitudinal study of the MigrAction Strategy in the period 2001-2011. The level of mobilization of regional actors will be measured by identifying types of mobilization through time. Another approach will be to

know the influence of the migrActive discourse over the prevailing discourse in the period 2001-2011. Comparing the evolution of the mobilization and the influence should confirm or refute the hypothesis.

2. Materials and methods

2.1. Case study

A case study was elaborated as a strategy of demonstration. Case study is defined as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" [4]. Several approaches are possible with comparative case studies: comparison according to a characteristic, comparison of groups created randomly, comparison over time [5]. We opted for a single case study with a comparison of periods.

To be selected, a case has to demonstrate its exemplary [6]. First, the MigrAction Strategy is an exemplary case because it can be exhaustively documented through various sources of information: organizational documentation (RAJ-02, CJE, etc.), articles from the local and regional press, press releases, statistics, etc. In addition, primary data were available after meeting several agents of the MigrAction Strategy, twenty-three in total, involved in each of the periods under consideration. Then, the case can be limited in time and space. A time frame of the mobilization was made out of mobilization steps suggested in the literature [7]. These steps have been identified in the case of the MigrAction Strategy: October 27, 2001 (the beginnings of the MigrAction Strategy), September 15, 2003 (realization), June 25, 2004 (implementation), July 14, 2008 (renewal). The different periods delineated were compared in this longitudinal study. This approach is called "temporal comparison"[8].

2.2. Operationalization of concepts

The concept of mobilization is to be defined. According to the interactionist structuralism paradigm, mobilization would be nothing other than the activation of latent social networks in order to cooperate [9]. This would involve mobilization networks with cooperative purposes. Cooperation networks are those who "do not oppose opponents, but are rather made of partners who seek to cooperate with each other" [10].The mobilization of cooperation networks implies a partnership between actors. Mobilization will be synonymous with partnership. In this logic, the steps leading to partnership will be equivalent to those of mobilization. Partnership is called "active participation", as well as cooperation or collaboration [11]. Conversely, there is a passive participation: information [12] and consultation [13]. Thus are to be distinguished "passive mobilization" and "active mobilization" on the model of participation.There would be five main phases in the mobilization process of local and regional actors' networks [14]: 1) onset and diagnosis; 2) initial mobilization; 3) shared vision and development planning; 4) continuous mobilization (making project); 5) evaluation.

The second concept is the "influence of the organizational discourse". It refers to the communicative influence. Very briefly, communicative influence could be likened to a process of social influence through argument. This is the idea that an actor can influence another through communication [15]. The process of social influence refers to "the changes entailed in judgments, opinions, attitudes of an individual - or a group - the fact to take

note of judgments, opinions and attitudes of others on the same subject" [16]. The targeted actor will react in three different ways: engage, comply, or resist [17].

Social influence involves means of persuasion through oral communication. It often boils down to a process of argumentation, "a process by which a person - or a group - undertakes to bring an audience to adopt a position by the use of presentations or assertions - arguments - designed to show its validity or merits" [18].The argument is therefore to convince others to adhere to a perception. There are three types of arguments [19]. The first is described as authoritarian as it is based on competence or experience. The second appeals to common assumptions, values or shared beliefs. The last one alludes to reality reframing. The agent of influence defines a new framework, new perceptions that targeted actors should join. Strategies of argument can be made either to anchor reality, reference to common assumptions, or to reframe a reality, i.e. shaping new perceptions conveyed in a speech which shall appeal to others.

Finally, precisions should be given on the regional actors influenced by the discourse. They may belong to different spheres: state, local and regional authorities, civil society and entrepreneurs [20]. They are mobilized by agents of mobilization. Those are leaders in their community. They must "create the right conditions for citizen participation on the territory" [21]. Thus, mobilization is synonymous with participation. Actors will mobilize potential partners planning to "build lasting relationships between them" [22].

