

Les Néo-ruraux and La Chacx

Changing patters in managing wildlife commons in Brittany

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Abstract - The radical changes in the population structure of three Breton villages affect the traditional management of wildlife, and re-questions the traditional activities related to it, in this case, the hunt. The study follows the field-research that took place around Paimpont Forest during the 2006-2007 hunting season. The aim of this paper is to describe and analyse the relationship between the demographic dynamics and the changing patterns in managing the wildlife commons. The starting point of the research is the use and the social representations of the natural environment among different socio-economic categories of inhabitants. Furthermore, considering the French literature related to the topic, new insights of the definition of neo-rurality are drawn.

Introduction

The neo-rural population issue

In the late '70s the neo-rural population was described in the French context as the offspring of May '68 Revolution, hippies in return to nature, searching for its virtues, with a permanent concern for social integration in the rural life (Léger and Hervieu, 1979). Close to new age philosophy, the aim of this 'return to the land' strategy was to preserve local traditions and a variety of craftsmanship. Neo-rurality issue is re-questioned in mid-'90s, with another major sociological study, made at a national scale, by Hervieu and Viard (2001). Following the changes of social values and patterns of consumption in both rural and urban areas, the main conclusion of this study was revolutionary for that time: the etiquettes were reversed – in cities leisure and work, in the countryside beauty and freedom. Although the study shows very well the changing patterns in the way of life of the French people at that time, little was analysed for the re-definition of the neo-rural population (*les néo-ruraux*). The picture becomes more

complex as soon as we take into consideration agriculture, not as an end point of a culture (Mandras 1967), but more as a switch towards a profession (Abdelmalek 2005). By analysing exhaustively the social representations over the natural environment and its usages in three Breton villages, the present study wants to bring contributions to the re-definition of neo-rurality and its implications for the management of the wildlife¹ commons in the region studied.

Natural environment and its main usages among local population

The study took place during two months, February and March 2007, at the end of the hunting season, in three villages around Paimpont Forest, in Brittany Region, France. The forest has about 8.000 ha and the main owners are two local noble families. In the western and northern part of the forest, there is a large area of moorlands of about 7000 ha, that belong to the three villages studied. Even if the moors are owned individually, hardly one may find villagers that know where their piece of moorland is. Until the late '60s, the moors were commonly used for grazing cattle and harvesting litter (vegetal material used to provide bed for animals in the stables). The use of moor for litter was important not only as a permanent contact between people and the environment, but also more pragmatically, to prevent fire in the forest². Around moorlands there are important plains of cultivated fields and farms. The farmers, although no more than two in each village, are an important minority in the analytical framework.

Three types of hunting (*Chacz* – in *Gallo*, the local regional language) take place in Paimpont Forest: *venery* - stag hunting with dogs and horses, without any firearms. The hunt takes place in the forest and in the surrounding moorlands. The participants are the buttons (members of the hunting club), the guests (potential buttons, usually with an important social status) and the followers (people from the club's entourage) that take part not on the horseback but in cars or on bikes. The hunt takes place usually every Sunday.

Peasant hunting - noisy firearms-hunting, using hounds for chasing the animals (wild boar, foxes and deer). Although the venery equipage passes in the moorlands for

¹ The common definition of wildlife is the non-domestic animals and birds. In my study, I will refer only at few species of mammals: deer, boar, stag and hare.

² Since 1980, more than 14 fires took place in the moor and forest, three of them devastated up to 3.000 ha.

chasing the stags, the peasants don't have the right to hunt in the forest, only in their moors. The hunting territory is divided within villages, and sometimes, informal agreements are made so that the groups of hunters join sometimes. There is no regulation regarding the days of hunting during the hunting season, but usually they avoid hunting on Sundays. The relationship with the owners of the forest, the two noble families, varies from respect to conflict within even the same hunting season. The open conflicts are very rare, most of the time the small issues being regulated according to very interesting informal agreements based on traditionally friendship relations (from father to son) and gifts.

