

TOPOS & DEMOS COLLOQUIUM, TINOS (GREECE)

WEDNESDAY, MAY 20, 2026

# Politicization of Territorial Branding: The Case of Quebec Municipalities


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# BRAND



## Objective of the presentation

A theoretical and conceptual reflection on the action and legitimacy of politics in the construction of the local territorial narrative



# Outline of the presentation

Conceptual clarifications

A typical case of municipal "rebranding" in Quebec

Emerging tensions and preliminary findings



## Theories and concepts mobilized

Political communication

Political marketing

Brand

Brand image

Branding

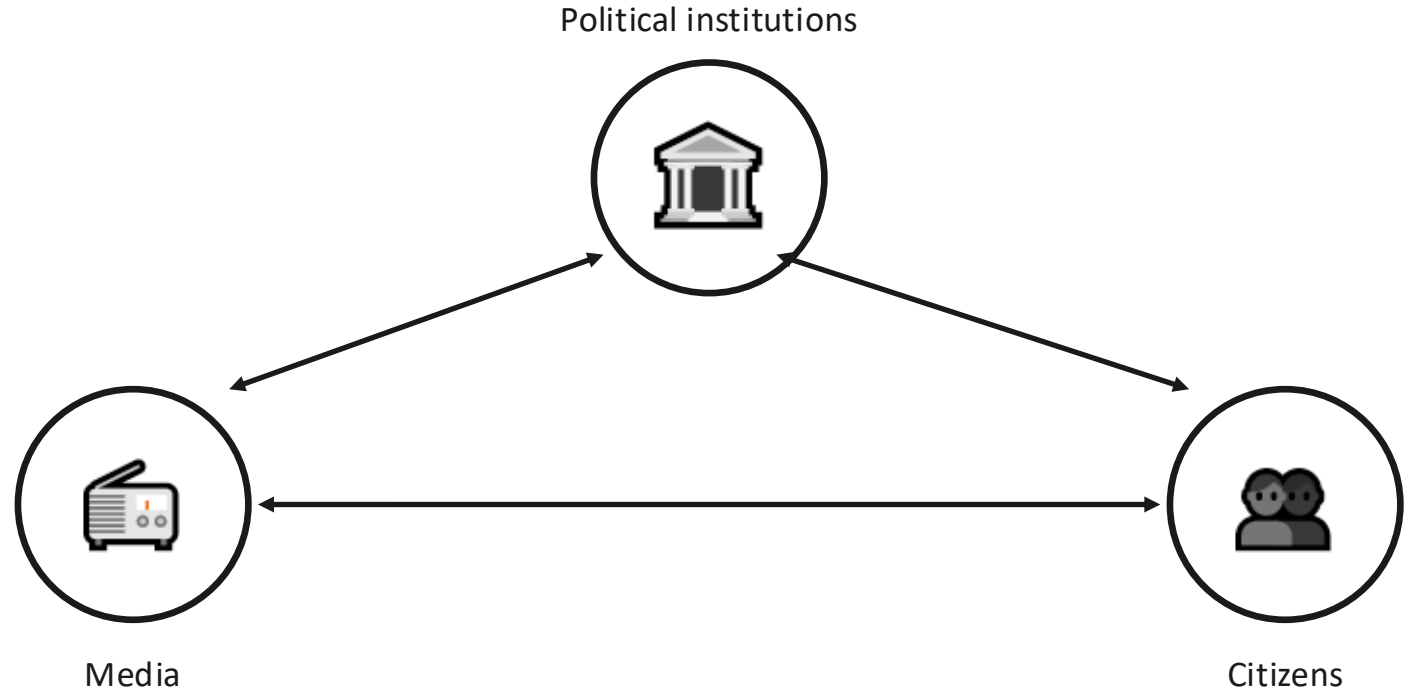
Politicization

Professionalization



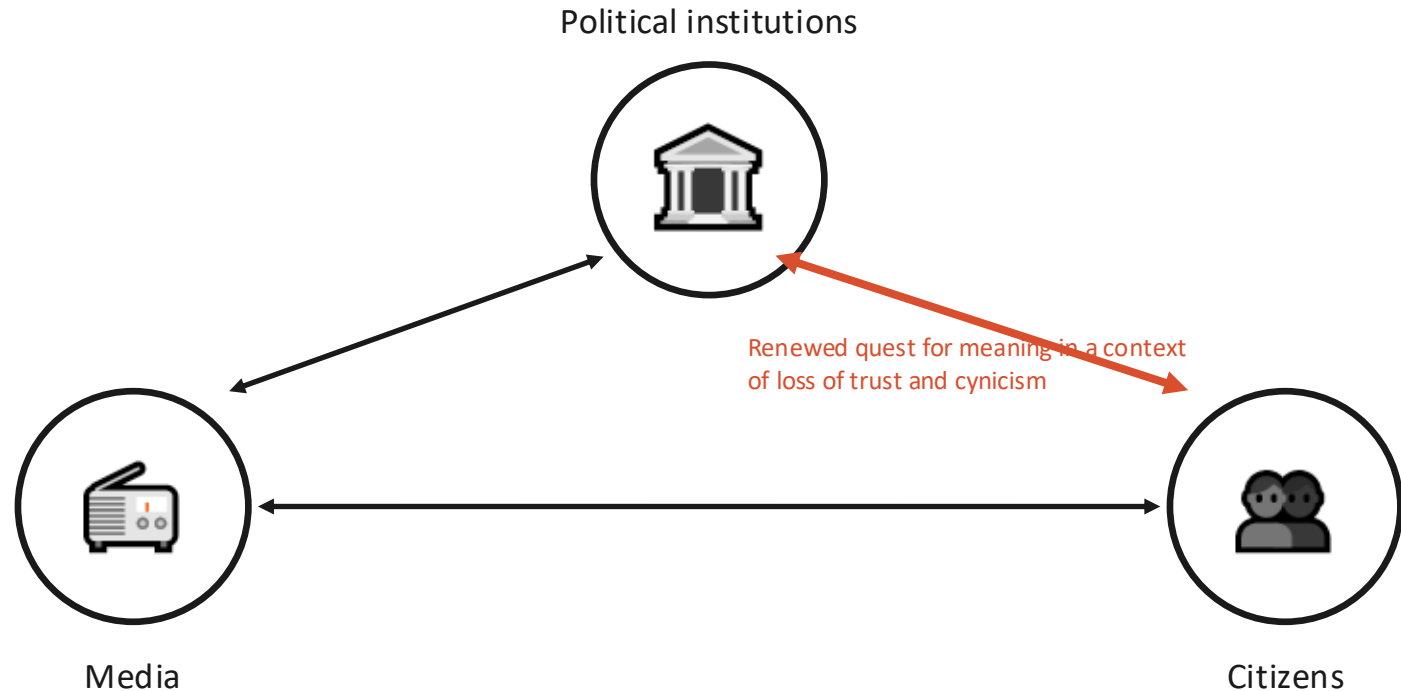
# Political communication

## THE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION TRIANGLE



# Political communication

## THE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION TRIANGLE



# Political marketing

**Political marketing** can be described as the adaptation of marketing concepts and techniques to the political sphere with the aim of identifying, understanding, and better responding to the needs and demands of the electorate. In this sense, voters' interests occupy a central place in the strategic development and tactical deployment of campaigns (Lees-Marshment, 2001, 2019).

Political marketing is not concerned only with the conquest (partisan sphere) or the influence (lobbies and interest groups) of power, but also with its exercise. It has been shown that this is a perspective mobilized by governments, particularly with respect to its tools (Lees-Marshment, 2004; Marland et al., 2012; Marland, 2016).

# Marketing terminology

## **BRAND**

- What identifies us; what we wish to embody

