

The Vendée Uprising through the Lens of Everett Hagen's Theory of Social Change: From Historical Trauma to the Post-WWII "Miracle Vendéen"

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Introduction

In this paper, Everett Hagen's psychological-sociological framework (1960, 1962, 1963, 1967, 1968) is applied to analyse **the long-term socio-economic trajectory** of the "Military Vendée," a region defined by parts of the current French departments of Vendée, Maine-et-Loire (the Mauges), Deux-Sèvres, and Loire-Atlantique. Hagen's theory proposes that significant social change and economic growth can be triggered by a "withdrawal of status respect" from a well-entrenched group, leading to a multi-generational shift in personality structures.

"In some historical instances, entrepreneurial personality traits did not emerge until five, six, or even seven generations after the initial loss of status. The process is slow, and only when the frustration has been internalized and culturally transmitted does the personality compensatory enough to undertake entrepreneurial activity appear." Everett E. Hagen, cited in the PhD Thesis of Michael P. O'Neill, 1977.

We would like to illustrate the case of the 'Miracle Vendéen', which arose after the Second World War. It is an example of an original surge in development by a disparaged population who have never forgotten the trauma of the Wars of the Vendée. In this way, we can argue that development is a form of culture. This territorial system is unique and leads to specific development, with competitive SBEs that are highly resilient and innovative.

Historical facts

The Civil Constitution of the Clergy and the execution of the king formally withdrew status and respect from the Vendée identity. The decision to conscript 300,000 soldiers to fight against the foreign coalition at the borders in March 1793 (the '*Levée en Masse*') acted as the 'precipitating event' that turned a psychological withdrawal of status into active, violent resistance and subsequent massacres by the Republican army.

The brief but extremely violent war in the Vendée (1793–1794) led to a significant population decrease. While it is difficult to pinpoint exact figures for each county due to the

destruction of many parish registers during the conflict, the following demographic impacts have been established for the 'Military Vendée'. Historians (Martin, J. C.; Seycher, R.; and Husset, J.) estimate that between 20% and 25% of the population of the insurgent territory, which spanned parts of the Vendée, Maine-et-Loire, Deux-Sèvres, and Loire-Inférieure departments, were killed (in some districts, this figure reached 40%). Out of a pre-war population of around 800,000, at least 170,000 inhabitants of the Military Vendée (including both military personnel and civilians) were killed, with total deaths on both sides reaching 200,000–210,000.

Methodological approach

-Using historical data to delimitate precisely areas that constituted the heart of the 'Military Vendée', we will rely on the documents gathered by historians. The heart of the uprising, often cited by historians like Jacques Hussenet and Jean-Clément Martin, spanned 735 to 773 communes across four modern departments.

-We will study the development of these communes since the second World War, thanks to data from Insee, making a comparison with others similar regions or in extending the areas from the Military Vendée to measure the differential of development.

Hagen's retreatist phase

The "withdrawal of status respect" from the Vendée peasantry and nobility by the Revolutionary government during the main War of the Vendée (1793–1794) led to several resurgences in 1796, 1799, 1814–1815 and 1832. This enormous trauma triggered a multigenerational 'retreatist' phase, during which apathy towards national values developed as a result of the pain experienced. However, this period was a necessary incubation stage. Hagen posits that, over generations, retreatism creates a home environment conducive to the emergence of 'innovative personalities'. This triggered a generational shift from 'retreatism' to 'innovative and reformist personalities', ultimately shaping the region's unique path towards social and technological change, known as 'The Miracle Vendéen'

'The Miracle Vendéen'.

Hagen's argument is that "conformity is a powerful enough force to overwhelm isolated individuals". It required several generations for the values of the war survivor group and their descendants to be firmly entrenched, thereby enabling them to successfully resist national trends and establish a localized industrial revolution. The trauma of the 1790s, along with the subsequent deceptions and frustrations, was identified as the "prime force" that led to significant changes in the population's personality structure. However, the economic flourishing of the 20th century was found to be contingent upon the presence of specific "economic circumstances".