And, *fix posts hunting* – hunting in certain area of the forest with firearms from fixed posts. People from outside rent from the owners the hunting area for one or several days. They hunt foxes, deer, boar and hear. Most of the time there are very rich people that arrive in big jeeps and they do not hesitate to show certain arrogance to inhabitants and even to owners. They want to take the advantage from their investment as any leisure that one pays for.

Along with these usages, the local population also uses the forest moors for harvesting timber and mushrooms. The Paimpont Forest is the mythological site of the King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Here, a number of megalithic sites, also important from an archaeological point of view, are called Merlin's Tomb, The Fountain of Viviane, The Fountain of Baranton, etc. Thus, more than 120.000 tourists (the unofficial number might be double) are passing the forest, outside the hunting season. Consequently, both the noble families and the peasant associations of proprietors of moors are in charge with the management of the tourist sites and passageway together with the local administration (namely a special service of the town hall was created).

The population structure in villages studied

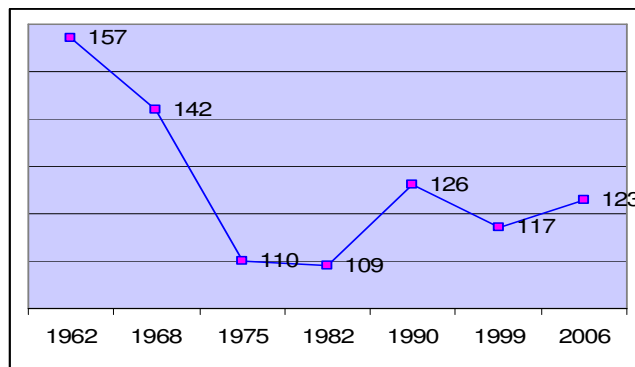
In this study, I look at how the demographic dynamics influence the management of wildlife commons. In other words, how significant changes in the demographic structure influence local practices of hunting and preservation of wild fauna. By significant changes, I do not mean only quantitative changes of population structure, number of

individuals, but also qualitative, in terms of social values. The following description will help us to define the neo-rural population nowadays.

At the first glimpse in the demographics we see dramatic demographic decreases after 1962 in all three villages studied.

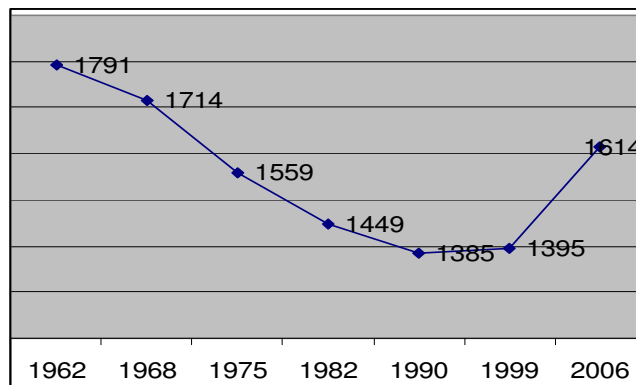
TREHORENTEUC

Year	1962	1968	1975	1982	1990	1999	2006
Population Number	157	142	110	109	126	117	123



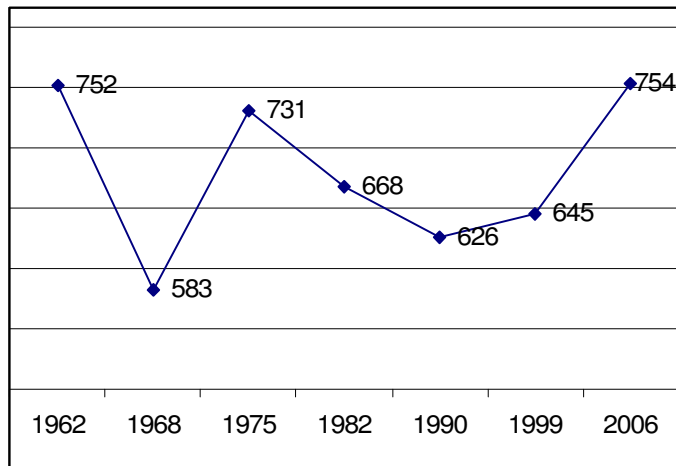
PAIMPONT

Year	1962	1968	1975	1982	1990	1999	2006
Population Number	1791	1714	1559	1449	1385	1395	1614