2.3. Methods of data collection

Data collection was to help the achievement of a series of tasks specific to an empirical approach. These data had to respond to specific requests: understanding the MigrAction Strategy and the actors involved; discovering these actors' networks; identifying mobilization from 2001 to 2011; determining the characteristics and components of the actors' discourse.

A press review was made. Its first goal was to determine the types of mobilization implemented by the youth organizations. The second aim was to reconstruct the discourse of these organizations about youth migration, and the one of the regional actors. The study period was chosen. October 27, 2001 is a key date for the building of the MigrAction Strategy. That day, the exodus of young people became the trumpeted cause of the youth organizations. The research period ends in June 2011, when the annual review of the MigrAction Strategy was made to donors. This is therefore a ten-year period. Several local and regional newspapers are notable: *L'Étoile du Lac, Le Journal Lac-St-Jean*, *Le Quotidien, Le Progrès-Dimanche*, etc. The research software *Eureka.cc* was used to target items, thus ensuring the completeness of the press review. After sorting, 446 articles were retained for their relevance.

Semi-structured interviews were also conducted to structure the organizational discourse. The designated population for the interviews consists of all persons working or who have worked within the youth organizations engaged in the MigrAction Strategy.It is precisely agents of the "migrActive team", past or present, since the study is longitudinal. The press review has been helpful in the distinction of key persons. A core group of 13 people was then established.To complete this population, the researcher conducted a snowball sampling method,

"a technique that consists in adding to a core, all individuals who are in relationship with them, and so on"[23]. For example agents have referred us to some of their colleagues. Finally, the size of the population was 24 people.

Other data have proved useful for the construction of the research object context. They were important for several reasons: the contribution of statistical data (*Institut de la Statistique du Québec*, Statistics Canada), knowledge of plans and action balances, and access to surveys conducted on populations of the region. These secondary data came from several sources: Government of Quebec, local authorities of the Saguenay - Lac-Saint-Jean, youth organizations, public institutions (universities, etc.), Research groups (groupeÉCOBES).

2.4. Methods of analysis

One of the objectives was to identify the prevailing discourse, i.e. what was said on the migration or exodus of young people before the creation of the MigrAction Strategy September 15, 2003. All significant articles published in the local and regional press between October 27, 2001 and September 15, 2003, were consulted. They numbered 74. The content of these items was analyzed, that is to say coded. Coding is a cutting operation of the corpus, in order to form relevant information units.The Morin-Chartier method was used [24]. Thus, in a first step, information units were circumscribed by theme, because the objective was to find themes related to the migration or exodus of young people. They are concrete statements on the subject. In a second step, a categorization work was conducted. This consisted in classifying the units of information obtained under a common generic. A software, *NVivo 9*, has helped organize these themes and sub-themes.

The corpus formed by the 23 semi-structured interviews was analyzed. But before all, the interviews recorded were fully transcribed. The transcript was then coded. At first, the researcher divided the corpus in propositions (assertions), as indicated by the rules of the propositional discourse analysis (PDA) [25]. An average of just over 400 propositions by interview has been reached.Since the preferred analysis is categorical, these propositions were subsequently grouped under the umbrella of a common theme. The researcher has identified information units linked to the theme of youth migration. Other themes were identified in these units. The most recurrent, in co-occurrence with respect to the migration of young people, thus appeared to be major components of the migrActive discourse. Six themes or components have been identified:

1.   Comparative advantages of the Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean
2.   Professional integration of young people
3.   Entrepreneurship in the Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean
4.   Sense of belonging to the region
5.   Culture of mobilization
6.   Improvement in the Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean net migration

Finally, it was necessary to analyze the mobilization of the youth organizations' networks. The first objective was to determine the status of these cooperative networks and the relative location of the actors who make them up, before the MigrAction Strategy became a specific agreement in June 2004. The study of the press review

then consisted in the census of information about collective actions involving the CJE on the one hand, and the RAJ-02 on the other hand. By collective action, we mean all partnerships, actions of cooperation, collaborations, consultations and information sessions. A list of stakeholders was then generated. An array of social networks has been constructed using *Ucinet 6*. In a binary matrix, relations have been marked with a "1" and the absence of a relationship with a "0".*NetDraw* has generated graphs objectifying the social networks of both the RAJ-02 and of each of the CJE (Figure 2, Figure 3). A second objective was to discern stages of mobilization: 1) onset and diagnosis; 2) initial mobilization; 3) shared vision and collective action planning; 4) operationalization of collective action; 5) evaluation. The analysis of the level of involvement of regional actors was a third objective.

