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HUNTING IN A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE – APPROACHES AND BENEFITS

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Summary: In wildlife management, it has been established that the understanding of animals is equally relevant as the behavior and attitudes of those people who come into contact with them. Although, in this context, the importance of "human dimensions," is regularly emphasized, adequate research has not yet been conducted in many countries. Particularly in the social sciences, the management of animals and specifically the dealing with hunters is only vaguely understood.
In this context, the paper describes some "blind spots" in social sciences and addresses the traditions of applied research involving hunters. It introduces some examples of recent research and draws conclusions for further development in this field, concerning the social dimension of wildlife management in Europe.

Key words: human dimensions, hunter, behaviour, attitudes, implementation process

Introduction

By now, it is likely that scientists, who studied the Stone Age hunter found in the Ötztal Alps in 1991, outnumber scientists who study contemporary hunters. This seems obvious the more one compares the extent of scientific literature and the number of scientific symposia on both topics. As hunting is still one of the major topics of concern in rural areas, this gap seems quite surprising. The ongoing debate about appropriate game populations and the successful spread of a wide range of problematic animals (e.g. beaver, cormorant, and wolf) regularly question the behaviour of hunters. With the increasing presence of numerous wild animals in urban areas (wild boars, foxes, martens) new issues on the proper handling of these animals, and the role of their hunters, begin to arise [37, 25].
Management of these species, in many cases, is based on the idea that animals are killed by hunters to regulate their populations or to control their spatial distribution. The observable changes in society on fundamental ecological practices, from game hunting to wildlife protection, show a serious difference in opinion [5]. Since these fundamental values have an influence on public attitude regarding treatment of wild animals, these values are becoming increasingly relevant concerning conflict situations mentioned initially. As with all regulatory action, there is to expect resistance. On the other hand, at least at the regional level, for various reasons hunters are increasingly not willing to take over the task of a regulator. This, however, intensifies the existing problem. International literature tends to involve the credo that without considering the "human dimension", proper wildlife management becomes impossible [1, 7, 23].
In this respect, knowledge on the evaluation of actions performed by various stakeholders, in particular the hunters, represents an essential foundation on any relevant decision by associations, administrations or landowners [31]:

- They help to assess the future behavior of hunters.
- They contribute to the benefit resulting from planned measures for various wildlife interest groups.
- They help to reduce costs of measures by avoiding fault developments.
- They are an important basis for conflict prevention and proper management.
- They provide foundations for information and education.

Blind spots of social science

The North American hunting system has promoted the provision of necessary resources to deal with these issues. The comparatively high level of public involvement on the management of wildlife and the funds generated through licensed hunting contributed to the development of an extensive university network of wildlife education in the past thirty years [31, 33].
Compared with comprehensive North American research, level of knowledge on hunters and other wildlife stakeholders is still insignificant in Europe. Hunting science tends to focus more on wildlife and the damages caused by wild animals. Moreover, there is large interest in the history of hunting. The number of available scientific studies on present behavior and attitudes of hunters is still relatively few.
Interest in the topic of hunting is limited in other sciences as well, in particular sociology. If at all, interest of researchers is aroused concerning hunting subcultures. In German speaking countries hunting interests sociologists as an expression of "better society" [16] or as a "symbol of polite society and of idleness" [15] or in its illegal varieties. However,

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sociologists usually pay not much attention to contemporary hunting. In this respect, the existing studies focus mainly on a social-historical examination of poaching and its alleged political ambitions. One example is the Vienna sociologist Girtler (1998), who sees poachers, shown by the title of his book, as Rebels against the established order. Other motives of the illegal 'peasant hunting' such as sheer distress, adversity defense or own hunting passion are neglected. Thus, the representatives of the discipline usually ignore everyday hunting practices of the majority of hunters, but give the theme a political appeal.

The political attitude of scientists is obviously very significant for used explanations on the phenomenon of hunting. The American anthropologist Matt Cartmill is outspoken about the so-called `hunting hypothesis', or the question of the role that hunting played in the context of humanization and its importance regarding actions of modern humans. He comments the debate between right and left-leaning scientists: "Most of the bullets that were fired at the hunting hypothesis of the origin of man came from the left. Marxist critics did not approve the image of human nature, (...) because for many of our social ills the ancestors of man were to blame, not our economic system." [4: 33]. Consequently, in addition to the leftists were mainly pacifists and feminists, who argued against the 'hunting hypothesis' since they did not approve a theory on genetically determined aggression or phylogenetic distribution of roles between man and woman.