The Choletais system

United by the wars in the Vendée, the Choletais 'system' encompasses Cholet and its district, the southwestern part of the Maine-et-Loire department (the Mauges), the northeastern Vendée, the northwestern cantons of Deux-Sèvres, and the southeastern tip of Loire-Atlantique. In 1990, the population was around 300,000. Following the Second World War, the

ecclesiastical authorities organised men's training, regulated cultural and social life, and encouraged the elites to become entrepreneurs. The Choletais 'system', which can be considered as the heart of the military Vendée, originally benefited from the establishment of textile factories under Colbert (Belouard, 1993), as well as tanneries set up along the rivers. However, at the end of the 19^{ième} century, it switched to shoe manufacturing, which took over from weaving. This was due to mechanisation favouring production in cities, which affected weaving. Subsequently, post-war development and the accompanying wave of entrepreneurship greatly benefited the region. Several specific characteristics can be identified that explain the region's dynamism. The Choletais 'system' specialised in low-tech, labour-intensive activities that required limited financial resources, which were provided by local savings. For a long time, it was a closed environment that regulated its own labour market, with small-scale factories being set up in the towns. There was no traditional emigration to the cities or the Paris region, and the poorly educated population found immediate employment. Social cases were absorbed by the low level of minimum professional requirements.

A social and economic consensus emerged around the enterprise. This resulted in an absence of social class rivalries, significant technological innovations and the recognition of business leaders' status. In this entrepreneurial culture, business leaders form a corporation and an employers' union, which creates 'disciplined competition' supported by the local community through a network-based organisation (Berthet & Palard, 1994).

The North-East Vendée

The north-east of Vendée has its own specific characteristics which have enabled significant regional development since the post-war period (Ganne & Bernard, 1996). Its industrial sector is highly diversified, covering agri-food, mechanical engineering, shipbuilding, metal construction, and of course footwear and clothing. The north-east of Vendée is also highly successful in the agricultural sector, with no shortage of young, educated and skilled farmers. Committed to their land, they have developed technical excellence in above-ground farming and, unlike the Breton model, diversified to mitigate the impact of cyclical crises affecting various agricultural productions (Mundler, P., & Grouiez, P., 2020). The most recent example of this is the development of the duck industry. Specialising in the production of young ducks, the region has recently moved into force-feeding and slaughtering, surpassing the Périgord region in the process.

Explanation of the succes

Davezies (2012) argues that while much of France moved toward a "residential" economy (driven by consumption and public transfers), the Vendée and the West maintained a high "productive" core. He highlights the region's capacity to withstand the 2008 financial crisis better than other industrial basins. Through the Hagenian lens, this "resilience" is the modern expression of the "need-achievement" and "need-autonomy" developed by a group that learned long ago not to rely on the central state. He identifies a specific "West of France" model characterized by social cohesion and a dense network of SMEs that prevents the "disaggregation" of the social fabric. For Davezies, the Vendée succeeded because its actors did not wait for state intervention (the same state that historically disparaged them). Instead, they relied on local "productive excellence."

Buléon (2014) explores the link between geography, history, and modern political-economic behavior. His work focuses on how the "Vendean identity" functions as a cohesive force. Hagen argues that transition occurs when members of a "distinctive and disparaged social group" react to a loss of recognition. Buléon demonstrates that this "distinctiveness" survived for two centuries. Buléon argues that because the region felt marginalized by the Parisian Republic, it developed a "self-help" culture. This created what Hagen calls the "protection against inhibiting factors." Because the group felt "othered," they were more willing to experiment with unique social and economic structures (like the Choletais system) that ignored national norms.

Working often with INSEE, Caro (2018) provides the statistical evidence for what makes the "Choletais System" unique in the 21st century. Her research highlights the "low unemployment/low wage/high social cohesion" paradox. This note analyzes the resilience of the Vendée industry (textiles, leather, clothing) in the face of international competition and highlights the strength of its network of SMEs and local networks. She describes a region where "business leaders form a corporation" and create "disciplined competition." This mirrors Hagen's requirement for an "institutional environment" that supports the entrepreneur. Caro shows that the region's dynamism is rooted in technical education and local apprenticeship. This aligns with one parameter of development according to Hagen (State of Knowledge): the region didn't just have rebels; it had skilled rebels who transformed traditional crafts (weaving/tanning) into global industries (high-end fashion/luxury shoes).

Vignerot (2019) shows that the region's strength lies in its strong "social proximity" (often stemming from its religious heritage and the Vendée wars), which compensates for the absence of large cities. Choletais is not just a city, it is a territorial system that has been able to update the "low-tech" description: the region now integrates robotics and digital tools in its traditional sectors (shoe/textile/boating). He points out that the Vendée region has managed to transform a "poorly educated" but disciplined population into a highly skilled workforce in niche areas (luxury goods, agricultural robotics, advanced shipbuilding). People work where they live. There is no "tradition of emigration to the cities." This sedentary lifestyle strengthens the group's identity. For Hagen, social change only occurs if the group is "distinct and disparaged." By remaining on their land (the Mauges and Bocage regions), the people of Vendée maintained this distinction, which served as fertile ground for entrepreneurship.

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