

RENAISSANCE DE LA VALLEE DE LA SELUNE

EFFACER - RESTAURER - VALORISER
COLLOQUE INTERNATIONAL - FRANCE

>24 - 26 Septembre 2019
RENNES - AVRANCHES



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Is the removal of the Selune Dams also a failure? Social approach of ecological restoration

The removal of Vezins dam, which has begun in July 2019, can be perceived as the sign of the success of Selune dams removal. On the contrary, the research program focused on social aspects of this operation (2015-2019) illustrates that it is far from being obvious.

This research is based on semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The aim was to reconstruct the relationships between the different stakeholders since the announcement of the removal by the government until now and to analyze governance process (Germaine and Lespez, 2014 et 2017). This analysis depicts an adverse political context for the emergence of a common project for this territory. In fact, the governance route was punctuated by uncertainties and interruptions. Furthermore, the lack of communication, especially on the ecological objectives and the progress of the territory project, reinforces this failure claim.

If the State and Water Agency are in charge of the ecological aspects of the operation, local authorities have to manage the socio-economical reconversion of the valley. But, locally, local electives and inhabitants have expressed their opinion against the removal on repeated occasions. The project therefore had to be built against the wish of the local population and did not succeed in truly including the territory. In addition, inhabitants were not taken into account in the governance process even though they have a strong attachment to places.

Finally, the Sélune ecological restoration project questions the future of the landscape. According to inhabitants, the removal deals with the appearance of wastelands and more generally the abandonment of the valley (Germaine et al., 2019). The next stage, called valley "renaturation", must be considered as a crucial moment during which several conceptions of nature, probably difficult to reconcile, could compete: on the one hand, users are attached to a natural landscape but want a maintained and controlled nature and on the other experts may dream of natural stream and wild river defined by certain ecological criteria...

While the ecological project is about to take shape, State services and local electives must take into account all these political questions which involve the future development of the territory and the sustainability of the ecological project. It may not be too late to build a common world with local actors and residents around a new valley with new ecological qualities.