But even today there are still ideological motivated reservations critiques of socio-biological approaches. These concepts assume that human behavior is determined to be substantially heritable. The approach in 'Sociobiology' by Wilson (1980) initially promised to reconcile scientific and sociological explanations for the behavior of humans. Accordingly, human behavior is also a result of natural selection in the context of the ongoing evolutionary process. This notion sparked fierce reactions from the social scientists though. Finally, a biologist who ironically was described by the sociological side, "became famous in the professional world as an ant researcher" [29: 101], Lutterer undertook the approach to enter the spheres of sociology. Indeed, sociobiology challenges the principle of traditional sociology, that social phenomena should always be explained through social phenomena only. The attempt to initiate biological explanatory models is rejected almost reflexively as an attack on the limits of the discipline itself.

Although Wilson himself warned that socio-biology should not lead to the point that genetic origin is used by the hunters and gatherers "to justify the continuation of this practice in current and future societies" (quoted in 3], this idea is of certain popularity among hunting writers up to this day. In the tradition of the 'hunting hypothesis,' by now regarded as outdated by many scientists, it is being suggested by some authors today that among the motivations of hunters include a "genetic basis of a passionate (instinctive) aptitude" [26: 36] or a 'hunting gene' that could be part of the cause. In particular, the idea of a "determination of hunting nature" and "entertainment and diversion at experience of the 'kick' in view of killing a wild animal as fortunate, liberating emotional process" [27: 27] certainly does not sit well with the views of the post '68 generation.

Indeed, the theory of the former "killer ape" that was genetically determined to resemble the spare time hunter of today, has been disproved many times by now [cf.4]. Contemporary hunting cultures do not appear to be verifiable especially aggressive either. Above all, it is assumed that we cannot look back on such a long hunting tradition as claimed in the postwar years. The early hominids seem to have hunted infrequently, and often were among the hunted themselves. In this respect, there is little on-hand evidence for the existence of aggression derived from a "hunting-gene," since the relationship between wild animals has been experienced over the longest period of human evolution from the perspective of the prey [19].

It is therefore not surprising that the latest dissertation on hunting and hunters in Germany expressly dissociates itself from these considerations and pursues the established social-historical approach. It is a concern of Klaus Maylein [34: 22] that his work should be considered a "counterpoint" to Kuehnle. On understanding hunting, he trusts that everything "stands outside the instinct theory of human action" and therefore sets "the interaction between the non-hunting majority of society and the hunting minority of society" in the forefront of his analysis.

Thus, the contrasts in reasoning and language couldn't be bigger. Whereas Kuehnle [27: 30] demands respect for the "lifeform" of the hunter from other nature users, Maylein [34: 23] emphasizes that justification of hunting can be based solely on its role in society. For Maylein, the legitimacy of hunting therefore is not derived from the satisfaction of the individual hunter, but from the benefits of hunting for economic and ecological processes.

With this in mind, the observer gets the feeling that, as similarly ascertained by Cartmill for American anthropology, the debate on hunting does not seem to focus on the explanation that best describes the phenomenon of hunting. In the forefront of this debate is obviously the marking of the own disciplinary territory and the fear of possible reasoning advantages on either side of the (hunting-) political spectrum.

In fact, it is often the "dash - social sciences" or representatives of adjacent disciplines who apply attention to hunting from a sociological perspective. By now, they have collected some of the basics for understanding the actions of hunters. Agricultural sociologists, forestry scientists, lawyers, anthropologists, wildlife biologists and cultural geography scientists tend to make up this research field. In Germany, a forestry scientist composed an empirical study on the socialization of hunters [40]. A lawyer recently reported on their living environment [8] and a physicist took on the task of compiling all available studies that make clear what the Germans think of hunting [2]. The fact that the latter is not simply a German phenomenon is clarified, for example, by the numerous studies

carried out on British fox hunting. The studies on the tradition of fox hunting and contemporary political relevance were usually not written by sociologists. However, they are pioneering and important, especially at the interface of scientific analysis of hunters' behaviour and its social and political relevance to society [21, 36, 46].

Results and Discussion

Some of our contemporary studies can illustrate the benefits of socio-psychological research in the context of hunting. This includes the behaviour of hunters, mainly in the context of the implementation of policy programmes like the shooting plan for roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus*), the illegal killing of protected animals like the lynx (*Lynx lynx*) by hunters, poaching, communication strategies in the context of red deer management that aim to address hunters and participation of hunters in policy processes. Surveys, oral interviews and focus groups have become crucial instruments to understand attitudes and behaviour of this societal group and therefore to formulate better policy programmes to address this group.