3. Results

3.1. Level of network mobilization by phase (2001-2011)

The mobilization of regional actors was carried out in five major periods. Each of them reflect a more or less variable intensity depending on the type of mobilization. At the outset, it should be noted that this mobilization was especially active. The MigrAction Strategy has given rise to numerous collaborations, dialogues (cooperation) and partnerships. Regional partnerships are examples of the most successful mobilization.
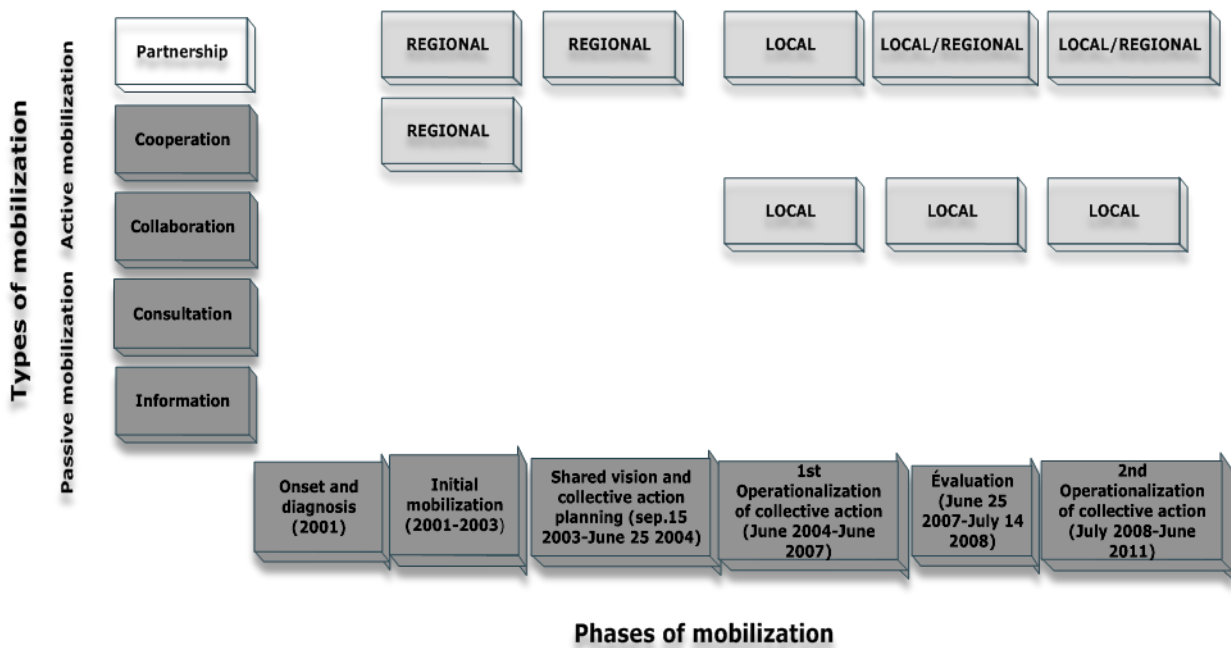

Fig. 1. Types and phases of mobilization (2001-2011)

In the first period, from 2001 to 2003, local and regional consultations resulted in regional partnerships. The mobilization of regional actors was strong in order to achieve a specific agreement of regionalization. This strengthening of regional partnerships was particularly illustrated in the second period, from September 15, 2003 to June 25, 2004. In the third period, from June 2004 to June 2007, the MigrAction Strategy returned in its

operationalization phase. Local partnerships and collaborations were then dominant. The decline of regional collective action also meant that of the mobilization. The fourth period June 25, 2007 to July 14, 2008, confirmed the strengthening of local partnerships and collaborations. It is however concluded by the renewing of the specific agreement of regionalization with 36 partners. In the fifth period, from July 2008 to June 2011, the MigrAction Strategy returned again in operationalization phase. Local collaborations would give rise to fears of local closure. However, these fears could be allayed by a significant upsurge in regional partnerships (Figure 1).