## **BRAND IMAGE**

- Representation that the targets have of the brand; the meaning they give it

## **VISUAL IDENTITY (IMAGE OF THE BRAND)**

- Tool (among others) to project the brand and negotiate its meaning with the targets

## **(RE)BRANDING**

- Process of constructing a brand, in particular with the aim of influencing the brand image

# Politicization (administrative)

Politicization is a polysemic concept (Palonen, 2003).

**Administrative politicization** is "an intervention that contravenes the principles and conventions associated with a professional and impartial public service" (Eichbaum & Shaw, 2008: 343).

- This refers, in particular, to the interference of partisan interests in the affairs of the State.
- Branding is a major source of partisan politicization.

# Professionalization

Professionalization is a polysemic concept (Strömbäck & Kiouisis, 2014).

"**Professionalisation** [...] refers to a *process* of change in the field of politics and communication that, either explicitly or implicitly, brings about a better and a more efficient – and more reflective – organization of resources and skills in order to achieve desired objectives, whatever they might be" (emphasis added) (Papathanassopoulos et al., 2007, p. 10; Negrine, 2007, p. 29).

## Argument under study

The "denaturation" of the marketing process within a territorial branding exercise leads to another form of politicization — one driven not by partisan interests, but by personal preferences.

This is characteristic of a low level of professionalization of local administrations when it comes to marketing.



## The context

In recent years, Quebec municipalities seem to be changing their visual identity as often as one changes underwear!