CONCORET

Year	1962	1968	1975	1982	1990	1999	2006
Population Number	752	583	731	668	626	645	754



The differences in percentage between the population level in 1962 and the lowest point, which highly varies between 1968 and 1990, is as follows: in Trehorenteuc decreases with 30%, in Paimpont decreases with 23.66% and in Concoret also decreases, with 23.50%. In 2006, all three villages recovered the population gap as follows:

- Trehorenteuc from -30% population decline in 1982, to -21.66% in 2006;
- Paimpont from -23.66% decline in 1990, to -5.58 in 2006;
- Concoret from -23.50% decline in 1968, to +0.25 in 2006.

After this snapshot in population's dynamic, the next question is: who are the individuals that increase the population of the villages after 1990? Is it a natural increase, by birth? The answer is no. Another macro data from the statistical database of INSEE (the French National Institute for Statistics) will help us.

Between 1990 and 1999 the natural balance in Trehorenteuc was -0.6, in Paimpont -0.3 and in Concoret -1.0. In the same time, in 2006, only 72 % lived in the same village five years ago in Paimpont, 81% in Trehorenteuc, and 73% in Concoret. The difference is covered by the neo-rural population established in the between 2000³ and 2006. Moreover, in Trehorenteuc, 26.6% of population came from the same Region, Brittany and 8.3% from other regions of France or from foreign countries; in Concoret, 10% of population came from the same region and 8.2 from different regions or foreign countries; finally, in the case of Paimpont, the percentages are 15.8 and 12.1.

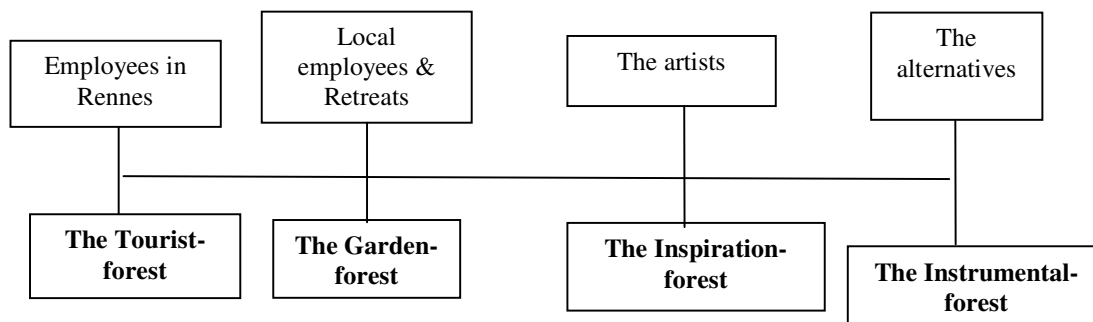
³ Unfortunately, I do not have more data back in time, but I consider that the major in-pup of population took place after the year 2000.

The Neo-rural population and its usages of the forest

After we saw the quantitative portrait of the population recently settled in the villages, I will try to bring some more color to this portrait by describing who these people are in terms of social values related to the natural environment. In doing this, new insights for the definition of neo-rurality will be given.

Approaching the forest

Within new-comers population, the contact with the forest is made in a very different way and also the social representations of the forest differ. According the frequency, the following scale is more a tool kit for a better understanding of how changes in the population structure influence the management of the wildlife commons.