3.2. Structuring networks

If the stages of mobilization mainly consisted in mobilizing existing networks since 2001 (Figure 2), they nevertheless had a structuring effect from 2004 to 2011. After 2004, other regional actors have been mobilized. In view of the cooperation network in 2011, and the fact that networks are mobilized for regional development issues, it would be permissible to think that the next specific agreement would include more partners.
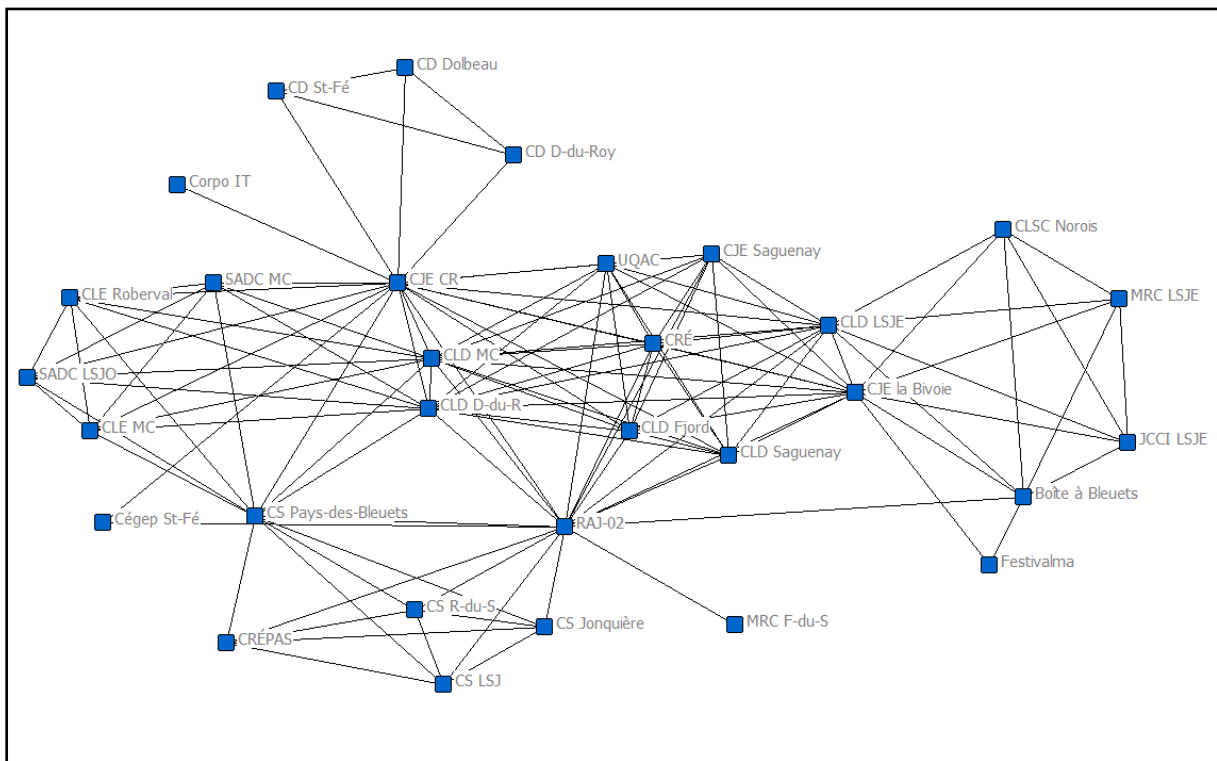

