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Gentrification beyond the Tourist Bubble: The Touristification of Everyday Life in Montreal

Dominic Lapointe

Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

Hélène Bélanger

Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

Alexis Guillemard

Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

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Title: Gentrification beyond the Tourist Bubble: The Touristification of Everyday Life in Montreal**Authors:**

Dominic Lapointe
 Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

Hélène Bélanger
 Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

Alexis Guillemard
 Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada

Abstract:

Urban stakeholders, in a context of neoliberal international competition, seek to attract economic activities, tourists and new wealthy residents (Kavaratzis, 2007). One of the favorite actions, in order to capture unwarranted earnings (Harvey, 1989), is the construction of a “hard” brand image through the alteration of symbolic and physical attributes of a place in order to create a unique experience (Zukin, 1995). By doing so in residential environments, they create spectacular, clean and safe spaces framed by leisure, authenticity and consumerism social discourses in what can be associated with tourist bubbles (Judd and Feinstein, 1999). We argue that this contributes to the commodification of space and people (Britton, 1991; Edensor, 2001), where tourism intermingles with dwelling (to dwell), giving blurred boundaries between daily life and a/the tourism experience, what we call *touristification* of daily life.

In the city of Montreal, neighborhoods’ revitalization leads not only to gentrification but also to touristification of daily life. In these neighborhoods, space is staged, secured and standardized to provide an experience, a landscape, a way of life, thereby producing a space (Lefebvre, 1974) that conforms to the needs of capital (Harvey, 2001). The transformation of space excludes marginalized populations, poor residents and their private market affordable housing. The traditional private rental market is shrinking and is replaced by a new one, where housing is a capital investment for small and big investors who target the middle and upper middle classes contributing to the speculative bubble. Starting with urban planning criticism of the chain reaction City’s revitalization plan-private real estate development-gentrification-touristification which leads to physical and symbolic exclusion, using examples based on observations and interviews with stakeholders and residents from neighborhoods in Montreal, this paper will discuss how tourism and urban planning practice are causing or exacerbating these conditions, and will open questions on ways to challenge the issue.

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