

2008: 85–92). The modern-day *agriculteur* is the business-like, entrepreneurial, usually educated, usually industrialized version of this traditional figure, with a consumer lifestyle that is very similar to that of city-dwellers; over one third of France's mayors, we note, are farmers of this type.

They are, moreover, emblematic of the productivist turn taken by French agriculture in the 1950s and 1960s (as seen in Chapter 1). Designed to generate growth and, ideally, even it out across the territory, this was a characteristic of the socio-economic boom of the *trente glorieuses*. These were the early days of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and its support for the over-production of food-stuffs. It was also the heyday of the centralized planning of France's territory known as *l'aménagement du territoire*. In today's France, far more actors and interests are involved, alongside or instead of the central state, in planning out the use of the land, with small *communes* having considerable responsibility for planning permission, and regions closely associated with the handling of EU financial aid (see Chapter 4, for a discussion of the many and complex layers of local government in France). In rural France, today, agricultural production has to be balanced with economic development (especially job creation), the preservation and stewardship of the environment and, crucially, the promotion of the tourism that is so significant to France's economy (representing around 6% of France's GDP), and which sustains, in turn, rural life itself.

#### *Tourism and Diversity*

Indeed, the tourist to rural France will find themselves regaled with opportunities to sample what appears to be a wide diversity of produce, of *paysages*, and of physical beauty. Regions, *départements* and *pays* (groupings of areas with common cultural identities) all advertise their *terroir*, its distinctiveness, and its specialities. *Terroir*, we have said, is at the root of some of France's most famed and iconic produce, including its wine and cheeses. Steinberger (2009: 19) summarizes the idea of *terroir* as 'location, location, location' and as 'a central organizing principle of French viticulture'. Stephen Bayley, writing nearly a decade ago, hears the French explain *terroir* as 'the mystical union of landscape and weather and personality which gives specificity to a great wine' (Bayley, 2002). Clearly, the precise meaning of the notion of *terroir* varies according to the palate of the gastronome and the balance sheet of the producer. Thus, by

way of example, when driving across small roads in central France, we may come across *la route des produits d'origine contrôlée transcorrèziens* (the road of produce of certified origin from the Corrèze') in what is a deeply rural department of France.

Furthermore, rural France works hard to attract and to entertain its tourists, both national and international. Events and attractions are signed and signposted, and the smallest of villages stage art exhibitions open to all, usually free, often run by volunteers organized into special interest *associations*, and made possible courtesy of good amenities including the *salle des expositions* (exhibition space) or the tiny local tourist office. These frequently display a bewildering array of brochures and flyers for local accommodation, organized events, and advice on the many ways that the area can be enjoyed by the visitor. Furthermore, most small villages have clean public toilets and *aires* – public spaces – for picnicking in the shade, and at a proper table with proper seating. Certain villages qualify as *villages étape* by virtue of the quality of their services (and if they have fewer than 5000 inhabitants and can be found beside a free – not toll – stretch of motorway, or dual carriageway), and these villages are clearly indicated on the highways and motorways that run past; in the words of the scheme's website, 'It's the village's life that's at stake'; 'a chance for development and recognition' (Village d'Étape, 2010). Beyond the village, France has 46 'natural regional parks' defined as 'inhabited, rural' areas in need of protection to preserve their natural beauty; nine 'national parks'; 327 nature reserves and numerous historical monuments (*monuments historiques*), classified sites of interest (*sites classés*) and thirty UNESCO World Heritage sites (UNESCO, 2010). The whole of France is, thus, way-marked for the tourist; at the entrance to small villages on both national and departmental roads, large signs display the amenities and attractions on offer; even huge supermarkets advertise distinct regional produce. Rural and regional France, we observe, is both intrinsically appealing, and big business.

