Planning Development, Promising a Better Future Through Infrastructures

The Cases of Fort St. John, Prince Rupert, and Kitimat in British Columbia

Giuseppe Amatulli
Carleton University

Abstract: The lure of development, intertwined with promises of creating endless growth, well-being and socio-economic opportunities, has been used in British Columbia to shape a specific narrative around resource exploitation while justifying the continued approval of development projects. Pipelines such as the Coastal Gas Link (CGL) or LNG liquefaction facilities in Kitimat have been approved and praised as infrastructures that can bring prosperity to locals while fostering the global green transition by shipping "clean" gas and resources to Asia, by using the two deep-water, ice-free ports of Kitimat and Prince Rupert, located in Northwestern British Columbia. Often presented as the shortest routes to link North America to Asia; the former provides the fastest and most cost-effective route for LNG export through the Douglas channel, while the latter is believed to offer the best options for shipping goods into North America while exporting raw materials and resources to growing Asian markets.

The discourse around the necessity of such infrastructures has revamped since Donald Trump took office as the 47th president of the United States on 20 January 2025. The recent tariffs imposed by the US on Canadian goods and the ongoing threat to Canadian sovereignty provide industries and financial actors with a strong argument to foster the discourse around the necessity of such infrastructure, with politicians using it to shape Canada's 2025 federal election campaign. Combining all these elements, by engaging with the literature on infrastructure and drawing on my fieldwork experience,

this contribution explores how infrastructures have been used to shape and strengthen the narrative around the perpetual need for further development while highlighting the impact infrastructure development has had on people's daily lives and their ability to envision the future.

Keywords: First Nations; Industrial development; resource exploitation; extractive industries; futurity; expectations; British Columbia; Canada; US tariffs

Résumé : L'attrait du développement, associé à des promesses de croissance, de bien-être et d'opportunités socio-économiques illimités, a été utilisé en Colombie-Britannique pour façonner un discours spécifique autour de l'exploitation des ressources tout en justifiant l'approbation continue de projets de développement. Des pipelines tels que le Coastal Gas Link (CGL) ou les installations de liquéfaction de GNL à Kitimat ont été approuvés et salués comme des infrastructures susceptibles d'apporter la prospérité aux populations locales, tout en favorisant la transition écologique mondiale grâce à l'expédition de gaz et de ressources « propres » vers l'Asie, en utilisant les deux ports en eau profonde et libres de glace de Kitimat et Prince Rupert, situés dans le nord-ouest de la Colombie-Britannique. Souvent présentés comme les routes les plus courtes pour relier l'Amérique du Nord à l'Asie, le premier offre la route la plus rapide et la plus rentable pour l'exportation de GNL via le canal Douglas, tandis que le second est considéré comme offrant les meilleures options pour expédier des marchandises vers l'Amérique du Nord tout en exportant des matières premières et des ressources vers les marchés asiatiques en pleine croissance.

Le débat sur la nécessité de telles infrastructures a pris un nouvel élan depuis l'entrée en fonction de Donald Trump en tant que 47e président des États-Unis, le 20 janvier 2025. Les récents droits de douane imposés par les États-Unis sur les produits canadiens et la menace permanente qui pèse sur la souveraineté canadienne fournissent aux industries et aux acteurs financiers un argument de poids pour alimenter le débat sur la nécessité de telles infrastructures, les politiciens s'en servant pour façonner la campagne électorale fédérale canadienne de 2025. En combinant tous ces éléments, en m'appuyant sur la littérature consacrée aux infrastructures et sur mon expérience de terrain, cette contribution explore la manière dont les infrastructures ont été utilisées pour façonner et renforcer le discours sur la nécessité permanente de poursuivre le développement, tout en soulignant l'impact que le développement des infrastructures a eu sur la vie quotidienne des gens et leur capacité à envisager l'avenir.

Mots clés : Premières Nations ; développement industriel ; exploitation des ressources ; industries extractives ; avenir ; attentes ; Colombie-Britannique ; Canada ; droits de douane américains

Introduction

Promises for a better future, intertwined with economic development and the construction of "vital infrastructures," such as oil and gas pipelines and LNG facilities, have been the core message industry, politicians, and several local leaders (including, but not limited to Indigenous) have promoted in British Columbia in the last few decades. This has happened over a period in which the federal and provincial governments have ceded responsibilities to local governments and Indigenous communities, with the result that decision-making is now more multilevel in orientation and scope, with several actors involved (Summerville and Wilson 2016, 110).

The discourse around the necessity of such infrastructures has been revamped since the newly elected US President, Donald Trump, took office on January 20, 2025. Trump's newly imposed tariffs have sparked a trade war between the US and Canada that has had the effect of bringing back the conversation about the necessity Canada has of specific infrastructures (for example, coast-to-coast pipelines, national energy corridors, and LNG liquefaction facilities) to be less reliant on the US as a trading partner while building new trade relations with other countries.[1] This new situation allows industries and financial actors, politicians and local decision-makers to foster the discourse around the necessity of such infrastructure.[2] But what do people think about infrastructure development? What are the real needs of people and how are their expectations used to promote a specific development pattern? What does the attention to infrastructure "lives" (construction, use, maintenance, and breakdown) reveal about them and the future?

In this chapter, I engage with the concept of expectations not only to explore the hopes and dreams for a better future they generate among people, but also to shed light on the heuristic reality surrounding infrastructures development and the oil and gas industry, a sector that often operates with conflicting priorities, market volatility and where decisions must be made under geopolitical uncertainty.

