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MULTIFUNCTIONAL AGRICULTURE IN PERSPECTIVE: CONCEPTUALISATIONS AND DEBATE IN FRENCH POLICY AND RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT. The research work on multifunctionality in France is being carried on by a variety of epistemologic communities, with a wide range of research questions and methods. The purpose of this state of the art report is to identify these communities, their different uses of the concept of multifunctionality, and the types of agriculture it refers to. The functions to be promoted and the way to enhance them can be related to the theoretical framework used. Six main types of epistemic communities are identified in the French literature, which highlight a common view on the functions of agriculture, and the scientific approach. Some research gaps in the French literature are suggested. The way to convert the principles of multifunctionality or the principles of sustainable development into farm policy principles in particular is a matter of interest. More empirical research is also needed to characterize multifunctionality, including divergent perceptions and valuations by different stakeholder groups.

Key words: multifunctionality, sustainable development, farm policy, non-trade concerns, jointness, multiple roles of agriculture

Introduction

Since the late 1990s multifunctionality has been an issue of great interest for the social sciences in France. This has led to a wide-ranging and heterogeneous set of works referring to this concept. This phenomenon has of course emerged both as part of the growing political debate on multifunctionality at an international level and within a specific national context.

National context

First of all, French agriculture is highly diversified and includes almost every type of commodity supplied within Europe. Both the plant and livestock sectors are equally represented. Regional variations range from highly intensified and specialized agriculture on large-scale holdings such as cereal crops in the *Bassin Parisien*, through intensive pig, poultry and cattle farming in the West (Brittany, Pays de la Loire), to more extensive agriculture with sheep, goat and cattle farming in mountain areas and less-favoured areas (including tropical ones). As in many other parts of Europe, the trend in recent decades has been towards the concentration of holdings, the intensification of farming processes, and the abandonment of land in less-developed areas. Some of the issues raised by the debate on multifunctionality — agriculture's contribution to rural development and to balanced land-use across the national territory, and its negative and positive impacts on the environment, the landscape and natural resources — had therefore already emerged in the national debate by the late 1970s and in the course of the 1980s.

Furthermore, even if agriculture has declined in terms of employment and its contribution to GDP, the sector remains important for the French and it still wields considerable political influence, as evidenced by successive governments' conservative positions on CAP reform and in WTO trade negotiations. France has always been for a strong CAP, calling for price support, milk quotas and export subsidies to be maintained, and more recently for subsidies to be coupled to production. The French government's interest in multifunctionality may be interpreted, then, as a new way to justify current agricultural policy.

But the enactment of the *loi d'orientation agricole* (Agricultural Orientation Law) in July 1999 showed that one priority for the government of the day was to move towards greater incentives to improve farming practices and to improve the allocation of public-sector support. The Act officially recognizes the multifunctional character of agriculture: "Agricultural policy takes into account the economic, environmental and social functions of farming and contributes to the management of the territory, with a view to sustainable development". It also implements a new policy instrument, the *contrat territorial d'exploitation* (CTE: Local Exploitation Contract). The objectives of this new policy were, among others, to increase the supply of high quality products and to protect natural resources, biodiversity and landscapes. Even if the current administration has decided to replace the CTE by the *contrat d'agriculture durable* (CAD) (sustainable agriculture contract), with a view to simplifying procedures and reducing public spending, the new instrument remains much the same in spirit.

The French government's interest in multifunctionality prompted the Ministry of Agriculture to commission some contributions both to NGOs and to economists from INRA on the issue of the justifications of public intervention for the promoting of multifunctionality, in the view of the WTO agricultural trade negotiations. Purely academic output on multifunctionality began in the late 1990s.

The concepts oriented research clusters

We account for the different definitions and conceptual contributions of the existing literature in France on multifunctionality. To structure this amount of publications without bringing any judgment on the different views on multifunctionality, we classify them into “concept oriented research clusters”, that designate different epistemic communities working on conceptual approaches on multifunctionality. We focus on the scientific genesis of these definitions, the type of agriculture that they describe and what are weaknesses of each definition.