Example 1: Implementation of the shooting plan for red deer

In a survey among hunters in one German district leaseholders of hunting grounds were asked to evaluate the state system of shooting planning [42). It could be shown that the acceptance and willingness to implement the public plan was very weak. About two thirds of the interviewees reported that they were not following the regulation (one group shoots more than allowed, others less). The whole group of hunters could be clustered in three subgroups based on their self-reported behaviour. It became clear that the assumed function of the shooting plan differs among the most important stakeholder groups. Whereas forest administration mainly expects to guarantee a minimum number of shots, many leaseholders expect the plan to restrict the hunting activities of hunters in neighbourhood hunting grounds. This leads to a mismatch of the policy objectives and the correspondent policy instrument. In general the efficiency of the whole planning system is very weak. The study fostered on-going discussion about the liberalisation of roe deer management as it could offer empirical data on the (lacking) benefits of the given public planning system.

Example 2: Hunters as a target group of communication strategies

Today, modern governance principles suggest basing wildlife management on the participation of involved stakeholder groups. This approach is believed to contribute to effective wildlife management. Anyhow, several examples show that round table talks or mediation processes can also fail and conflicts even get worse. The study was based on a quantitative survey among hunters and land owners who were invited to a participatory process initiated by a national park administration in Germany [13]. The aim of the study was to identify factors that affected peoples` attitude towards this process and considerations to change the red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) management in the national park. Two variables mainly influenced the interviewees´ evaluation of management measures: First, their land use interest, which revealed significant differences in the attitudes of land owners and hunters; secondly, the historical development of differences in the relationship between stakeholders and national park administration. We concluded that traditional concepts of target group identification solely based on land-use might lack case-specific, actual group-structures. Furthermore, attitudes towards wildlife-related issues might be superimposed by issues other than the originally addressed.

Example 3: Understanding illegal mortality of Lynx

Illegal mortality is a crucial factor for the reestablishment of predator populations like the lynx (Lynx lynx). Reintroduction programmes and natural dispersal are questioned by the deviant behaviour of some hunters. The aim of the study is to understand the assessment of lynx by hunters and to explain their behaviour [28]. The research is based on group interviews with hunters who report on their evaluation of the situation, formulate assumptions on the extent of illegal activities and discuss explanations for this kind of behaviour. We learned to interpret the evaluation of the lynx by hunters in the context of several other policies, mainly conflicts with nature protection agencies. Several social theories on deviant or illegal behaviour help to interpret the reported experiences and to formulate suggestions to address this problem. Today a communication strategy addresses hunters in the region trying to develop a new sight on Pro-lynx-groups and to trigger exchange with them.

Conclusion

Figuratively speaking, a gathering of the representatives of the various 'hunting theories' and wildlife activists is currently required. The widespread understanding is that with the continuation of the recent dominance of wildlife biology in hunting sciences, the major pending problems cannot be solved. In Europe, the "human dimensions" still need to be more involved in the management and the resolution of the conflicts that have emerged concerning wildlife. Hunters as important addressees and backbone of most management concepts will become a major counterpart and subject of research.

At the same time, the quality standards required for social science works in other research fields should obviously be implemented within hunting sciences as well. Scientists should define exactly what they want to know and what assumptions they follow before they design a questionnaire. Basis for the conception of these assumptions can be sociological concepts and theories which are also used in other fields of research. Several studies demonstrate that well-established concepts such as motives [38], norms and values [11, 40, 47], attitudes [10, 20], approaches from the sociology of law [39, 41), or collective theories like the theory of planned behaviour fulfil this task very well for the understanding of hunting action [22]. It is questionable whether there should also be a harmonised "hunting theory". Concepts based on the "biophilia hypothesis" [45], provide starting points explaining the special emotional relationship of man to wildlife. They also contain the idea that both the positive attention towards wild animals, which becomes apparent at game keeping as well as its killing, might be explained by a combination of biological heritage and learned behaviours [24, 32: 36].

Concerning the empirical work on hunters, practical relevance and target group orientation of research is not to be neglected. Social science is not just about dispersing questionnaires from the ivory tower of research institutions. On the contrary, it should represent applied research in the best sense. This is most obvious in research approaches that are referred to as 'participatory action research'. In this field of research is assumed that scientists alone cannot provide the solution of practical problems. Their function is to be regarded rather as a 'supporter'. The scientist puts a group which is affected by the research in the position to work on solutions of their problems e.g. with respect to the issues of wild animals. The aim of such projects is therefore not only to gain new survey data, but also to prepare the data appropriately with respect to the target groups and the evaluation with stakeholders. On the one hand, this strengthens the applicability of the findings obtained by the cooperation partners; on the other hand, there are also benefits for the research itself. Namely, if the generated insights are applied in the context of wildlife management and the resulting reactions of groups interested in wild animals can subsequently be monitored systematically.

This approach becomes particularly relevant in the context of active involvement procedures, stakeholder interviews or round tables, which have become increasingly significant in wildlife management as well. While considering this, it seems that the observed behaviours are not necessarily typical for hunters. Regardless of whether the content of the debates include red deer, grouse or lynx, it always becomes obvious that hunters are also just social beings who observe their social environment closely.

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