What are Infrastructures in the Canadian Context? Some Definitions

Born during the Enlightenment, to describe a world in movement and open to the change that progress would bring, the concept of infrastructure quickly got intertwined with modernity (Larkin 2013). Emerging as a term to describe the substrate, as infra means below; over time, infrastructures became

conceptualized as "a class of things in their own right, hard technical artefacts or systems, rather than processes" (Carse 2014, 11). Larkin defines infrastructures as "built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space" (Larkin 2013, 328).

Infrastructures actively produce the conditions of everyday life while generating a way of sensing according to which the mind and body define the meaning of being modern, mutable and progressive (Larkin 2013, 332-337). Infrastructures talk about aspirations, anticipations, and imaginations of the future. They can be considered as eventful, as they are well rooted in a settler future; they enable a material transit to a better future that is considered inevitable and necessary to achieve an idea of progress that is nevertheless feeble and not clearly defined (Spice 2018, 44). Mrázek refers to infrastructures as material tools that evoke enthusiasm for the imagination, in relation to the promises they generate (Mrázek 2002). Infrastructure expresses how people envision the future and their society in such a future; they can be seen as "concrete instantiations" of visions of the future (Gupta 2016, 63).

Infrastructures can be described as an archetypal technology intertwined with an emancipatory modernity, as they bridge distances while being built using the latest technology to be always more efficient and "modern." In today's world, infrastructures are also servers and software technologies, intangible infrastructures that allow people to stay connected (Karasti, Baker, and Millerand 2010, 381–382). Whereas infrastructures like roads and railways are tangible, material things that exist in specific places and that people use in their everyday lives; they function because they hold together a range of things, from material objects to ideas and policies (Knox, Gambino, and Stein 2023, 4). Infrastructures that are not tangible, however essential, are transparent to their users and taken for granted, but they become visible when they stop functioning (Karasti, Baker, and Millerand 2010, 382).

The government of Canada uses the concept of critical infrastructure to define "Processes, systems, facilities, technologies, networks, assets, and services essential to the health, safety, security, or economic well-being of Canadians and the effective functioning of government. [...]. Disruptions of critical infrastructure could result in catastrophic loss of life, adverse economic effects, and significant harm to public confidence."[3] In this sense, "roads, railways, bridges, water systems, powerplants, telecommunication facilities, ports, and airports are components of the infrastructure that are vital to the economic activity" (Harchaoui, Tarkhani, and Warren 2003, 1).

Infrastructures planning, construction and operationalization require a political and social will anchored in a strong believe that their realization will transform the socio-economic space (Harvey and Knox 2012, 523). It has been argued that infrastructures are not possible without the state and that modern nation-states cannot exist without infrastructures. In this sense, infrastructures can be seen as key technologies through which states enact, perform and reproduce themselves; tools of colonization, perpetuating colonial and racial violence (Knox, Gambino, and Stein 2023, 5–6). Collier and Lackoff argue that infrastructures promoted and funded by the state are connected to processes of securitization; they are a material response to challenges of international security (Collier and Lackoff 2008, 18). Protecting critical infrastructures is then intertwined with a new problematization of security, occurring when something has "happened to introduce uncertainty and a loss of familiarity" (Foucault 1994, 598).

Settler infrastructures, as an "artifact" of governance decisions, have the capacity to regulate society. In the Canadian context, they can be described as tools based on dispossession, theft and extraction that enable the flow of commodities and capital from Indigenous lands (Pasternak et al. 2023, 8). These kinds of infrastructures, defined by La Duke and Cowen as Wiindigo infrastructures, normalize a condition of carcerality that Indigenous peoples in Canada continue to suffer (LaDuke and Cowen 2020, 253). Alternative, life-giving infrastructures to foster different forms of life, based on a different socio-economic organization, are then necessary. This type of "alimentary" infrastructure, also known as infrastructures otherwise, is clean water, natural food abundance, freedom to harvest and intact habitat for wildlife (Pasternak et al. 2023, 8). For Spice (2018), these are critical infrastructures that can ensure the well-being of Indigenous peoples, their socio-cultural and economic continuity and the maintenance of the whole ecosystem. For example, having clean rivers, streams, and lakes also means protecting riparian zones, while opposing development that could contaminate these waters and the occupation of sacred places. Whereas pipelines ensure the flow of oil and gas, healthy rivers ensure the circulation of fish and the supply of drinking water (Pasternak et al. 2023, 8).

Therefore, the approval, construction, and expansion of infrastructures in the village of Kitimat, the port city of Prince Rupert, and the city of Fort St. John, can be conceived as an articulation of materialities with local regimes, policies, institutional actors, and knowledge practices constantly in formation across time and space; defining relations between settler states, Indigenous

communities and individuals on the one hand, and corporations and capitalist circuits on the other (Anand, Gupta, and Appel 2018, 12).

When infrastructures Shape the Narrative

On 4 April 2024, a Notice to Proceed was issued for the Cedar LNG Project, as a consequence of the finalization of long-term commercial offtake agreements.[4] This step was described as a milestone to allow the project to proceed to secure financing, required prior to making a Final Investment Decision (FID), which was announced on 25 June 2024.[5] The Cedar LNG facility, located in the traditional territory of the Haisla Nation in the district of Kitimat, means for the Haisla Nation to take control of its future again while developing meaningful partnerships with industries, governments, and other communities with the aim of supporting economic reconciliation and building a net-zero economy.[6]

Economic reconciliation intertwined with development is not a new concept. In the first Reconciliation Action Plan drafted by Trans Canada Energy in 2021, it is affirmed that "creating enduring relationships and expanding economic opportunities for Indigenous communities are part of the reconciliation that must occur between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of North America" (TC Energy 2021, 3). Economic Reconciliation can be implemented in different ways, through investments, by building new infrastructures, and by setting up a more advantageous taxation regime.

