

WALK WITHOUT DESTROYING, PROTECT WITHOUT PROHIBITING ; NATURE : ACCESS UNDER CONDITIONS

Philippe Pesteil

University of Western Brittany, Department of Anthropology, CRBC - Breton and Celtic Research Centre, France

<https://doi.org/10.11118/978-80-7509-963-1-0386>

Abstract

Public policies and local administrations are faced with an unavoidable paradox: how to make nature accessible to as many people as possible, while protecting the environment and biodiversity from the excesses of over-frequentation? The growth of tourism in most national GDPs makes this activity a key sector of development. Pressure exerted on the territory by facilities and the presence of the public act directly as threats to nature. Depending on their interests, different social categories take different positions on the measures to be adopted to prevent and remedy the damage caused. Local balances of power directly determine how regulations are accepted and how they are received by those working in the field (farmers, hunters, members of associations, politicians, technicians, etc.). We will be guided by an anthropological approach that examines the relationship between man and nature, and the implementation of environmental protection policies. We will illustrate our remarks based on our field experiences: Corsica (France), Brittany (France), and Eastern Siberia (Republic of Sakha/Russian Federation).

Keywords: Biodiversity, Environmental policy, Mass tourism, Environmental management

Introduction

Since the development in Europe of a formal capitalist system, supported by liberal ideology and politics, the idea of continuous economic progress has been equated with the ability to control nature. Long ago, Marx established the link between the endless accumulation of capital, the exploitation of nature and human physiology, and the absence of moral limits (Marx 1993). Far from being a pure consequence of technical development, it is a deliberate implementation of free trade based on individual freedoms (Manent 2012). The liberation of land from the old rights and customs, of which communal landholdings were an essential category for the survival of the poorest peasant groups, will enable the commercialisation of land, particularly uncultivated and mountainous land, which is especially affected by current tourist flows and environmental protection. Tourism is one of the world's leading economic sectors, accounting for 7.6% of GDP in 2023. In terms of employment, the World Tourism and Travel Council estimates that 295 million people worldwide work in tourism-related jobs. At present, tourism can be seen as a major economic challenge for all countries, either by maintaining an already prosperous business in a highly competitive sector, or by the prospects for development it promises. We will first look at the issues linked to this unlimited economic potential, before analysing the consequences of overtourism on regions and policy management.

The apeiron¹¹ as an economic and ideological principle

In 1972, a report by the Club of Rome (financed by the Volkswagen group)¹² sounded like a thunderclap in the world of economists: it linked exponential economic growth to the depletion of natural resources. For the authors of the text, the human ecological footprint was becoming increasingly problematic, jeopardising not only the economic future of populations but also the ability of eco-systems to renew themselves. Since then, calls for degrowth have multiplied, arguing that the Earth's resources are limited (Latouche 2012) and that the notion of unlimitedness is dangerous (Garcia 2018), echoing Husserlian warnings about the disguise of the life-world (Husserl 1989).

Tourism between over-visitation and heritage development

¹¹ For more about the notion of apeiron (unbounded), see Detienne M. and Vernant J.-P., (1974), *Les ruses de l'intelligence ; La mètis des Grecs*, Paris, Flammarion ; '...in the mythical thought of the Greeks, there is a space similar to the expanse of the sea, where the boundless, the apeiron, oscillates between fetters that no one can untie and paths along which no one can travel. It is Tartarus... inhabited by furious winds, traversed by whirlpools, a place of total confusion, an undirected space, deprived of fixed directions and regular landmarks.' (pp. 278)

¹² Also known as the Meadows Review.

While it is easy to understand that tourist pressure on certain areas, already saturated by the resident population, has a strong impact on the environment, it is less easy to understand that all areas can be affected if they are already weakened by a polluting economy. Let's take a specific example.

The Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) in the Russian Federation covers an area of 3.103 million km² and has a population close to 950,000 inhabitants, almost 40 times the size of the Czech Republic. The economy is essentially based on mining, with the Republic's subsoil being particularly rich in materials of all kinds: gold, silver, diamonds, gas, oil, coal, etc. At first glance, it might seem that abundance and profusion characterise this region, opening up an unlimited economic future. Successive field trips have shown me the importance of nature in all its components (animals, plants, elements, etc.), including the supernatural (spirits), in the discourse of the inhabitants, particularly the Yakuts, but also the indigenous populations. Nowadays, this inclination is activated by an awareness of the damage caused by industry and mining, and an expression (freer than in Soviet times) of animist and shamanist representations and practices. Therefore, despite the vastness of the territory, it appears to be increasingly threatened by pollution, resulting in the destruction of fragile natural resources. From nuclear testing to the dumping of heavy metals in rivers and agricultural pollution (Maj 2006), we are witnessing a deterioration in the health of the local population and their health in general.

At present, almost a quarter of Yakutia has protected area status, and initiatives are being developed to try and make a breakthrough in the field of extreme tourism, based on showcasing an incomparable natural environment and even a specific gastronomy (Pestil 2021). The Amossov University in Yakutsk created a 'Heritage and Tourism' degree (Cultural Engineering) in 2008. While epidemics and international tensions are having a negative impact on the expansion of tourism in Russia, it is likely that tourism will continue to spread to areas that have been little affected until now. In this way, groups that have long been left out of economic development are being given a new role in line with the most globalised industry: that of tourism. The creation of heritage sites is an essential step in making an inventory of unexploited wealth and making it available to an extroverted society. In this way, the link between the globalised economy and local identity can be made. As Marie-Françoise Lanfant points out: '... on the one hand, the spread of tourism in the global economy is generating extroversion, de-territorialisation and globalisation; on the other hand, it is helping to re-root identities, in a territory, a system of filiation, a heritage, a great ancestor acting as points of support... as has often been pointed out, tourists, through their travels, are looking for what they feel they have lost in their own society: nature, purity, wisdom, childhood and origin, freedom' (Lanfant 1994: 438-439). Will this call for identity and authentic traditions find a favourable echo in Yakutia? Will the vastness of this territory be no more than a backdrop designed to guarantee the precarious survival of traditions that have long been discredited and are now being exploited?

A glance at the websites of the main tourism bodies, such as the World Travel & Tourism Council, is enough to convince us that the impact of tourism on the environment needs to be taken into account: dossiers on sustainable development, decarbonisation of transport, the virtuous use of water, etc. feature prominently in all the media (<https://wtcc.org/>). But, as Jean-Louis Caccomo puts it: 'It's obvious that what can contribute to the charm of a tourist destination can disappear under the very effect of tourist numbers. The same applies to tourism as to all human activities: we must be careful not to kill the goose that lays the golden egg' (Caccomo 2007: 205).

The result is the appearance of a strange figure, the tourist/anti-tourist, the bearer of '... the ultimate form of contempt: paradoxical contempt - that which the tourist holds for himself... Driven in turn by an anti-tourist hatred identical to that of the traveller or the xenophobic native, this state of mind leads the tourist to the worst excesses. They come to fear their own visit.' (Urbain 2002: 121-122). Agencies and the advertising industry, having confirmed this dimension of self-destruction, have been able to develop campaigns focused on promoting areas without tourists, aimed at... tourists: 'advertising... tells tourists that the land belongs to them, as long as they come there or over there before the 'others' come' (....). Sometimes, more mischievously, it tells them to come and see why others have already come, thus establishing the tourist in another role, that of a transcendent judge... Here, the tourist is led down the path of a pre-tourist illusion... There, he is led down the path of a meta-tourist illusion, another mirage, where he will be a superior tourist situated above the holiday crowd (Urbain 2002: 127).

