

Christian Ernst 1996

The German Forest After The 30-Year War



Forest as pasture (Röhrig 1938)

Situation before the 30-year war

During the 16th century Germany was divided into some larger and many smaller states. The most important forest owners were the aristocracy, the clergy and the commune of most villages. The increased population and the increased prosperity led from 11th to 14th century to an increased consumption of timber and firewood. During this time the forest area was reduced from about 75% to 25 % of the whole area (Wobst 1971). This was a result of forest utilisation and undeveloped silvicultural methods.

In the municipal forest it was a traditional law that everyone of the commune could take out as much as he needed. On the other hand the aristocracy needed timber for the military and money for their states. A lot of wood was needed for mining and iron and steel industry. Sometimes the industry followed the forest resources so that the raw material was transported to areas where enough timber could be extracted in the next period (Hilf 1938). When they harvested the forest they took out the trees but nobody really cared about reforestation. This was the traditional use which seemed to work. During the following centuries this situation led to a increased scarcity of timber and firewood.

To protect the forest for their own interests the rulers of the different states enacted laws. A novelty was that these laws concerned not only their own forest but also the municipal forest. These laws were mostly to reduce the general use. They regulated how to use the forest, for example how to harvest, what to collect and especially how much each person could extract. Now it was very much depending how serious these laws were. In some cases there was a real advantage for the forest and people for example in Brandenburg - Preussen. In other areas there was a reduced harvest for farmers but an increased use by the ruler. During the 16th century the forest laws were more and more developed. In the end of the 16th century first orders came how to get and how to sow seeds from coniferous trees and how to do reforestation. The forest administration were managed by "Jägermeistern" and "Oberjägermeistern" who were first and above all responsible for hunting. To control the forest laws a forest police was installed.

The 30-year war and its after-effects

The 30-year war ended 1648 with the "Westfälischer Frieden" (24.10.1648). This is the conclusion of the peace treaty between the French king and the Swedish queen Kristina. Germany had to give away much area to France and Sweden. The splitting up of Germany into many small states was increased. During the war almost 75 % of the German population was killed (Hilf 1938) and large areas were depopulated.

The forest was in a similar negative situation. First the timber was needed for military weapon, wagons, bulwarks, bridges and navy. The soldiers needed a lot of firewood. Foreign soldiers came and took wood and timber and were very inconsiderable when they harvested in the forest. After a short while everybody tried to get as much as possible wood for his own not to leave it for the next looters.

After the war Germany had to pay a lot of reparation. For example Mecklenburg which is situated in the north eastern part of Germany became Swedish. A lot of clear cuts were done to built up the Swedish navy. But the Swedish administration brought also some advantages which will be discussed later on . The respect for laws was decreased. Nobody cared about the forest laws, there was no control and sometimes careless people caused disastrous damage in the forest by making fire. The smaller forest area was now used more intensive for animals so that there was no change for natural regeneration.

The decreased population caused on the other hand a stop for timber scarcity. Many villages and farms disappeared and wasteland were left. This areas were covered by shrubs and trees after a few years. This new forest were to young for timber harvesting and that's why not very interesting for timber harvesting. When this young forest surrounded an old forest area it had a protecting function because the firewood could be taken from this areas.

As I described earlier the laws were not as strong as in the time before the war, but also the whole development of forest laws was stopped. We should not forget that a lot of knowledge about forestry and silviculture was included in these forest laws. The timber scarcity in the 16th century made the people think how to use the forest in a sustained way. Some people started to specialise and collect a lot of knowledge about forestry. But most of this knowledge was not published in books but it was given from father to son and from the old forester to his trainee. All this acquisitions were lost or broken down during the war and it took a long time to refresh all this things.