On 30 January 2023, a statement was issued by Chief Commissioner Jules regarding the First Nation Resource Charge (FNRC), to support First Nations' fiscal jurisdiction over resource projects on their lands. As explained, since the 1970s, "multiple court decisions have led to the recognition that First Nations have an inherent right to revenue generated by using land and resources in their jurisdiction."[7] However, these verdicts have not generated a clear strategy for distributing fiscal benefits among governments and economic benefits among individuals. The FNRC would be an important step to (re)defining First Nations fiscal benefits, securing more transparent agreements while ensuring that First Nation governments receive direct and stable fiscal revenues from resource projects on their lands.

Revenue is as important to First Nations as it is to municipalities for providing essential services to citizens. In the Canadian context, revenues are often generated by exporting raw natural resources, while importing final goods produced overseas. This is the case of Prince Rupert, a small port city of 12,300

inhabitants[8] on the northwest coast of British Columbia, home to Canada's third-largest port by cargo tonnage and container volume.[9] According to the Prince Rupert Port Authority (PRPA), the revenue generated by the port has grown more than 150% in the last 10 years, from CDN $ 4.9 million per year in 2011 to CDN $ 12.4 million in 2021.[10] These revenues made up 43% of Prince Rupert net tax revenue in 2021. It is expected that future port investments and expansion will continue to grow municipal tax revenues. An expanding economy is therefore necessary to sustain the financial needs of municipalities, as well as First Nations.

A growing economy is often connected with the exploitation of natural resources, oil and gas, which northern British Columbia is rich in. Fort St. John, located in the traditional territory of several Treaty 8 First Nations, including Doig River and Blueberry River First Nations, is the major city in northern BC. With a population of 21,123 inhabitants[11], it is called the "Energetic city," as it is the hub for oil and gas exploitation in the North of the province. Major pipeline projects have been constructed in the area, such as the North Montney Mainline and Foothills pipelines, both connected to the TransCanada NTGL system, and the recently completed Coastal Gas Link (CGL).[12]

In addition to pipelines, the Site C hydroelectric dam was recently completed and will soon be operational. Heavily opposed by the vast majority of the Peace River residents, the dam embodies, perhaps as few other development projects, the development-at-all-costs policy that has been promoted in British Columbia in the last fifty years (Cox 2018, 8–9). Expected to be put into operation in 2025, it is estimated to produce about 5,100 gigawatt-hours of electricity each year. According to BC Hydro, this is enough energy to power the equivalent of approximately 450,000 homes or 1.7 million electric vehicles per year in British Columbia. In terms of economic benefits, it has been estimated that the construction of the dam will contribute CDN $ 3.2 billion to provincial GDP, with a total of CDN $ 40 million in tax revenues to local governments and, once in operation, CDN $ 2 million in revenue from grants-in-lieu and school taxes.[13]

Site C may well be used as an infrastructure that can create infrastructures of the future. In March 2025 Prophet River First Nation, a Treaty 8 First Nation located 300 km north-west from Fort St. John, signed a letter of intent with ABCT Pacific Ltd, a venture capital corporation (VCC) that invests in clean tech innovations. With the aim of responding to the growing demand for data storage generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Band and the VCC intend to explore the possibility of building a large-scale data centre in Fort St. John.

Due to its cooler climate and the abundant energy generated by the Site C Dam, the city located in Northeastern British Columbia may be an ideal location for the project.[14]

These development projects and the economic benefits they generate explain why, with a median total household income of CDN $ 102,000, Fort St. John has the second-highest household income in British Columbia and ranks seventh in Canada. Fort St. John is depicted as a dynamic city, thanks to the vitality of its residents, who are typically nine years younger than the average population in the rest of British Columbia. As stated on the city website, "modern-day pioneers continue to bring a fresh spirit of exploration, innovation and connection to community within our city."[16] Pioneers, with a strong desire to explore and innovate, foster development, create opportunities, and generate wealth. Such a reference to pioneers has long been used to refer to settlers who moved to Canada and helped shape the country while facing any sort of hardship.[17] Nevertheless, the arrival of pioneers often meant conquest, occupation, oppression, and denial of self-determination for Indigenous peoples. They were the vanguard of the crude face of domination, that dispossessed Indigenous peoples of their lands, not recognizing their Inherent Rights while destroying their ecosystem (Hume 2001, 125).

The reference to modern-day pioneers highlights a specific way of conceiving the world, a sort of heritage of a colonial past that is difficult to overcome. In such a view, modernity facilitates a particular way of being in the world, while inhibiting others. Non-pioneers' lifestyle and cultural practices are threatened by this kind of modernity, not because they cannot adapt to it, but because of the economic and political structures they live in. People living in resource-rich areas often struggle to take control of the pace and degree of development and the change it generates in their lives (Raibmon 2002, 192). In such contexts, modernity is intertwined with a specific kind of development in which infrastructures play a key role as they are described as tools necessary to promote socio-economic growth and the common good, thus ensuring a better future for the generations to come (Abram and Weszkalnys 2011).

Expanding Existing Infrastructure, Creating the Needs for new Development – The Case of Prince Rupert

The port of Prince Rupert occupies an area of 667,731 hectares (1,650,000 acres) and extends along 20 kilometres (12 miles) of coastline.[18] During a conversation with a public officer of the city of Prince Rupert in July 2022, I was told that:

> Prince Rupert can grow in a sustainable way only if the development of the port is commensurate with the development of the town and the well-being of its inhabitants. The main challenge for Prince Rupert is then to support this development without collapsing on it.