We can see here that taking GDP alone as a measure of any economic activity leads to a simplistic view of the phenomenon as a whole¹³. We must take the ideological dimensions and their legal development into account.

¹³ As Bob Kennedy pointed out on 18 March 1968: "In a word, GDP measures everything except what makes life worth living".

Everyone's right to everything

In 1999, the UNWTO (World Tourism Organisation) adopted a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism (GCET) recognising the globalised dimension of tourism and its decisive role in the development of the Global South. Its preamble affirms: '... the right to tourism and freedom of movement for tourists' and the 'wish to promote an equitable, responsible and sustainable tourism order, whose benefits will be shared by all sectors of society in the context of an open and liberalised international economy'.

Article 7 states: 'The prospect of direct and personal access to the discovery and enjoyment of the planet constitutes a right equally open to all the world's inhabitants'. (<https://www.unwto.org/global-code-of-ethics-for-tourism>).

As Marie-Françoise Lanfant points out, the transition from the word charter to the word code is not insignificant; its normative objective is binding on the signatories, and we are moving from an asserted ethic to future legalism. The author sums up the process: 'Over the last few decades, tourism has gradually become a major phenomenon in contemporary societies. Tourism has become an integral part of the global landscape. All countries are affected, rich and poor alike' (Lanfant 2004: 368). The deleterious impacts of this globalised and globalising industry are becoming increasingly apparent to researchers, local populations and tourists themselves. The unbridled exercise of these rights is bound to clash with the ancient rights of indigenous groups to control and manage their territory. They also come up against measures designed to protect fragile environments. We can see that the multiplication of rights conceived individually and guaranteed by supranational institutions is coming up against measures designed to manage and protect biodiversity that have international value.

The proliferation of rights corresponds to the spread of liberal ideology and the capitalist economy throughout the world. This concept apparently contradicts the new focus in Western countries on a holistic analysis of the environment. Water rights were proclaimed, animal rights were strengthened, and the Rheinauer theses evoked the rights and dignity of plants. As Brewster Kneen points out, the 'Rights of Nature' embody a legal conception of the relationship between man and nature that is typical of Western anthropocentric culture (Kneen 2014). According to the philosopher Donna Haraway, 'since the Enlightenment, the obsession with the difference that separates what is human from what is not has been human exceptionalism' (Haraway 2008), which prevents us from building an 'alterglobalisation' (Haraway 2021: 9).

This exponential propensity has been pointed out by Jean-Claude Michéa: 'This right of all to everything ('take your desires for realities') obviously has as its logical correlate - no one being prepared to give in on his own desire - the right of all to complain about all. This is why the project of a world in which everyone would have the right to 'live without time out and enjoy without hindrance' inevitably carries with it its practical complement: the war of all against all through lawyers, a war that is still in its infancy but is already not just American.' (Michéa 2019: 76). The rhetorical and syntactic mastery of a double language consisting of campaigning for measures to protect nature and moving around without constraints belongs to what this author calls the green bourgeoisie (Michéa 2023: 19). Characterised as a new urban middle class, they assert their ideological specificity while seeking to approximate to the lifestyle of the upper classes, for whom mobility (along with economic and educational capital), cultural openness and mastery of foreign languages are the determining attributes (Hugrée, Penissat, Spire 2017). Let us now take a closer look at how biodiversity protection measures are put in place.

Problematic land management

In this context of the opening up of spaces and the disappearance of communities, the State intervenes to carry out a management process that is referred to in technical terms as land-use planning. In parallel with the expansion of the urban and peri-urban world, protected areas are being created in an increasingly wide range of nuances: National and Regional Parks, ZNIEFF, Natura 2000 zones, Man and Biosphere, etc. Each administrative and legal sphere is associated with measures designed to limit (or conditionally authorise) the actions of local populations and tourists. These restrictions have met with a lukewarm reception from local residents, as well as from temporary residents and tourists.