Six categories of CORCs can be identified from the selected academic works:

CORC 1: Joint production by farming of commodities and goods with externalities and/or public goods aspects

This first CORC uses a conception of multifunctionality which is consistent with the “positive” definition laid down and used by the OECD in its works (**Production... 2000, Vermersch 2004**). The main issue covered in works using this definition is the efficiency with which public policies or other institutional arrangements promote multifunctionality. The policies surveyed are the ones implemented at all levels (CAP measures at European, national and regional level, trade policies, international trade regulations; **Mahé and Ortalo-Magé 2001, Guyomard and Levert 2001, Bonnieux and Rainelli 2000, Le Cotty et al. 2003**). Most of these works belong to the mainstream of neoclassical economics (welfare economics, neo-institutional economics, environmental economics, economics of production and trade, etc.). Few contain any lists of functions, reflecting a shortage, within this category of works, of empirical studies on determining what the functions of agriculture are. Some authors mention a legitimate multifunctionality, that is, multifunctionality which, in the light of welfare economics, justifies public-sector intervention.

CORC 2: Multiple impact and contribution of agriculture/rural areas to society, local community and environment

It deals with the contributions of holdings, of a rural territory or of woodlands, which may be positive or negative, and may affect a community, a territory or a society as a whole (**Bonnal et al. 2003, Aznar and Perrier-Cornet 2003, Laurent 1999**). Moreover, these contributions/impacts are not considered through their non-market aspects. A first category of agronomists and economists within this CORC seeks to expertise the impact (on employment, landscape, income, etc.) of agriculture or of specific holdings in a given area. A second one, coming from disciplines such as geography and management sciences, is interested in actions (such as public policies or private coordination) that may promote or hamper multifunctionality. This conception produces very wide-ranging lists of functions, which differ with the location and size of the areas considered, collating all identifiable contributions or positive impacts of farming or rural areas.

CORC 3: Agricultural Multifunctionality as a complementary and conflicting connection between commodity and identity good productions

Economists usually consider that non trade concerns in the field of agricultural multifunctionality should be analysed as resulting of market failures, which would find its

solution either by way of creating new appropriate markets or by way of public good production. Researchers involved in this CORC do not share this opinion based on the presupposition of continuity between private and public goods. They consider that market exchange development unavoidably involves the destruction of identity and reciprocity structures. The non market exchange dimension of agricultural production is precisely assigned to restore identities and reciprocity relationships (concerning community and resource management, culture territory, intergenerational link...). In other words, two separate economic rationalities (market exchange economy and identity or reciprocity economy) take place in the field of agricultural multifunctionality, and conflict, which means each one sets the limit to the other (**Barthélemy** and **Nieddu** 2003, **Sabourin** and **Djama** 2002, **Barthélemy** 2003, **Sourisseau et al.** 2003, **Barthélemy** and **Nieddu** 2004 a, b, **Andriot** 2003).

Empirical works of this analytical stream, in several parts of the world (EU – national implementations of Rural Development Regulation, North and South America, Africa) show the way these two complementary and conflicting dimensions of agricultural multifunctionality and sustainable development are implemented: on the one hand market exchange organisations and market price systems, on the other hand identity and reciprocity organisations (mainly renewal or new establishment of communities) and framing of non merchant price systems. Each of these two economic ways tends to overflow the other, resulting in movements and changes. Researchers draw the concrete lesson that there will always remain two different (market and non market) organisation and price systems, and that political task deals with managing and controlling conflicts between both of them and not to hopelessly keep trying to reduce one dimension to the other.

CORC 4: Farmers strategies and practices

In this CORC, multifunctionality is perceived by agronomists and economists as a set of “good” agricultural practices (**Morardet** 2002, **Daniel** 2002, **Deraeve** 2002, **Ulmann** 2002, **Bazin** and **Kroll** 2002, **Aumand** and **Jacquet** 2004). Those “good” practices do not refer here to social demands, but more to ecologic norms (sometimes combined with economic ones), that should be integrated in farmer’s individual choices. The main issue researchers deal with is to what extent the recognition of multifunctionality (in public policies or in local institutions) has led to an improvement in farmers’ practices, or again to changes in farming strategies toward multifunctionality. They usually do not attempt to identify any list of functions of agriculture, but consider more new functions, like environmental protection, maintaining of landscapes, or contribution to rural employment, as given, trying to see if producers’ technical choices are moving in this direction or not.