Nevertheless, the struggles people experience in everyday life suggest that Prince Rupert is collapsing on its own development. Whereas the port is supposedly expanding, and new development is taking place, ruination is already affecting existing infrastructures, as the continuous expansion of the port and the needs it generates puts ongoing pressure on existing old infrastructures, which need to be maintained and renovated. As a matter of fact, roads and housing are two big issues in Prince Rupert. The town is small, and its roads require continuous maintenance due to the soil's morphological features, rich in muskeg. This is also why housing is an issue, as building new houses is both expensive and challenging. As I was told during my fieldwork in town:

> We really have a problem with housing. Rent is so high, as high as in Vancouver! And less than 1% of our houses are empty. It really is a problem and if you cannot provide housing solutions, there is no way the city can support any growth.

Prince Rupert's residents blame the port for the housing crises. Residents believe that house unaffordability is directly caused by the high salaries the port authority and companies operating at the port pay to their employees (Amatulli, forthcoming). As it was explained to me by a resident:

> If you think about housing; prices go up because people who work at the port can afford it. So, companies who operate at the port buy old block of flats, refurbished them and then they rent it out to transient port workers. They can pay CDN $1,500 per month, even more. This is not a price everyone may be able to afford, especially non-port workers. We have seen these cycles, and we are aware of their meaning.

Moreover, the port is phagocytizing other businesses in town. People prefer to be employed at the port, due to the higher salary they receive, in addition to the fact that many jobs available do not require any specific degrees. Although the port may generate new demands for services and jobs in other sectors (that is, in the service industry); small businesses, such as cafés, restaurants, and local shops, struggle to find employees (Amatulli, forthcoming). As the owner of a small café in town told me:

> I do not know why. I don't know where people go…but in Prince Rupert is difficult to find people available to work in a café…

Narratives around the potential expansion of the port create huge expectations in relation to the kinds of jobs people look for and the amount of money they desire to earn. However, not everyone is convinced that something is really happening at the port, as clearly stated by a Nisga'a citizen:

> Nothing is really happening at the port. I mean, they have openings, people send their applications to work there, they get trained…but then, they are not called. They are put on this waiting list and it's unpredictable to know whether they will be called and for how long.

Such a statement was echoed by another Nisga'a citizen, who expanded on the reflections that the port generates real possibility for people to have a good life in Prince Rupert. As she said:

> There are not many jobs at the port right now. It does not create the same amount of jobs we used to have with fisheries. You know, in the past there were so many jobs, so many people working in the canning industry. Every season was good for something, crabs, halibut and salmon in the summer, groundfish in the winter. There was so much to do…

Mason argues that expectations are used to build protected spaces that play a key role in the process of supporting technological and infrastructural developments. Defined as events collective, this specific category of expectations can be seen as a strategic resource for attracting attention from specific sponsors with the aim of stimulating agenda-setting processes while contributing to the creation of a specific narrative around the need to have specific development and infrastructures (Mason 2004, 326–27). As a young Nisga'a citizen remarked,

> I have never thought too much about the port, about its expansion. It has always been there, and it is a good thing for Prince Rupert. But the big expansion…they keep saying that the port is expanding, but I do not see it. I think it would be good, as it may create jobs…but my feeling is that is more like an expectation. The expectation has always been about expanding it. But the reality…well, it is more complex.

Unlikely-to-be-realized infrastructures have been defined as "sky castle architecture" (Magnani et al., forthcoming), similar to the "sites of fantasy and projection" described by Harvey (Harvey 2005, 131); thus, fostering a tension

between existing and future expectations, which project a broader tension between past and future infrastructure development. In these settings, old buildings and infrastructures such as roads and water pipes become obsolete much faster because of the new development taking place. Potential future ruins materialize in the present, by making existing infrastructure outdated; thus, producing a need for new infrastructures, which must be built on a continuous basis. Such a dynamic applies to Prince Rupert, a town that must develop quickly to keep up with the expectations, as established in the 2020 Gateaway Vision and Strategic Development Plan drafted by the Port Authority. According to it, more than 1,000 acres of industrial federal land could be developed to increase the exporting capacity of the port, so meeting the increasing demand to export Canadian resources around the world (Prince Rupert Port Authority 2016, 44).

Exporting Resources, Importing Infrastructure: The Case of the LNG Liquefaction Facilities in Kitimat

In the last few decades, exporting Canadian resources around the world has become a relevant part of British Columbia's economic strategy. The extractive sector has been extensively promoted by targeted economic policy, with the aim of attracting external investment (Wilson and Bowles 2016a, 9–11). By supporting the construction of large infrastructures, such as LNG liquefaction facilities and the CGL pipeline, a new narrative has been shaped around the path BC should follow to be green while fostering economic development (Wilson and Bowles 2016b, 15–16). It has been argued that by exporting LNG to Asian markets, both Canada and the world will benefit in terms of economic growth and environmental targets. This discourse has been revamped in the last few weeks, following the tariffs imposed by the new US administration and the threats to Canadian sovereignty. In addition to the need of finding new trade partners, having the capacity (and the infrastructures) to do so has become a matter of national security in response to the continuous threats of President Trump to make Canada the 51st state of the US.[19]