Fig. 2. Cooperation network: RAJ-02, CJE comtéRoberval, CJE Lac-Saint-Jean-Est and CJE Saguenay (2001-2004)

The networks of the RAJ-02 and the CJE widened since the signing of the first specific agreement in 2004. Local (Chambers of Commerce and Industry) or regional organizations (CRÉPAS, Centre for International Solidarity) and businesses (Bell, Canal Vox, Malette, etc.), joined a network mainly formed by government agencies and local authorities. The notable change after 2004, is certainly the inclusion of several local or

regional companies such as Malette, Unibec or Ferlac. The network diversified by including partners and employees from all professional areas (Figure 3).
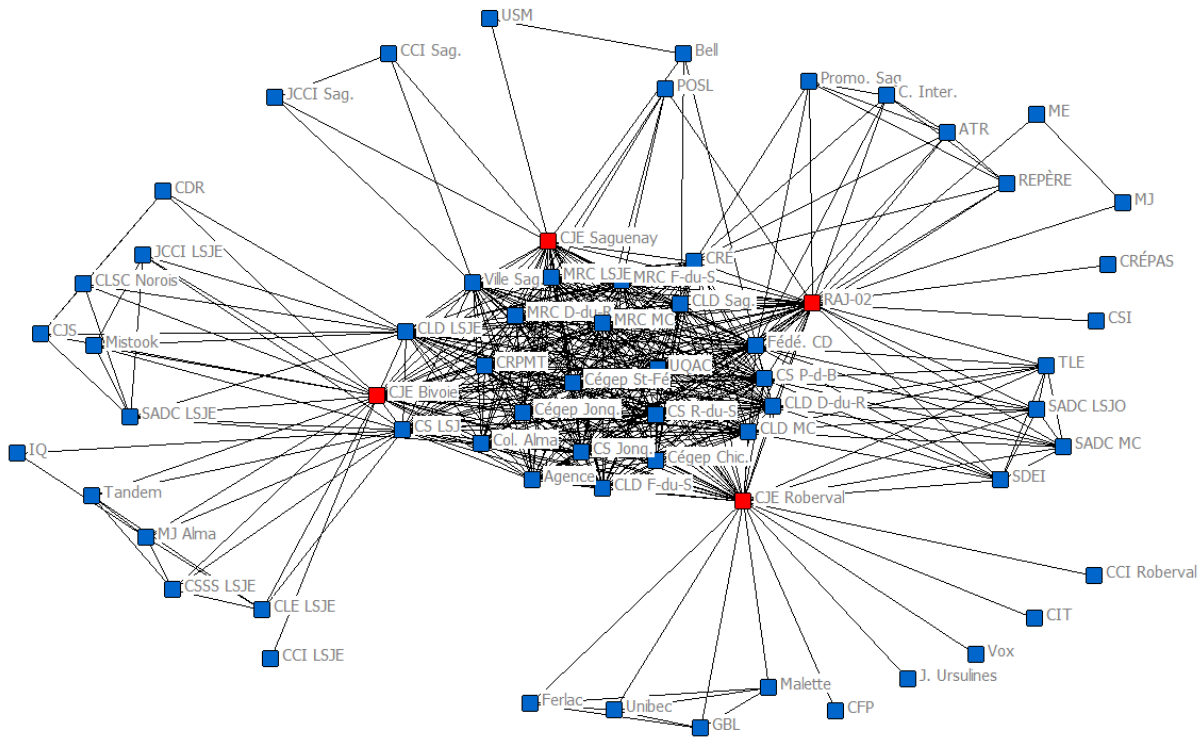

Fig. 3. RAJ-02 and CJE cooperation network (2001-2011)

3.3. MigrActive discourse: impact on regional actors

The prevailing discourseon youth migration, the one embodied by the regional actors, revolves around five axes. First, the phenomenon of youth migration is presented as inevitable. More and more young people leave the region, attracted by metropolises. They do not consider their return. Second, this exodus is massive and of quality. Third, the exodus of young people leads to a demographic vicious circle. It would result in statistically aging population, thus in demographic decline. Fourth, jobs could be the cause of this exile. Indeed, plant closures and layoffs have detonated the unemployment figures, which instantly pushed many young people out of the region. Fifth, employment could also be the solution to the problem, including the creation of quality jobs.