Examples of human/animal cohabitation

A paradigmatic example of the issues of cohabitation and conflicting interests is the reintroduction of species. The arrival of 'Italian' wolves in France via the Alps and the reintroduction of Slovenian bears in the Pyrenees have not failed to cause problems for farmers, hunters and hikers... Each human/animal encounter raises a controversy in which the legitimacy of the approach undertaken and supported by environmental associations is questioned. As Sergio dalla Bernardina states on his blog:

'I often say that, in the name of biodiversity, sheepfolds, including in Alpine pastures, will soon resemble the concentration camps for chickens so well illustrated in the animated film *Chicken Run*'¹⁴. The attacks by a bear in Liptovsky Mikulas (Slovakia) in March 2024 and the ensuing confinement of the population prove that cities are now concerned, and that animal excesses have an impact on human traffic.

We are even witnessing the reappearance of species that were thought to be extinct, and with them the emergence of problems that have not arisen before: for example, Winton's golden mole (*Cryptochloris Wintoni*), which has not been seen since 1936, has reappeared in South Africa near diamond mines. While there is no reason to fear attacks by this subterranean animal, industrialists may be apprehensive about the protective measures that could be taken. Calls for the preservation of biodiversity have their corollaries in management measures, a less controversial term than limitation or restriction. Let's give a few concrete examples of this governance.

Tourism accounts for 3.1% of global GDP. This average varies from country to country. In France, it was 7.5% in 2022, making France one of the world's leading tourist destinations (<https://www.campusfrance.org/>). A closer look reveals major regional variations: Brittany's share of GDP rises to 8.1% (<https://pro.tourismebretagne.bzh/etudes-chiffres-cles/>), while Corsica, the country's top destination, reaches 31% (<https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/>). For the island, the economic take-off based on tourism (and agricultural monoculture) was a government decision designed to remedy the absence of industry, the rural exodus and the loss of jobs provided by the colonial Empire. At the peak of the tourist season, the island's population doubled (from approximately 340,000 to 700,000), although its distribution was not uniform. Regions renowned for the beauty of their sites were particularly popular. The Restonica valley, the Aiguilles de Bavella and the Calanques de Piana, which are particularly popular and recommended by all the tourist guides, are the most popular areas. The Environment Office has suggested that certain sensitive sites should be subject to visitor quotas. For example, the Scandola reserve (a UNESCO World Heritage site)¹⁵, which is a must for visitors to the island, sees an influx of tourists from all over the world. As a result, the osprey (*Pandion haliaëtus*), an endangered species and a tourist attraction on boat tours, has become a bone of contention between local stakeholders. Incessant visits and engine noise are disrupting nesting and bird numbers are stagnating. Tourism professionals have spoken out against the planned measures, calling them economic assassination. The fact that the restrictions would not apply to Corsican residents was denounced by the French media, which spoke of discrimination. In reality, it's all just talk, and on the ground it's proving very difficult to decide on and enforce measures that risk turning away large numbers of tourists from certain sectors. Caught between the desire and the obligation to protect nature and the need not to hinder the tourist windfall, politicians are prevaricating and the phenomena of congestion remain unresolved.

Overcrowding also affects Brittany's coastline. Access to certain beaches on the Crozon peninsula in Finistère (Kerséguinou, Goulien, La Palue, etc.) has been restricted. Unauthorised camping, the large number of vehicles and car parks and the inconvenience caused to residents led the mayor of the commune to take restrictive measures. Restrictions on access, use and visitor numbers are rapidly coming under attack in France as being contrary to freedom of movement, or even an infringement of human rights. Surfers, as a sporting and practising population, are particularly mobilised against what they see as discrimination. Conciliation meetings, demonstrations and rallies, petitions and the creation of associations are the most frequent consequences of these processes. Understandably, situations are becoming increasingly intractable both administratively and politically, giving rise to inter-group conflict.

