The evolution of the “line seabass” labeling process: a comparative analysis of two French regions

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Consumers in developed countries are becoming increasingly aware of the environmental, social and governance impacts of fishing organisations. (Brécard et al., 2009; Charles et al., 2009; Bronnmann and Asche, 2023, 2017). Depending on the techniques used, fishing can have a greater or lesser impact on the degradation of the sea and fish stocks (Menozzi et al., 2020; Le Bras et al., 2024). Consequently, consumers are willing to pay more for a better-quality product that is caught responsibly (Lucas and al., 2021). This article compares and analyses the evolution of two labelling approaches in the face of overexploitation of the common sea bass resource.

The overfishing of sea bass has raised questions about the economic sustainability of fishermen reliant on this resource. Fishermen have shown their ability to defend their profession and promote their production by forming part of a social and territorial organisation, (Drouot, 2012, Drouot and Le Corroller, 2019; Bonnet and al., 2025). Various labelling initiatives have faced challenges, with the 'Pointe de Bretagne line-caught bass' label maintained but not the 'Normandy line-caught bass' initiative. Understanding the differences between the two is crucial.

Von Bertalanffy (1968), a biologist, makes the systemic approach a new science, with the integration of economic and social facts into the environmental problem. The reference to socio-systems, which are a combination of social and territorial organisation, has also been associated to the concepts of resilience and vulnerability. The literature review on the concept of economic resilience (Pendall et al., 2007) shows that this concept is fully adapted to understanding regional economic dynamics (Hassink, 2010). The concept of economic resilience helps us understand how local economies cope with shocks (Crescenzi et al., 2016).

Holling (2013, 2001) combines resilience with two other factors, social control and resource potential in order to define the ability of a system to adapt to systemic approach. Two scenarios predict a population's future, both requiring alternative resources. A system with high resilience and low social control can resist change by maintaining the same growth trajectory. A system with low resilience and strong social control, such as that provided by an entrepreneur-innovator, can invest in a new growth path. This second scenario is riskier, but may allow survival in the face of major change. We will consider it in relation to entrepreneurs who try to balance profit and conservation of the resource. Organisational resilience at the level of an association, thanks to leading entrepreneurs, demonstrates its ability to evolve and to adapt

to environmental changes. This option is consistent with Schumpeterian logic, a logic fuelled by the diversity of technological possibilities in the territory, a diversity of actors, an ability to adapt and change direction (Boschma, 2015 ; Sønvisen, 2014 ; Pike et al., 2010; Simmie and Martin, 2009).

Our results shows that the approach allows fishing patrons, who are highly dependent on the resource, to charge a premium, but that their long-term economic viability is jeopardised by the lack of mechanisms to regulate access within the fishery. The continuation of the approach in Brittany can be explained by contextual factors linked to the territory, a strong identification of line fishermen with their profession and the possibility for them to switch to other species with high added value. On the contrary, the individual start of the approach and then the lack of involvement of other liners, combined with the exploitation of a 'transitory' resource, without the possibility of transferring to other species, have been obstacles to the maintenance of the approach in Normandy.

The research methodology is the longitudinal study of the liners in Brittany and Normandy over twenty years (2004-2024). Our research involves two approaches to data collection: quantitative data from the Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (DGAMPA) and semi-structured interviews with Breton and Norman trollers involved in the labelling process. The qualitative study is relevant for integrated cases in this context (Yin, 2018).

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