The migrActive discourse contains six components. The first and most detailed is that of the comparative advantages of the Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean. It is described as a beautiful area where people enjoy an exceptional quality of life and opportunities. The second component puts forward the employability of young people. Many jobs are available due to a shortage of labor as a result of retirements. The third component persuades of starting a business in the Saguenay - Lac-Saint-Jean. The fourth component focuses on the sense of regional belonging. The fifth component deals with the culture of mobilization. Consultation in the Saguenay - Lac-Saint-Jean is believed to be higher than elsewhere in Quebec. The sixth and final component concerns the improvement in net migration. Many young people are reported to be back and others do not want to migrate.Some of those six components fit together. They can be formulated as statements, in which components

are arranged with a causal link between them. The central component of the migrActive discourse is "improvement in net migration".

The migrActive discourse and the prevailing discourse reveal two distinct states of mind. The tone of the first one is much more positive. Despite their many differences, these two discourses may raise identical or complementary questions. In both discourses, the professional integration of young people could be an important issue of settlement in Saguenay - Lac-Saint-Jean.

To learn how the migrActive discourse influenced the prevailing discourse, the first step was to discern significant periods of their evolution. It was necessary to identify central themes of the migrActive discourse between 2001 and 2011. The influence of the migrActive discourse was felt from April 2003, but its scope was limited. In the third period (April 2004 - January 2006), this influence acted in various spheres of regional actors. In the fourth period (February 2006 - January 2008), the migrActive discourse couldn't make consensus; there were disagreements about the improvement in net migration. The migrActive discourse eventually revived in the fifth period (February 2008 - June 2009), as it proved its efficiency in influencing the political discourse and local collective actions. Finally, in the sixth period (July 2009 - June 2011), it declined slightly because of its difference with some local realities.In summary, different periods, except the first, can be ordered in descending order of influence: fifth (February 2008 - June 2009), third (April 2004 - January 2006), sixth (July 2009 - June 2011) second (April 2003 - March 2004) and fourth (February 2006 - January 2008) (Figure 4).
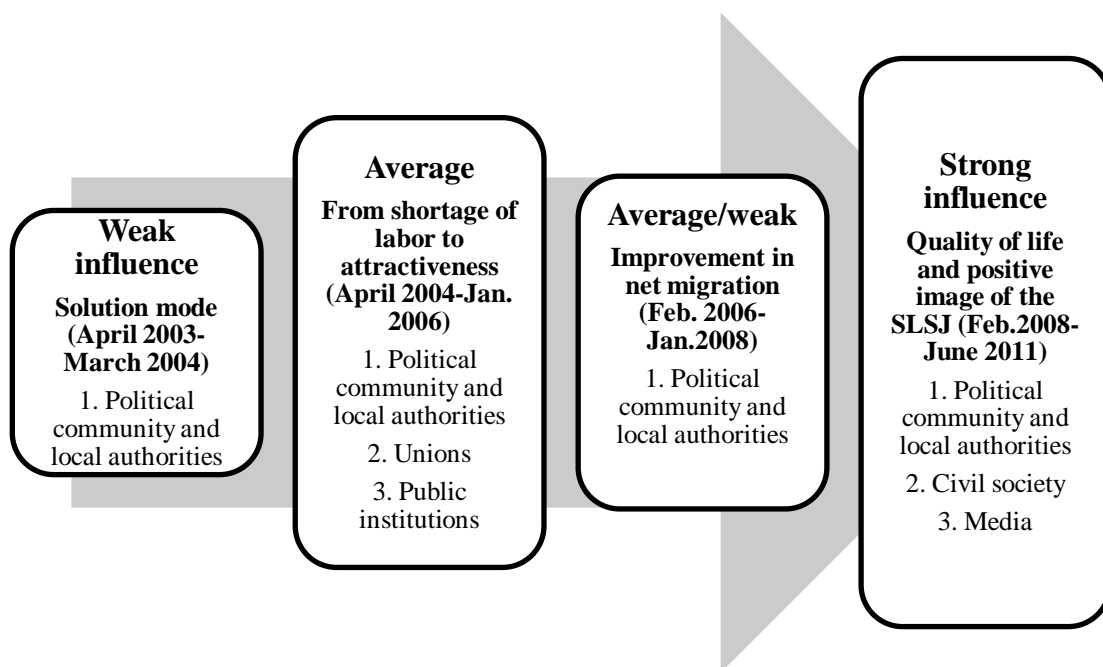

