

FOREST MANAGEMENT IN URDAIBAI BIOSPHERE RESERVE: A LOST OPPORTUNITY

M^a José Ainz Ibarrondo and M^a José González Amuchastegui

Department of Geography
UPV/EHU

Radiata pine (*Pinus radiata*) is the most planted forest species in Basque Country and represents about 75 per cent of the total forest area. It occupies the ecological niche of oak (*Quercus robur*), which has been almost eliminated of its original land. Radiata pine was introduced in northern Spain in last years of the XIX century. Once its productivity was proved, during first years of the XX century the forest plantations with this specie began, and after 1949 it was generalised around northern Spain, mainly in Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya. Nowadays, around two thirds of the basque-cantabric mountains are occupied with this species.

The ambiental impact of these plantations have been studied for numerous authors not only for its important surface area but for the agressiveness of the forest management also. The principal impacts are related with the vulnerability of these species to fire and different pest like insects and several fungi, as *Fusarium circinatum*, responsible of the epidemy that actually are infecting numerous stands. Other impacts are the loss of biological and landscape diversity.

Geocological effects are related with the selviculture regime. For example we can cite the big loss of soil by erosion, reaching in some cases to 140 t ha⁻¹. Obviously, it has a high influence in water resources and its dynamic: the risk of inundation grows and the colmation of estuaries is increased.

This situation is tolerated by the local administration, whom justified its incapacity of action because of the dominance of the own property and defends that this type of management is related with the small extension of the stands (around the 3-4 has), divided into small parcels; so if the ownerships want to obtain some benefits, its necessary to recur to the cheapest method of exploitation, that implies the clearfall of all the trees called *corta a hecho* or *matarrasa*, leaving the soil without any vegetal coberture in a high slope, all of it in spite of its environmental cost.

The ecological preoccupation related with the environmental impact of forest management is collected in some planification documents, as the *Directrices de Ordenación del Territorio (D.O.T.)*, in the *Plan Forestal Vaco 1994-2030*, or in the *Plan Territorial Secto-*

rial *Agroforestal*; they reclaim that it is necessary to reduce the erosion and propose some measures, but always without any normative character. As conclusion, we can say that these documents could be defined as a summary of good practices; at least, forest management is regulated by the *Normas Forales de Montes*, done by the administrations organs of each province, but with a similar content, with no concretion, very ambiguous and with few sensibility with the application of the proposals of the mentioned ordenation documents.

Forest management in Urdaibai Reserve Biosphere presents the same environmental problems than in other areas of the basque-cantabric mountains: erosional processes, landscape homogeneity....., and as in the rest of Guipúzcoa and Vizcaya, about the 90% of the land here is private.

The declaration of Urdaibai as a protect area, Urdaibai Reserve Biosphere, seemed a good opportunity for improving its forest management. In fact, it was one of the main objective of the *Plan Rector de Uso y Gestión (PRUG)*, elaborated in 1993, in which the forests of autoctonous species were object of maximum protection, and the forest land use was controlled, both the kind of forest management and its extension surface. These objectives were specified in some proposals that implied the reduction of the area occupied by the pines in some cases, or the employ of a selviculture less damaging. Forest agents (properties and primary sector) rejected the document and argued that it would have negative socioeconomic and environmental effects because the ownerships would see no incentives in future forest plantations.

The unconformity of forest sector finished with the modification of the *PRUG* in 2003, and of the Urdaibai law, once they got a softer regulation of forest activity; at least this space is regulated by the *Normas Forales de Montes*, as the rest of Vizcaya. Initial "*Plan Rector de Uso y Gestión*" of Urdaibai and their latter modifications reflects the important disagree generated by the document in all forest sector and specially in forest ownerships. We can find the reasons of this unconformity in the fact that it was a document redacted with a cabal environmental criterium but without the opinion of the owner`s land.

This process has served to show the difficulty of implant a rational control over forest land use in a protect space, Urdaibai, opportunity that could have served as a good example for other places, furthermore it caused the discouragement between different sectors with ecological conscience.