CORC 5: Social demands towards agriculture

For other researchers (mainly economists and agronomists) the multiple roles or functions of farming relate above all to expectations or requirements of the society or community of which it is part (**Léger** 2001, **d’Auvergne et al.** 2000, **Raymond** 2003, **Alphandery** and **Pinton** 2002, **Buttoud** 2000, 2001). The two main types of questions they ask relate to the identification of these social demands and to the ways agriculture might be able to meet them. The lists of functions considered or identified by these authors contain the different expectations of agriculture and in particular the expectations arising from consultation procedures when CTEs are put in place.

CORC 6: Roles of agriculture to be officially addressed by policies

This CORC refers to the functions of agriculture explicitly recognized in the legal texts underpinning agricultural policies. Some researchers here study the consistency of this new official objective (promoting multifunctionality) with policy measures implemented, in particular the CTEs, using expertise most of the time (**Berriet-Sollic** et al. 2003, **Pivot et al.** 2003, **Josien et al.** 2001, **Chatellier et al.** 2004, **Aumand and Jacquet** 2004, **Perraud** 2003, 2004). Others try to see if multifunctionality constitutes a new paradigm or can be a new guide for agricultural policies: some socio-economists (**Laurent** 1999, **Losch et al.** 2004, **Laurent and Maxime** 2003) and above all researchers in political sciences and rural laws (**Bodiguel** 2004). The functions used in this research work are therefore those embodied in the CAP and in the French agricultural policy.

Multifunctionality and sustainability

The connection between multifunctionality and sustainability is almost never explicitly mentioned. But some of these works implicitly refer to whether the contribution of agriculture is consistent with the objective of promoting sustainable development. For instance, studies of agriculture's contribution to functions considered all together, such as income, employment and natural resources, can be related to the three dimensions of sustainability (ecologic, economic and social).

Conclusion

The state-of-the-art of French studies of multifunctionality highlights a wide-ranging and heterogeneous set of works. This academic output is produced in the context of political discussion on agricultural policy reform at both international and specifically national level. This includes the historical importance of rural economic and sociological disciplines in France and of works on related issues, the official recognition of multifunctionality both in the French agricultural law in 1999 (and the improvement of the CTE) and in the CAP, and the interest of the French government in the concept for policy purposes (reflecting the great traditional political influence of the farm sector) as well as for a rethinking of the transfers to the sector.

The first scientific discipline mobilized (over time and in terms of size of production) in these works is economics. Within it, the researchers belong to very diverse schools of thought such as welfare economics, institutional economics, neo-institutional economics or French school of regulation. But the concept has also been caught by other disciplines inside (geography, management sciences, sociology, political sciences, law) and outside (ecology, agronomy) social sciences. In some disciplines like agronomy or sociology, research on multifunctionality could get more emphasis soon. Six CORCs have been identified from the selected documents.

Finally, it can be noted that most of the reviewed studies relate to multifunctionality in agriculture, although some consider rural territories, and a few consider forestry.

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WIELOFUNKCYJNE ROLNICTWO: KONCEPTUALIZACJA ORAZ DEBATA WE FRANCUSKIEJ POLITYCE I BADANIACH

Streszczenie

Badania dotyczące wielofunkcyjności we Francji są prowadzone przez różne grupy badawcze w szerokim zakresie analitycznym i metodycznym. Celem artykułu było zidentyfikowanie tych grup, zdefiniowanie różnic pomiędzy koncepcjami w odniesieniu do typu rolnictwa. Funkcje przypisywane koncepcji wielofunkcyjności nawiązują do teoretycznych podstaw. W badaniach zidentyfikowano sześć głównych nurtów badawczych realizowanych we Francji, jednocześnie wskazano na obszary badawcze wymagające dalszych badań. Dodatkowo określono zakres implementacji idei wielofunkcyjności lub zrównoważonego rozwoju polityki rolnej.