Fig. 4. Evolution of the migrActive discourse influence and impact of themes

Some influence strategies have been revealed. From April 2003, the call to go into "solution mode" tacitly invited to move from inaction to action. This reframing strategy was perpetuated from April 2004 to January 2006. It dominated until the eve of the renewal of the MigrAction Strategy in January 2008. It was then necessary to end stories of young people exodus, spreading the news of their return. But after the renewal of the

specific agreement, the anchoring strategy was preferred. Young people now aware of family values, are looking for a safe haven to raise their children. The quality of life was then promoted by the diffusion of shared values. In the last period, anchoring and reframing strategies were simultaneously implemented, respectively, to promote the comparative advantages of the Saguenay - Lac-Saint-Jean and demonstrate the ever growing establishment of young people in the region.

3.4. Impact on network mobilization

At first glance, it seems that the discourse of the youth organizations has not had a major impact in mobilizing networks. The discourse impact seemed minor when mobilization appeared at its highest. Conversely, when the regional mobilization seemed to be in standby, the influence of the discourse was in full swing. Should we then reject outright the influence of the migrActive discourse in mobilizing networks around the issue of youth migration? A more careful reading could nuance the major trends.

On the one hand, certain themes seemed more unifying or mobilizing than others. Between 2007 and 2008, during the evaluation, the discourse strove more to prove the effectiveness of the MigrAction Strategy. That theme, apparently controversial, could neither create bonds in the community, nor mobilize, as local collaborations have taken precedence over regional actions. Conversely, during the operationalization of the second agreement, from 2008, the influence of the migrActive discourse was resounding. The theme of quality of life and positive image of the region obtained the favor of the political community, young families newly established in the region and yet defeatist media (Figure 4). That theme, less controversial and full of virtue, was therefore a better vehicle for mobilizing other topics widely controversial, such as improvement in net migration.

On the other hand, the diffusion of the migrActive discourse was accompanied by a dual strategy. The reframing strategy didn't allow the migrActive discourse to have the expected influence. It had less impact on the mobilization of regional actors. One conclusion stands from all these facts. For an organization to mobilize at a regional level, it should make sure that its discourse has an influence and that it materializes in mobilization. The anchoring strategy was the best strategy to rally the consent of the community.

4. Discussion

4.1   Mobilization of cooperation networks

Do the expansion and diversification of networks represent opportunities or threats for future mobilizations? If we stick to the position that a structuration is the equivalent to future mobilizations, then this expansion and diversification would be desirable for future mobilizations. Nevertheless, a reflection intrinsically linked to the regional governance raises many issues. A specific agreement of regionalization is the illustration of a regional governance, which balance is conditioned by a consensus reaching during the different phases of mobilization. Logic dictates that the more players involved in the decision-making process, the more difficult it will be to reach a consensus. The inclusion of many partners from different spheres therefore represents a challenge for regional governance. Also should there be a new governance for actors from different organizational

backgrounds. The challenge is therefore not sufficient in itself to establish a systematic correlation between a structuring network and its mobilization.