In such a context, some First Nations have become important partners, establishing joint ventures with major Multinational Corporations (MNCs), or acquiring and implementing their own projects. Such is the case of the Cedar LNG project, a floating LNG facility proposed and built by the Haisla Nation, described as the world's lowest-carbon and first Indigenous majority-owned LNG Facility.[20] Using natural gas coming from northwestern Canada (in the

area south of Fort St. John) delivered through the CGL pipeline, and taking advantage of the year-round ice-free shipping route from the Douglas Channel, the innovative floating Cedar project is at the forefront of the liquefied LNG shipping industry.[21]

The Cedar LNG is located in the Kitimat area, a few kilometres away from the Kitimat LNG Canada Industrial Site, the first large-scale LNG export facility in Canada that is also the largest private sector investment in Canadian history, with an estimated final cost of US $31 billion as of August 2023. LNG Canada is a joint venture formed by five global energy companies with a long experience in liquefied natural gas, such as Shell, Petronas, PetroChina, Mitsubishi Corporation and Kogas. As explained in the press release after the approval of the CGL pipeline and the Kitimat LNG project, "With the shift to a low-carbon society, global demand for natural gas as a major energy source suitable for coexistence with renewable energy and with relatively low environmental impact, is expected to grow steadily, mainly in Asia" Mitsubishi 2018.[22] By receiving low-cost Canadian natural gas from Northeastern British Columbia through the Coastal GasLink (CGL) pipeline (to which some pipelines located in Fort St. John are connected), and taking advantage of the ice-free harbour located in the Douglas Channel; LNG Canada is expected to start export operations by 2025, with an estimated 14 million tonnes of LNG being exported per year.[23]

I visited the LNG Canada facility in Kitimat in September 2018, when the project was still in an embryonic stage, and the Final Investment Decision had not yet been released (it was issued on 2 October 2018). I spent most of the time with the communication officer, who explained the project while listing the endless benefits, in terms of jobs and economic opportunities, for the Indigenous peoples of the area. When I asked whether and to what extent the project could adversely impact the local community, for example, due to fly-in/fly-out (FIFO) workers, I was told that it is normal to have some adverse effects, and that LNG Canada was doing its best to accommodate the needs of different stakeholders (Amatulli 2022, 95). Research has shown that fly-in fly-out (FIFO) workers can significantly stretch the ability of local people to use existing infrastructures. In resource-rich, small and isolated towns in Canada, hospitals, health services, bridges and roads used by FIFO make it difficult for locals to rely on these services, which are already limited in many cases (Leung 2016, 2). This poses a further burden on Indigenous people, who already face a systemic shortage of services and infrastructures necessary to live a good

life in their traditional territories while carrying the burden of hosting export-oriented infrastructures built for resource exploitation. In addition, it should be considered that the shipping routes of these liquefaction projects pass through the marine territories of Gitga'at First Nation, Gitxaala Nation, Metlakatla First Nation and the Lax Kw'alaams Band, which for millennia have relied on the coastal waters for food, transportation, and cultural activities.[24]

Whereas LNG facilities in Canada have been designed with the clear goal of exporting resources, their realization cannot be completed without importing parts of the infrastructures that make such an export possible. Such is the case for the LNG facility in Kitimat, which, in 2022, received two processing modules used in the process of liquifying natural gas to remove impurities before the cooling process. The two large modules were fabricated in China and delivered by ship, through the port of Prince Rupert, as they could not be transported by land.[25] As stated by LNG senior construction engineer, Gerard Bowers:

> The module will evenly distribute gas at a constant flow to treatment facilities and processes, including liquification and storage, before it is loaded into specialized carriers for marine transport. It will then be delivered to markets that need low-carbon, made-in B.C. liquified natural gas to replace other energy sources such as coal.[26]

As explained on the LNG Canada website, exporting LNG from BC has the potential to substantially reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of many Asian countries, thereby enabling the energy transition globally and reducing net global greenhouse gas emissions. As argued by Conservative MP Bob Zimmer, during a political rally I attended in Fort St. John in October 2019:

> We all know that LNG is a great thing for the world, and I think this community here understands this! Just a small number: our yearly emissions contribute to 1.6% of the total emissions in the world. China can emit the same amount in 21 days! So, our approach is that we need more Canada in the world, not less! Providing natural gas to Japan and China is a great thing; we should do more. We need more Canada in the world!

An important strength of LNG liquefaction facilities is their location, which ensures one of the shortest shipping routes to Asia. As is the case for the port of Prince Rupert, shipping from Kitimat takes between 24 and 36 hours less time to reach Asia Pacific harbours in comparison to shipping from other North American harbours, such as Vancouver and Los Angeles.[27]

Nevertheless, not everyone agrees with the vision that expanding LNG export is the path Canada should follow. In a recent study published by the International Institute for Sustainable Development, it has been argued that the possibility of certain countries switching from coal to LNG should not be used in Canada to expand LNG production. In the specific case of the projects under completion in British Columbia, they will be late entering a market dominated by actors who can sell their gas at a significantly lower price in comparison to Canadian LNG (O'Connor 2024, 11).[28] In addition to this, and considering market uncertainties and the climate crisis, expanding the LNG sector carries more risks than advantages. The climate benefits of such a switch are not certain, and focusing on LNG could divert already scarce financial and clean energy resources away from more efficient decarbonization efforts (Haig, Dusyk, and Rempel 2024, 1).