The Tourist-forest

People working in Rennes bought houses located in the nearby villages up to 60 km. The advantage of the highway has considerably enlarged the metropolitan area. Thus, a house in a peaceful village located at the brink of the mythological *Broceliande* Forest is the best place to invest in. These people invest only money in their residences like in any other property and they are completely away from any social connections with the community. The contact with locals is absent; hardly one may find them in the local bars or taking part of any cultural and political activities of the community. Concerning the forest, they rarely take walks, most of the time with friends from other regions of the France or Europe in order to introduce them in their small piece of Haven. At this moment the forest becomes a point of pride and identity, but only for a short period of

time and for a precise reason: to impress the guests. Otherwise, the neo-rural population working in Rennes and living next to the forest might be regarded as tourists.

The Garden-forest

Some of the new-comers found jobs in the communities such as working in the town hall, schools, libraries, or building their own affair in tourism or different services. Together with the retired persons that bought a “quite place in the countryside” they get more in contact with the locals but also with the forest. Collecting mushrooms Sunday afternoons, picnicking or simply going out with the dog are ways of approaching and getting knowing the forest.

“I love going out in the nature, next to the forest. It is very relaxing, like a garden, you know...? I am going more in the summer time because in the winter there is the hunting season. But in the summer time there are also a lot of tourists. Hopefully there are only in August.”

Although these activities remain at the brink of the forest, they start to be more a habitude within a domestic ritual. Starting from this point, some new-comers may develop in short time a real passion for the forest and they start to adventure it. The forest is discovered.

The inspiration-forest

It is said that forests have always attracted bandits and artists. In the case of Paimpont forest, as far as I know, only the later is valid. Starting from people with timid artistic hobbies, to well known painters, sculptors, writers or musicians, the nearby villages are well represented in terms of artist shops. Excepting the autistic crises specific to any creative activity, generally speaking, the artists get in contact with the local population. One may find them often in the local bars, and they take part in local events. For the moment, we can not speak about a community of artists around the forest, but step by step a consciousness of a breach is about to be born. Musicians play in the local “*fest-noz*”, painters exhibit in the town halls, writers tell stories in the bars and so on. They start to know each other and to share their passion for the natural surroundings, for the forest. In their discourse, one may hear very often “*there is something with this forest, I don't know what, is hard to describe*”. There is a mutual acceptance among them that the forest posses ‘supernatural powers’, ‘a strange energy’, ‘a magnetisms different from any other part of the world’, etc. Frequently, these beliefs are associated with the Arthurian past of the *Fôret Brocéliande* and with the neo-druidism wave, quite developed in Brittany.

The Instrumental-forest

Another significant category of population living in or next to the forest is the young alternatives. There are people up to 30 years old, who quite schools and their families and they try to live differently, to live in ‘*alternative*’. Most of them are French extreme-left sympathizers. The alternative philosophy is rooted in the new-age era and in the rejection of any capitalit-globalist-hiperproductivist policies. They live in strong communities, working in common with domestic animals and carriages, using raw material from the forest. They practice bio agriculture not only by using bio plants, but also by using bio ways of production, without fossil carburant. Most of their products are sold in the villages and are well appreciated. The second part of their philosophy is to preserve local, peasant ways of production of working the land or simply gastronomic recipes and craftsmanship. Considering physical access, among this category there is the highest frequency, the access being permanent. For the alternative population the forest represents the last refuge, the final bastion in the fight with the global-capitalist state. Thus, the forest becomes a metaphor and an instrument for a political protest.