Another type of threat can be mentioned. The introduction of a new governance has been a reason for the solicitation of many regional actors, which often occurs on various issues of regional development. Over-involvement becomes a risk. Despite existing cooperation, some players may have to make choices of mobilization. They set priorities, which would lead them to shy away from certain issues. Companies would in fact be more likely to favor economic issues at the expense of others of a more social nature. Social agencies would be the only project leaders in their specific field of intervention, while a diversity of actors would be desirable to innovate in collective action.

4.2   *Mobilizing influence of the organizational discourse*

The evolution of the mobilizing influence of the migrActive discourse shows that its impact was felt from the beginning, albeit very timidly. It is verifiable during the first operationalization phase. The migrActive discourse produced its effect, first with the political community and civil society, as the MigrAction Strategy gained notoriety. However, in recent years of the operationalization and early evaluation, this influence was minimal. But the migrActive discourse regained momentum in the beginning of the second operationalization, having its greatest impact on the community. Its evolution ultimately presents a logic diagram. Indeed, the impact was most significant in the first year of operationalizationphases. No obvious explanation can be given in the present state of our research. Nevertheless, questions can be raised.

The first question relates to the articulation of the discourse. Should it be the most articulate to have the most influence? The results of the discourse impact may, in its current state, lead to the establishment of a link between the degree of articulation and the level of influence. In periods when the influence was found to be the lowest, the discourse was reduced to simple themes, i.e. low articulation. Between 2006 and 2008, figures showing the improvement in net migration had been commented by the agents of the MigrAction Strategy, without further explanation. The discourse was less articulated and had little impact. However, in periods of high influence, the discourse seemed more articulated. During the first operationalization between 2004 and 2006, a link was made between the attractiveness of the Saguenay - Lac-Saint-Jean and the prospects of labor shortage. Same between 2007 and 2008, when the improvement of the regional net migration among young people was attributed to the effects of the quality of life and positive image.

Should the migrActive discourse settle for an anchoring strategy of "status quo" when it appears that a reframing discourse could prove to be relevant in mobilizing? Indeed, building a positive speech extolling the achievements in youth migration, could lead in the future to a unifying passion around regional development issues. It is now to assume that the impacts of an anchoring strategy are immediate versus a reframing strategy which, because of slow changes in attitudes, are visible in the long term. Both strategies would be desirable in a process of influencing short and long term.

Finally, it is worth wondering whether the mobilization would have been less strong, had the issue of regional development been different from that of youth migration. All regional issues cannot equally and effectively create a regional mobilization. The adverse consequences of the phenomenon of youth migration, naturally caused a consensus among all regional actors. It would have been different with other phenomena whose manifestations and consequences are still uncertain on regional development.

5   Conclusion

Although the findings of the study seemed right away reserved about the mobilizing influence of the migrActive discourse, more precise analyzes showed, however, that certain themes and strategies were more mobilizing than others. This somehow validated the correlation between discourse influence and mobilization. In fact, the mobilizing influence of the discourse depends largely on the choice of topics to publicize and communication strategies to implement.

However, some limits of the research invited to make conclusions with great caution. On the one hand, these limits could come from methodological choices. The choice to study in depth a single case over a ten-year-period, meant abandoning the multicase analysis. In the current state, one example of mobilization has been studied in one area for a limited period, with a small population. On the other hand, the methods of analysis had some limitations. The analysis is all the more difficult as the data is qualitative. In our case, scales were constructed from an extensive literature review, to bring greater reliability to measure. It remains that the mobilization and communicative influence are difficult to measure concepts. Finally, our measuring instruments, developed for research purposes, have not been proven durable in other studies.

Despite those limits, this article has opened up vast opportunities for reflection on networks mobilization. This research has shown that groups of young people driven by frustration and generational claims, could opt for cooperation in territorial networks. Finally, the theoretical contributions of this study should be noted. The theory of mobilizing influences is considerably strengthened. The internalized discourse by youth organizations, has the power to influence the external environment. The choice of an appropriate strategy, anchoring or reframing, can be a decisive factor in this mobilizing influence.

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