Living with Oil and Gas Facilities in Fort St. John: Confronting Infrastructures in Everyday Life

Infrastructures modify the landscape and profoundly impact the wildlife and the ecosystem, while changing the way in which Indigenous Peoples perceive the environment and how they live in their traditional territories. In Fort St. John, linear infrastructure corridors that pass through a natural area and create a linear break in the landscape[29] have become part of everyday life to the point that people do not question their real needs and their continuous expansion. As a Fort St. John resident told me:

> The discourse should not be about being in favour or against pipelines, having or not having them as, for the time being, we are dependent on fossils, even if we integrate them with renewable sources.

Pipelines, oil and gas wells define companies' responsibilities in a place like Fort St. John. During a conversation I had with an employee of the Oil and Gas Commission (now British Columbia Energy Regulator – BCER), it was explained to me that when a company gets a contract to exploit subsoil resources in the area (oil or gas), it automatically becomes responsible for the maintenance of the roads used to get access to the wells and compressor stations. Once the well is no longer productive, it is the responsibility of the company to dismantle everything, deactivate the road, and restore the soil as it was before. These actions must also include reforestation.

The fact that companies are responsible for road maintenance is extremely important. While wells are active, there must be certainty about who is supposed to maintain the roads (in terms of related costs and responsibility if an accident happens). Once wells are no longer productive, the company must do all the necessary work to restore the land to what it was. My interlocutor informed me that companies normally comply with this regulation; however, there are cases where they try to avoid some steps, especially once wells are no longer productive and compressor stations have been shut down. Often, when companies are not making money, they will sell their facility, or worse, they will simply disappear before going bankrupt, abandoning the area where they operated, without taking care of post-closing operations. In such cases, the area can be designated as an "orphan site" and the BC Energy Regulator will have the possibility of accessing the Orphan Site Reclamation Fund (OSRF) to decommission and clean up the site.[30]

Dismissed infrastructure, such as abandoned gas rigs and compressor stations, and dismissed pipelines and oil wells, which abound in the Fort St. John area, can be seen, on the one hand, as objects evoking anticipation of possible future(s) and future profits; on the other hand, they perfectly illustrate the entrapment people living around them experience. When functioning, these infrastructures generate wealth and economic well-being; when not in service, they are maintained in the hope of a future reopening with the anticipated revival of an industrial economy following a new global demand driven by the market and new geopolitical interests (Magnani et al., forthcoming). Such a perception of infrastructures was clearly explained to me by a Doig River First Nation member during a clear-cutting session I was a part of in July 2019. As she said,

> This well was active until three years ago, when it was stopped, as it was not profitable anymore to extract gas and sell it to the US. Everything is market-driven; for sure, the company will come back when it is profitable to sell this gas again.

Whereas infrastructure might not always serve the purpose of moving resources, they surely generate symbolic meanings that shape the way in which society looks at, conceives, and makes sense of them. According to Williams' structures of feeling, infrastructures give shape and are shaped by everyday

human experiences and sentiments of hope, inclusion, and abandonment (Williams 1975). Infrastructures are critical assets, as governance, politics and people's aspirations are formed, reformed and performed by them; they foster fantasy and desire about the future, conveying a precise message about the time to come while holding and transmitting individuals' and society's dreams (Anand, Gupta, and Appel 2018, 3; Larkin 2013, 332).

Larkin defines it as the "poetics of infrastructures," meaning that infrastructures are not only important for what they do in the present, but for what they signify about the future (Larkin 2013). They can be seen as an approach to understanding life, always in motion, always built or assembled (Pasternak et al. 2023, 2). Enclosing the desires, hopes, dreams, and aspirations of a society (or of its leaders), governments often approve infrastructures not to meet real needs, but to show that the state is advanced and modern (Gupta, 2016; Harvey and Knox, 2012). It could be argued that building infrastructures is an ongoing, nation-building exercise; as they are built invoking the common good, as mechanisms to control time while instigating waves of societal progress.

Gupta argues that by fixing space and time, once finished, infrastructures are hard, often impossible, to reverse. They are imagined in static terms, as once completed, they become part of the built environment, fulfilling the role for which they were planned and working in the background (Gupta 2016, 63). In such a context, people tend to accept such infrastructures, describing them (or the sector they serve) in positive terms. As a Doig River First Nation member told me during my fieldwork:

> What if the oil and gas industry is allowing us to make all these things? What if this sector is having a positive impact on us? Our ancestors were able to live during the giant animals' era, to find a way to survive notwithstanding the presence of such animals. Now, we must survive industrial development; we have to find a way to cope with it. It is then necessary that we learn how to use that kind of resources and do good things for us, our culture, and future generations.

The reference to surviving industrial development shows how the industry and the infrastructures it brings are perceived as something temporary, which will not stay around forever. The prospect that sooner or later wells, pipelines and compressor stations will become ruins draws attention to the fact that the construction of infrastructures of this kind should be seen as an open-ended process that does not terminate with their inauguration. Instead, these kinds

of infrastructures have multiple temporalities, with decay and ruination being part of their temporality, with ruins representing the afterlife of infrastructures (Gupta 2016, 62-69). What is left from abandoned wells, pipelines, and compressor stations constitutes a form of ruination that has a specific temporal structure: they are not ruins of the past, but of the future. As they can quickly be reactivated when profitable, these ruins are in-between hopes of modernity and progress and the suspension of those hopes, waiting for a better time to come.