Local tensions

While the tourism industry is largely in the hands of the private sector, it is up to governments, public administrations and local institutions to take and enforce measures to protect the environment. But insofar as tourism and the free movement of citizens have become rights, we are witnessing an increasingly flagrant contradiction between the guarantees granted to tourists and the policies restricting the exercise of these rights. In other words, it is up to the public authorities to put in place sustainable tourism (sustainable, green, etc.) to protect natural resources that are non-renewable or difficult to renew. Local authorities, and mayors in particular, are on the front line when it comes to enforcing and respecting decisions designed to protect biodiversity, while at the same time linking them to sustainable tourism.

¹⁴ The anthropologist is keen to emphasise that the pressure to defend biodiversity must not be restricted in any way: 'Need I say that I, too, care enormously about biodiversity? The problem is not biodiversity, of course, but the misuse, the instrumental use, that can be made of this notion'. <http://lanimalcommepretexte.blogspot.com/search/label/biodiversite>

¹⁵ <http://www.ecase-pnrc.fr/reserve-naturelle-de-scandola/>

Among the tools designed to reduce the effects of overtourism on the environment as far as possible, we might briefly mention the following, without claiming to be exhaustive¹⁶:

- Quotas: set a *numerus clausus* of visitors that must not be exceeded, and prohibit access to excess visitors.
- Dispersal: offer visitors the chance to discover other sites that are less frequented because they are less famous but of equivalent interest
- Extensions: stagger the season to avoid overcrowding in summer and winter
- Demarketing: inform tourists of the number of visitors per day and per hour, so that they can spread their visits out more evenly.
- Raise awareness of good practice among local players and site users

Objective documents or DOCOBs (of the Natura 2000 type, for example) set out the issues and objectives for sustainable development on protected sites: they 'are based on a balance between environmental issues, determined by the specific aims of the Natura 2000 network, and local socioeconomic issues, defined by the local characteristics of human activities on the Natura 2000 site'. Their aim: 'is to contribute to halting, on a European scale, the loss of biodiversity observed in recent decades, on the basis of a list of habitats and species to be preserved' (Ragot, 2014 for the Glénans archipelago in Brittany). The documents, which are produced by experts (biologists, ecologists, etc.), include scientific analyses of the environment, economic and social data and recommended management measures. We will confine our observations to the work of Francesco de Castri and his reservations about measures of carrying capacity for sustainable tourism, as well as his insistence on taking social factors into consideration rather than purely technical or mathematical ones: the primary role of local entrepreneurship, the cultural homogeneity of the population, the maintenance of diversified activities, the ability to adapt to change, etc. (De Castri 2002).

Since preservation measures have been taken, it is not difficult to observe the development of a feeling of dispossession among rural populations and resident professionals. Peasants, now farmers, have become a minority and are struggling to gain recognition for their active role in nature conservation following campaigns denouncing the use of inputs¹⁷. Hunting and gathering, marginal and symbolically disinvested economies, considered economically irrational, are being downgraded by part of the urban bourgeoisie. Even projects that combine ecology, tourism and the economy do not automatically meet with local approval.

An example of this is the old but very significant project to create the Ariège National Park, which was rejected by the local population in 1974 and again in 1979. Faced with its general decline (rural exodus, decline in agro-pastoralism), mountain society reacted unfavourably to what it interpreted as a form of guardianship. The specialisation of areas (zoning), the transfer of power (from the local level to the Park Authorities) and the increased regulation of the territory and of activities were often rejected by livestock farmers. Traders were more nuanced depending on their geographical location: those belonging to the most 'integrated' communes were more conciliatory, while those located in marginal areas were more reserved. The refusal in 1979 led to a slow process of associative work in favour of the creation of a park, highlighting the fact that behind the general reactions there were divergent interests. As Guy Deiller puts it: 'The Haute-Ariège, a privileged scene of confrontation between urban society and rural mountain society, has seen the development of a capacity for resistance that varies according to the adaptability and integration of the various social groups that make it up (livestock farmers, small traders, the commercial bourgeoisie, notables, local elected representatives, etc.) and at the same time has seen the emergence of internal conflicts within its own organisation, the first signs of the break-up of a traditional society in difficulty' (Deiller 1982: 164). In 2009, the Ariège Pyrenees Regional Nature Park took over from these unsuccessful attempts.