In the forest administrations there were a lot of foreign people who had no idea about forestry. For them the hunting was the important reason to manage the forest (Hilf 1938)

In many areas the regeneration period was not for a long time. The rulers wanted to recover their states as soon as possible. When the population was increased they tried to find ways to colonise the unpopulated land. For example already 20 years after the conclusion of the peace treaty the ruler of Preussen supported the settlement in this area. Especially the improvement of the infrastructure was very important during this time.

After the war people had only the most essential things left to survive. On the other hand the rulers of many states had a very extravagant and wasteful lifestyle. For them the forest got more and more importance for hunting as a amusement. The people had to pay for this pleasure. The hunting was developed in a very negative way. In this time it was for the first time that firearms were used as a legal hunting weapon (Röhrig 1933). Imitating the French court, big hunting meetings were organised. A lot of people were necessary to breed and preserve the games. The hunting methods were very cruel. Sometimes the "hunters" were standing on a protected platform shooting on the passing game. Some states developed to a game park (Röhrig 1933).

The hunting passion was probably the most important reason for the rulers to get as much as possible area for this activity. That's why their administrations tried everything to become owners of the whole forest area. The result was that the rulers

got the absolute power in the state. Now the forest became also an interesting source of money. Money was needed for the expensive lifestyle. The developed economy is called "Mercantilism". The administrations were led by "Kameralisten"¹⁾.

In many states the export of timber was important and the harvesting methods were inconsiderate. Timber from oak and coniferous trees were exported mainly to the Netherlands and was called "Holländerholzhandel".

To guarantee the economy it was necessary to support the agriculture. Farmers got special timber prices and special rights to use the forest. The animals were often on forest pastures. This effected the natural regeneration of course quite negative. A new kind of damage which became more and more important is called "Streunutzung"²⁾. Its negative effects could not be seen immediately and that's why it was continued for a long period and became a traditional treatment which was difficult to abolish.

This situation was unchanged for a longer period depending on different conditions in the different states. Sometimes it was a more careful ruler sometimes it was the immense timber consumption which made people starting to think again about the future of forestry. The developing rationalism was a good basis for this thinking. Already in the beginning of the 18th century the first books about forestry were published, for example 1713 Hans Carl von Carlowitz "Sylvicultura oeconomica...". It is also the first time that these books were independent from agriculture and hunting (Hilf 1938). Two major questions became most important: 1. How to reach a sustainable timber production? and 2. How to manage and how to structure the forest? (Hilf 1938). Foresters started to do more and more natural regeneration and reforestation by sowing. Trees which were normally sown are oak, pine, spruce, larch, and seldom beech and other deciduous trees. Here I want to come back to Mecklenburg. After the large clear cuts it was the Swedish administration which was responsible for a successful reforestation. Orders were given how to sow, how much, and how to manage the young forest. It was often forbidden to use the forest as pasture land. It was also important that this orders were controlled. Responsible foresters had to present their area in front of a commission and reports were written about this. In Mecklenburg large areas were reforested mostly with pine during 18th century. Today many names like "Schwedentannen" and "Schwedenstein" remind of this time.

In the beginning of 18th century foresters started to divide the whole forest area into smaller departments. This was done to get a structure for a sustainable forestry. In the beginning it were for example 70 departments. Every year one department could be clear cutted. This method was more and more developed, later it was also looked on site productivity so that there was every year about the same amount of harvested timber. Also the harvesting methods were developed. The idea was to keep the stands stable against storm. Some very well grown trees were left to have more natural regeneration. To divide the forest into departments the surveying became very important. The development of this aspect was also influenced by the developing forestry.

The effects of the 30-year war differ quite much for different German areas depending on how much damage was caused during the war. Also the development after the war

was different. This was more depending on the authorities governing the state and managing the forest. We can also still see some effects of this different developments.

- 1) Characteristic for this “Kameralisten” was their all-round education. They knew a lot about administrative and theoretical things but of course their knowledge could not be very deep in every subject and they were no technicians.
- 2) “Steunutzung” means that organic material like leaves and branches were removed from the forest floor.

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