In such contexts, large-scale infrastructural projects are always in progress (Gupta 2016, 70-74). They are never fully completed, as there is always something to maintain, add, and improve. This is also due to the technological advancement that requires infrastructures to be continuously updated. Thus, it can be said that the inauguration of an infrastructure does not mark its completion stage; rather, it is always an ideological act, as from the moment an infrastructure is marked as complete, ruination begins (Gupta 2016, 70-76). Ruination should not be seen as a process taking place at the end of the infrastructures' lifetime; but rather, as something endemic to infrastructures. What keeps infrastructures functioning is the continuous work of maintenance, necessary to maintain them over time (Gupta 2016, 75). By embracing a dynamic view to look at infrastructures, it is possible to focus on the continuous process of renewal faced with the ruination that infrastructures undergo. In such a way, infrastructures can be seen as perpetually in motion, always shifting, changing, decaying and being maintained, and nevertheless always elusive (Gupta 2016, 73-74).

Decolonizing Infrastructure

The continuous process of ruination and renewal that infrastructures face could help shift the way infrastructures are conceived. On the one hand, it could ensure that their realization meets Indigenous expectations and is compatible with the Indigenous worldview; on the other hand, it may help guarantee that they are proposed and projected with a specific aim. Changing the way infrastructures are conceived, proposed, and constructed means decolonizing them and how people use them. Instead of a profit-oriented, economic purpose, infrastructures should serve people's needs.

As colonial tools, infrastructures have been weaponized and used to impose a specific narrative about the world, shaping power relations while perpetuating discrimination and inequalities. Colonial infrastructures enact dispossession, theft of resources and extraction. Contrasting colonial infrastructure means resisting them while "regenerating ontologies of care

and work toward infrastructure otherwise" (Pasternak et al. 2023, 2). Refusing colonial infrastructures can be done in different ways, as explained by Freda Huson, spokesperson for the Wet'suwet'en encampment of Dark House, which was built on a section of the CGL pipeline. As she affirmed, given that the pipeline was proposed to run through the clan's best berry patches, resisting the pipeline meant protecting Indigenous critical infrastructures (Pasternak et al. 2023, 3).

Infrastructures transport people and matter while sustaining specific forms of living. In this sense, infrastructures serve to shape a future imaginary, building on narratives used by politicians and economic actors. In the case of pipelines, for example, they serve a future that is still based on fossil fuels and resource exploitation. In a certain sense, these kinds of infrastructures materialize a future made of Indigenous dispossession and displacement, wealth disparity, environmental destruction, and climate change (Pasternak et al. 2023, 3).

Nevertheless, infrastructures can have a different meaning, they can create a different future if the market-driven extractivism[31] logic is challenged and, eventually, overcome (Willow 2019b, 239–40). Being based on large-scale projects, extractivism and the economy it promotes generate benefits for distant peoples while negatively impacting local communities and the ecosystems where resources are extracted. According to the extractive mindset, Indigenous peoples are seen as resources, with all life reduced into objects for the use of others (Pasternak et al. 2023, 6). Therefore, counteracting extractivism and the infrastructures it promotes is possible by conceiving and operationalizing new forms of social and infrastructural cooperation to promote a post-extractive future. Such a future must ensure a social and political transition to a society based on not-for-profit economies, driven by local communities, where exploitation gives way to cooperation and reciprocity (Pasternak et al. 2023, 7).

Reciprocity, together with sharing, has always been at the forefront of Indigenous economies. The capitalist colonial economy that has been imposed in Canada has made Indigenous people shift from a system based on sharing, caring, and respect, to a system based on relentless resource exploitation and profit maximization. This system has displaced Indigenous peoples from their lands while pushing them into economies of dependency, which only ensure enough money to keep them alive, not to thrive (Alook et al. 2023, 116). The future can be different.

Drawing on discourses around the green and just transition and the necessity of having infrastructures that can support such a transition, a decolonial approach must be used. This means that the transition must address, undo, and redress the theft of land that formed the basis of the Canadian economy. This also means that new infrastructures that sustain the transition must be built based on people's needs, not market needs. A green transition does not only mean electrification while making our electricity sources green. In an Indigenous context, it means creating infrastructures that recognize Indigenous sovereignty while redistributing wealth and changing consumers' patterns (Alook et al. 2023, 86).

A just green transition must be based on the will to build real and long-lasting Government-to-Government relationships between the federal and provincial governments and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. Infrastructures built to sustain such a transition must be planned and constructed together with Indigenous peoples, who must be included as rights-holders in every aspect of decision-making and land and natural resource management. It is then necessary to develop meaningful engagement processes with Indigenous peoples in terms of capacity building and inclusion in decision-making processes, while also shifting from a transactional approach to the engagement process to a relational approach (Amatulli and Nelson 2024, 262, 270). Meaningfulness requires respect and recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, and a new relational approach recognizing Indigenous people's role as the rights-holder will need to be implemented to achieve consent through community (pre)engagement and by focusing on both the agency of Indigenous peoples to make decisions for themselves and joint decision-making with the Government (Papillon and Rodon 2017).

Rethinking infrastructures is also about rethinking the society in which we live. Decolonizing infrastructures should allow everyone to meet their basic needs beyond the logic of the market-driven economy while respecting global ecological limits. Infrastructures that are essential to ensuring a functional society should be operated for the public good, not to make a profit. Such a shift could also give people the opportunity to make substantial changes to their everyday lives and habits, incentivizing choices that have a lower environmental impact (for example, public transport) instead of individual and high-emissions choices, such as private cars (Alook et al. 2023, 89).

Decolonizing infrastructure is a long process. It can be achieved only if there is a substantial shift in the political discourse and in the way spaces and objects

are depicted. It is then necessary to use a new decolonizing approach that some scholars have called "decolonial aesthetics" (Mignolo 2000). According to Mignolo, decolonial aesthetics is a fundamental step for non-Western people and societies to reclaim their culture, creativity, history, beliefs, and, ultimately, political power. It can be interpreted as a process of creating original subjectivities grounded in Indigenous survival and reemergence (Magnani and Magnani 2020, 399). Those who embrace this vision imagine "worlds otherwise" (Martineau and Ritskes 2014, 2).