Discussion - managing wildlife commons in the past, managing wildlife commons nowadays

Unlike Romania or the United States and Switzerland where “*there is no relation between the landed property and the hunting rights*” (Knoepfel et all. 2000:8) in France the wildlife commons were and remain nowadays the property of the land owners. In the French context, the hunt has great importance and impact at both local and central levels. Chamboredon (1982:234) noticed that: “*the hunt is one of the fields where various modes of attachment to rural society are reflected; it shows a continuum of ways of belonging, issued from opposing movements: of emigration and urbanization, on one side, and partial ruralization on the other.*” This continuum of ways of belonging (“*un continuum des modes d’appartenance*”, orig. Fr.) is reflected in the dynamic of the social representation and appropriation of the forest by the neo-rural population, process described above. The question remains: why neo-rural population opposes hunting practices? Michael Bozon (1982:338) makes the further observation:

“the conflict in the social representations over the hunting rights drives us to the internal oppositions of the rural society, to the transformations of the usages of the rural territory (especially to the newly distinction between the productive and non-productive usages), to the transformation of the social relation within the rural society with regard to the urban one.”

Moreover, according to Charles-Henry Pradelles de Latour (1982), in the rural communities where the agrarian cycle was interrupted or is practiced only by few specialized farmers, the hunt remains the only activity that enables local inhabitants to appropriate the territory and to sustain their identity. Thus, we notice that in the past, as well as in the present, managing wildlife through hunting practices is not only a technical issue for protecting the surrounding cultivated fields, but has deeper consequences. In the French society, the tumultuous of hunting bills started in UK in 2000 provoked a real earthquake (for an adequate comparative analysis between the two cases see Pinçon and Pinçon-Charlot: 159-165), but no alternative managerial plans of the wild fauna were proposed.

Wildlife in Brittany is not a resource owned by the state, but a common resource owned by few individuals and three communities. One of the main statements of the ecological approach is that harvest rates must be considered conservatively, not simply making increasing or decreasing, but harvesting for a continuing yield (Caughley and Entrican, 1994). Moreover, a difference has to be made in thinking conservatively in the case of wildlife and other natural resources, although *“the land ethic”* remains the same, as Aldo Leopold (1949:204, apud Shaw 1987:470) stated since the middle ‘40s. It is easier to manage trees instead of wild animals in a *“wise use”* concept (Leopold *ibidem*), which would protect both individual interest and natural protection. Even the *“modern”* and more fashionable *“sustainable use”* concept has to be re-questioned when wildlife management meets neo-rurality. What are the interests of this category of inhabitants? As we have seen, very diverse, according to the social representation of the forest. How can one build a community-based wildlife management in such a diversity of representations and interests? Before building a coherent management plan of the wild fauna based on sustainable use, one should consider the coherence of the communities involved. But, as Siura (2006) pointed out, the weak point of the community-based management project is

the definition of the community it self, as an empirical reality and as a concept. This study sustains this point of view once more. The great population dynamic in the rural area of today's western societies makes impossible a coherent top-down driven management programme but also a bottom-up driven one.

Why against hunting?

During my whole staying in the three villages, I haven't met any locals in disagreement with the hunt. As I have showed above, there are three different hunting practices: stag venery, quarry peasant hunt and fixed-post shooting hunt. The forest is owned by the nobles, the moors belong to the peasants and the animals run free within this area. Although the peasants are not allowed to hunt in the forest, the hounds pass through the moors and sometimes in cultivated fields. There are mutual arrangements between the farmers (only a few left) and the noble families that organize the venery actions. Thus, among the local population, there is no resistance to the hunting practices, and the commonly owned wildlife fauna has been reasonably managed between the tree types of hunts and hunters.

Hostile manifestations against hunting practices began with the late '90's, the exact period of the neo-rural population incensement. A hunting bill was signed by some inhabitants of the three villages and sent to the local and regional authorities. Some of the neo-rurals are vexed only by the noise made by the hounds and cars. They are not to much interested in politics of hunt. Their point of view is the one of the proprietor in defending his private property. These are the ones that have a tourist approach to the forest. The more new-inhabitants become attached to the forest, the more they become opponents of the traditional practices of managing wildlife fauna, namely the hunting practices. This relates to our initial hypothesis that people do not fight against hunting practices simply because they are new-comers and they do not understand local traditions, but because they have a different representation of the forest, a representation recreated after their own representation of nature.

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