The set of measures, briefly outlined, is accelerating the development of a nature policy outside its traditional players: the new function of nature as a space for leisure and recreation contrasts with the investment of rural communities in the territory as a productive space. Regulations governing access to land, the fruit of power relations between rural elites and communities, gave way to standards that

¹⁶ According to an Evaneos survey carried out by OpinionWay in January 2024: 'Three quarters [of French people] say they are looking for holiday destinations with few tourists (75%) and itineraries off the beaten track (72%). Many travellers (52%) even go so far as to support the introduction of quotas to limit over-visiting of sites.' <https://www.lechotouristique.com/article/surtourisme-ce-que-pensent-les-francais>

¹⁷ In agriculture, the term 'inputs' is used to describe the various products that are added to land and crops and that do not originate on the farm or nearby. Inputs are not naturally present in the soil, but are added to it to improve crop yields, the main ones being: fertilisers: fertilisers and soil improvers, pesticides: products used to eradicate crop pests, growth promoters or retardants, seeds and seedlings. <https://agriculture-de-conservation.com>

were seen as being imposed from outside and limiting old rights, thus creating traditional offences (Jamin 1982).

Conclusion

The natural environment has long been a strategic site of confrontation between the citizen and the powers that be (Bromberger, Lenclud 1982), and is also becoming the intersection between new rights (granted to tourists, but also to animals and even to nature itself) and systems of control dictated by the imperatives of protection orchestrated by supranational bodies. In 1972, the sociologist Michel Clouscard used his well-known phrase 'anything goes, nothing is possible' to highlight the aporias of the liberal/libertarian ideology. By dialectically articulating economic liberalism and cultural libertarianism in their fundamental unity, he called for apparent oppositions to be overcome. In this way, the mechanisms for protecting Nature (largo sensu) that correspond to the ideology of cultural libertarianism are integrated into the destructive processes that ultimately determine and control them in the interests of economic liberalism. In other words, we need to give back to the market (of which tourism is a part) the culture it generates (i.e. the culture of environmental protection). The role of the law here is that of an intersection between its abstract declensions (the right to tourism, the right to free movement, etc.) and its corrective readjustments, the latter intended to compensate for the damage caused by the extension of the former.

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Souhrn

Veřejné politiky a místní správy čelí nevyhnutelnému paradoxu: jak zpřístupnit přírodu co největšímu počtu lidí a zároveň chránit životní prostředí a biologickou rozmanitost před nadměrnou frekvencí? Růst cestovního ruchu ve většině národních HDP činí z této činnosti klíčové odvětví rozvoje. Tlak, který na území vyvíjejí zařízení a přítomnost veřejnosti, působí na přírodu přímo jako hrozba. Různé společenské kategorie zaujímají v závislosti na svých zájmech různé postoje k opatřením, která je třeba přijmout k prevenci a nápravě způsobených škod. Místní rozložení sil přímo určuje, jak jsou předpisy přijímány a jak jsou přijímány těmi, kteří pracují v terénu (zemědělci, myslivci, členové sdružení, politici, technici atd.). Budeme se řídit antropologickým přístupem, který zkoumá vztah mezi člověkem a přírodou a provádění politiky ochrany životního prostředí. Své poznámky budeme ilustrovat na základě zkušeností z terénu: Korsiku (Francie), Bretaň (Francie) a východní Sibiř (Republika Sacha/Ruská federace).

Contact:

Philippe Pesteil

E-mail: philippe.pesteil@univ-brest.fr

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