The Promises of Infrastructure: Planning Expectations, Managing the Future

In this chapter, I referred to my ethnographic work in British Columbia to describe the changes brought by infrastructures, the hopes they generate for a better future, and the promises they embody. The ethnographic approach allows the use of critical insights to highlight the conflicting and contradictory aspects of infrastructure development, by linking everyday life observations collected while conducting fieldwork with larger scales of economic, political, and socio-cultural dynamics.

The expectations produced by infrastructures and the hopes they generate for a better future grow with projects, throughout their planning stages. A key element of planning is the promises it generates for a time yet to come. Planning can be seen as a way to frame the future, by shaping space and time in a specific way. In general terms, planning for a desired future cannot be done without using specific tactics, technologies, and institutions to control such a passage into the future while influencing what people would like to see at the end of a comprehensive planning process. Thus, for the government, planning is a way to manage the present by governing and organizing the relationships between the state, citizens and other entities (Abram and Weszkalnys 2013, 2).

Planning has been used by states to organize their citizens, and colonizing powers have used planning as a way to effectively exercise control over Indigenous peoples, their territories and natural resources. In such a context, infrastructure planning has been promoted to improve life conditions while being used to perpetuate segregation and discrimination. Better facilities and infrastructures were built to facilitate colonial expansion, trade growth, and the life conditions of white settlers (Abram and Weszkalnys 2013, 6–7). According to what has been described in this chapter, this may still be the case in relation to resource exploitation. Planning and infrastructure development still serve

economic development, where the improvement of people's lives is considered to be a result of it.

Contemporary democratic states are based on planning. Plans play an important role in regulating the contradictions of capitalist development; they mediate the tensions that may arise in a society based on capitalist values and a market-driven economy. Planning, in these contexts, has its own socio-historical trajectory and peculiarities, aiming at creating a more organized, functional, and productive society to serve the capitalist state. In this sense, modern planning can be seen as a tendency of the contemporary state to colonize internally, with the public good invoked to justify development projects and new infrastructures while governing more people and things.

Infrastructure planning can be perceived as a material practice used to project people into the future while generating certain promises about it. Such promises are sustained by a specific performative effect, which associates promises with procedures, objects and circumstances under which promises are made (Abram and Weszkalnys 2011, 8–12). For plans to be made, it is necessary to have a social context in which they can be produced, as well as institutional structures that allow their implementation. Nevertheless, the temporality of the plan is not always a straightforward move from present to future, as the future promised by planning can be inherently irregular, elusive, and flawed, with its results materialized in unfinished constructions (Abram and Weszkalnys 2013, 1–3).

Unfinished is a key concept when talking about planning and infrastructures. Pipelines, railways, roads, ports, and big development projects such as dams or liquefaction facilities are often classified as proposed, planned, funded, blocked, delayed, failed or abandoned; in any case, in an "unfinished" state for a long time, which is the norm rather than the exception (Carse and Kneas 2019, 9–13). The status of being "unfinished" is intertwined with the temporality of infrastructures, as unbuilt and unfinished infrastructures may become stalled at a specific stage, in a timeframe where the beginning and the end are somehow defined and still uncertain. Exploring what was, what might be, and what might have been, and reflecting on infrastructures and temporalities, is an important exercise to try to explain the socio-economic and political dynamics that can define and shape specific communities for a very long time, framing social relations and the way in which people envision the future.

In the specific cases of Prince Rupert, Fort St. John, and Kitimat, "unfinished" is the defining word for the three towns. Whether related to the expansion of the port, the construction of new pipelines, oil and gas wells, compression stations and roads, or the realization of LNG liquefaction facilities; development projects are being approved on a continuous basis, and there is always a new project to be finalized and put into operation. The state of being unfinished is not related to a specific infrastructure or project, which may well be finished and made operational after a long gestational period. Unfinished is a status defining these municipalities, as there is always something new to be realized, a new project to be approved, a new infrastructure to be built. Unfinishedness becomes the defining feature of these resource-rich towns, always experiencing development with the promise of a better future, one that is, however, uncertain, and always in the making.

It has been argued that the main question when it comes to infrastructure development is not what an infrastructure is, but when. A myriad of things can be classified as infrastructures, but some of them become infrastructure as they embody relationships in the context of a particular activity. Therefore, infrastructures are not just artifacts related to the transport of goods, energy, people, and to the extraction of resources and their usage; infrastructures are instrumental in making and maintaining relationships while allowing people to find their place in the world (Star et al. 1999; Budka 2015; Carse and Kneas 2019). The very idea that an infrastructure will be finished and ready to be used shapes how people think, act, and talk about in relation to projects and the surrounding environment.

In the context of British Columbia, infrastructures may well be perceived in this way. Besides their role in transporting goods, resources, and people, they are instrumental tools in shaping specific relationships. From economic to political relationships, encompassing the achievement of Reconciliation and self-governance for First Nations, infrastructure is a tool used to advance specific claims while conveying a precise socio-economic and political vision of what a certain society should look like. In this sense, infrastructures are always unfinished and can never be completed, as the very idea they convey, their mission, and their role in society are linked to a continuous development of society itself, its needs, and its vision for the future.

Giuseppe Amatulli
Carleton University
giuseppeamatulli@cunet.carleton.ca

Notes

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