# Cultural recognition

**VILLE DE QUÉBEC**  
*[ship icon]*



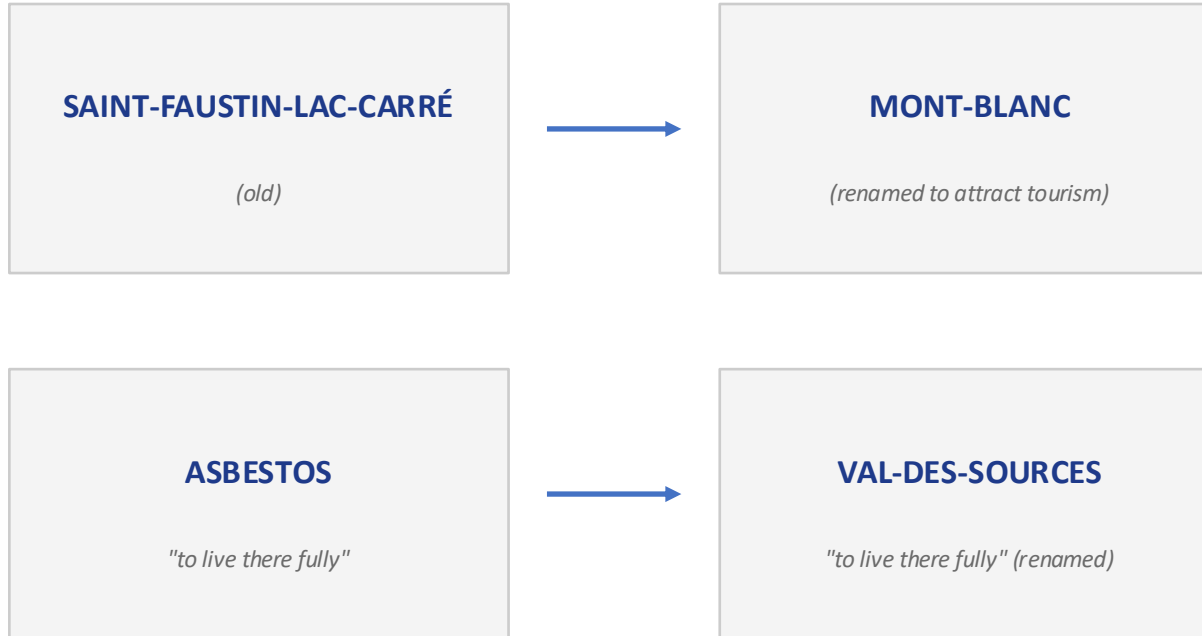
**VILLE DE QUÉBEC**  
*l'accent d'Amérique (tagline added)*

**MONTREAL — COAT OF ARMS**  
*(historical version)*



**MONTREAL — COAT OF ARMS**  
*(with white pine added — Indigenous nations recognition)*

# Strategic positioning



# Fashion effects (or the quest for "modernity")

**VILLE DE LA TUQUE**

*(traditional crest)*



**LATUQUE**

*(stylized modern wordmark)*

**ST-JACQUES-DE-LEEDS**

*(old crest, "at the foot of the Appalachians")*



**Saint-Jacques de Leeds**

*(minimalist tree icon)*

# Fashion **effects** (or the quest for "modernity")

**MRC des Pays-d'en-Haut**

**Saint-Philémon**

**La Malbaie**

**MRC de Bellechasse**

**Saint Alexis des Monts**

**Saint-Ferréol-les-Neiges**

**Saint-Jacques de Leeds**

*All adopt the same visual codes: minimalist icons (mountains, trees, waves), thin lines, sans-serif typography.*

# Fashion **effects** (or the quest for "modernity")



*The police logo of a Quebec city reuses the visual codes of an international airline.*

# Emerging tensions

## WHO OWNS THE MUNICIPAL BRAND? — TENSION OF LEGITIMACY

- Decision generally unilateral, with little or no public consultation
- Political or administrative initiative; execution outsourced to communication firms
- Strong influence of "fashion effects"; "banal" strategic justification (i.e. positioning)

## WHO / WHAT SHOULD BE REPRESENTED? — TENSION OF COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

- Revision of historical symbols deemed too complex or little known
- Identity tensions and divides in contemporary Quebec society

# Preliminary findings

## A BRANDING EXERCISE THAT DOES NOT FOLLOW A MARKETING APPROACH

- Decision generally unilateral, with little or no citizen consultation
- Process outsourced to communicators (not marketers)
- Opaque process, difficult to reverse

## WHAT MEANING FOR THE COLLECTIVE?

- Positioning objectives anchored in the immediate, often sectoral
- Strong influence of personal preferences rather than partisan ones

## A TWO-WAY ADMINISTRATIVE POLITICIZATION

- The administration substitutes itself for elected officials to create meaning (low level of professionalization)
- A result that projects non-partisan, but political, interests

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*Thank you! / Merci! / Ευχαριστώ!*

# BRAND

