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New orientations of forest management planning from an historical perspective of the relations between man and nature

Christine Farcy*, Freddy Devillez¹

Forest Science Laboratory, Department of Environmental Sciences and Land Use Planning, Faculty of Biological, Agronomic and Environmental Engineering, Catholic University of Louvain, Place Croix du Sud, 2 Boîte 9, 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

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Abstract

The increasing trend towards a less utilitarian approach to nature justifies the urgent need to define new principles of forest management planning, a discipline which is still based today on concepts linked primarily to wood production organisation. The following study involves an historical and comparative analysis of man's perception of nature and of laws which govern his relationship to land. Focussed on Wallonia, a densely-populated, forested area, its aim is to define the causes of present-day disquiet regarding forest management planning on the one hand, and to contribute to the emergence of new principles on the other. The study shows how biological, physical and socio-economic systems, which have been constrained to particular paradigms for a long time, have been the subject of specific approaches within the framework of distinct spatio-temporal models. As a turning point, the traditional discipline of forest management planning played an important and well-defined role within this framework. The progressive break with this position is described; it results in an acknowledgement of complexity and leads to new principles of forest management planning requiring work models incorporating a transverse component. This would allow the identification, structuring and hierarchical ordering of co-existing systems, their components, their levels of spatial organisation, their dynamics and their purpose in relation to the rights and responsibilities of the parties and major players involved. The analysis of respective characteristics of systems involved would then allow the proposal of models and tools with full knowledge of the facts and according to the level of complexity.

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1. Introduction

The increasingly voluntarist nature of conservationists' involvement in regional zoning, which is

reflected in measures taken into account by the legislator in establishing the European network Natura 2000 in Wallonia, is a sign of a growing trend towards a decreasingly utilitarian approach to nature. The project involving the merger of the Forestry Code and the Law on Nature Conservation, which is currently under study in the Walloon Region, is itself another striking example justifying the urgent need to update or redefine forest management planning, a discipline embodying man's activ-

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +32-10-47-49-98; fax: +32-10-47-36-97.

E-mail addresses: farcy@efor.ucl.ac.be (C. Farcy), devillez@efor.ucl.ac.be (F. Devillez).

¹ Tel.: +32-10-47-37-29; fax: +32-10-47-36-97.

ities on forests and still based to a large extent today on principles related to wood production organisation.

Man's relationship to land has undergone considerable change according to deeply contrasting situations which have emerged throughout history. The present study is a comparative and chronological one involving man's perception of nature and the laws governing his relationship to land, the latter being the result of his perception. Its aim is to define the causes of present disquiet regarding forest management planning on the one hand, and to contribute to the emergence of new concepts and principles on the other. The urgent need for rethinking the problem has been proposed by various authors (Laroussinie and Bergonzini, 1999; Farrell et al., 2000; Hüttl et al., 2000).

This transverse analysis aims at highlighting strongly contrasting situations which are very significant from a conceptual point of view. Consequently, it is not intended to be an exhaustive study and does not take into account transitional stages. Therefore, points of discussion from an historical point of view are kept short (Thireau, 2001). Integration of legal aspects, however, which reflects the balance of power operating in a given situation, should guarantee the coverage of most important and significant trends.

The area under study covers Wallonia, a region located in the southern part of Belgium. Situated in Western Europe, its development has been linked to the contacts it has had with Latin and Germanic civilisations and schools of thought which have evolved throughout history. The tradition of forestry is a very old one and is still firmly established in this wooded area due to 32% of the region, or the equivalent of 540 000 ha of forest, being interwoven in a patchwork covering very diversified types of landscape. The division of forested land into small areas has continued on a large scale since 100 000 private property owners share half the heritage of the regional forested area, the other 50% belonging to 200 public owners. With 196 inhabitants per km², Wallonia is a densely-populated area and provides both a research area of semi-urban forestry and a site which is particularly interesting and representative with regard to the study of man's interaction with nature.

2. The nature appropriated and segmented

During the Roman period in Antiquity, the very centralised form of political power regulated and organised society with the purpose of controlling land and the ever-increasing number of human settlements arising from military conquests.

The exploitation of land and its appropriation formed part of a positive view prevailing at the time which considered man to be responsible for his destiny within the confines of a certain amount of freedom defined by deities. The future was not considered to belong to the Gods, however, as it was man's task to shape its path. This pragmatic and freethinking view of the relationship between man and deities was dependent on rites being scrupulously carried out in order to satisfy the Gods. Man was then free to work towards developing the grandeur of his towns and their inhabitants with a complete peace of mind.

The development of legal forms of property took place during the first century BC when landed wealth was taken into account by the law and individual prerogatives regarding conquered territory, initially attributed to the Roman State, were established (Robaye, 1997). Land, nature, products of nature and other individuals all represented goods susceptible of absolute and exclusive appropriation. They were all listed, described and classified by Roman law (Bart, 1998). However, the power of the owner was not unlimited and, according to different periods, restrictions were sometimes enforced. The solid family structures which existed at first, neighbourhood or public interest relationships which were to follow and, later on, planning permission with regard to building construction or urban regulations on fire prevention, also provided potential restrictions (Gaudemet, 2000).

Property, first off all landed within a predominantly agricultural society, was regarded by lawyers at the time to be a form of power embodied within a finite, spatial dimension. This trend towards materialism was apparent in a number of regulations such as the principle of accession which decreed that property conferred the right to everything produced on the land in question. A spatial view of property rights also gave rise to their exclusive nature in contrast to the juxtaposition of partial rights. Joint

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