Such diversity is very much part of today's French national identity, even though, in reality, it exaggerates (for the purposes of business, the economy, and jobs) the extent of distinct regional identities in today's France. Yet, this is part of the picture in contemporary France, whereby protecting both rural and urban environments is in France, as elsewhere, an issue of rising political prominence that has provided opportunities for the politicization of special interests. Hunting, for example, remains a culturally significant and accepted



activity in much of the French countryside, and some have fought politically to maintain it in the face of other agendas, including ecological movements and pressure from EU legislation to regulate such activities across the EU member states. Thus, the CNPT (*Chasse, Nature, Pêche et Tradition* – Hunting, Nature, Fishing and Tradition – movement) featured in French national elections in the 2000s (see Chapter 3), associating itself with broader arguments against the impact of the EU in France.

#### *Nuclear Power, Food Scares and the Environment*

In France, the matter of environmental protection is complicated by the fact that, for all its natural attributes, France is relatively poor in natural resources, especially fossil fuels. Currently, France relies on nuclear power to meet the bulk (over 75%) of its energy needs. A new generating plant is due to open in Normandy (Flamanville) in 2012, the development of prototypes of the next generation of reactors is under way; and, in 2005, a decision was taken to site the ITER project (the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor) for research into nuclear fusion technology in Cadarache, southern France. The beginnings of the French nuclear programme in the 1970s, at the time of a serious world oil price and supply crisis, gave rise to ‘green’ movements, but these were largely unsuccessful in withstanding the force of the French state in their day. However, now that the fight against climate change and for environmentalism have become significant preoccupations for governments of Europe and elsewhere, French authorities have themselves become markedly more active, particularly following a succession of challenges to environmental health and food safety. These have included the BSE (bovine spongiform encephalopathy) – ‘mad cow’ – epidemic that began in the UK in the mid-1980s, and damaged Franco-British relations for a decade; the prospect of genetically-modified organisms (GMO) crops (still partially banned in France); and what some see as the globalization of junk food – *la malbouffe* – and its consequences, real and imagined, for human health and the demand for local produce. José Bové, a well-known campaigner in France, has come to symbolize such arguments for green and ‘slow’ food following his imprisonment after having coordinated the dismantling of a McDonald’s restaurant construction site in 1999 in Millau, south-west France.

Since 2002, notably, a ‘Charter for the Environment’ has been appended to the 1958 French Constitution, indicating the state’s

commitment, symbolic and legal, to the weight of the environmental factor when planning for economic growth (see Box 2.1). The Charter proclaims the right of all to a ‘balanced environment’; and, in the 2007 presidential election, a popular ecological campaigner, Nicolas Hulot, applied pressure on his mainstream candidates for an environmentally-aware agenda. By 2008, a rolling programme of environmental debate and policy-planning (known as *le Grenelle de l’environnement*) was in place. Moreover, France signed the Kyoto protocol in 1999, and increasingly looks to the EU and the international stage to manage the environmental and climatic change, while gradually proposing a series of climate-friendly measures at home. These include the increasing use of electric vehicles in public transport schemes, including in Paris, and the ongoing development of France’s leading expertise in nuclear energy technology; and the planning of further high-speed rail links. The ‘Grenelle’ initiative also launched a ‘carbon tax’ on individuals and companies. At the time of writing,



**Illustration 2.4** Electric bus in Paris, la Traverse de Charonne in the 13th *arrondissement*

Another similar vehicle, the Montmartrobus, takes residents and tourists around the famous Montmartre area of the city.



however, this was first struck down by the Constitutional Council, and then suspended altogether following the poor results of the government in the 2010 regional elections. Thereafter, the whole 'Grenelle' initiative itself came into serious doubt.

The environmental agenda in France is, thus, driven by political considerations and cost-cutting measures, as well as a broader concern with the impact of climate change, and many actors and interests galvanize for and against change, making reform as difficult in France as elsewhere. Unsurprisingly, France has turned to international arenas to share the costs and responsibilities of tackling today's

### Box 2.1 Charter for the Environment

'The French People

Considering that

Natural resources and equilibriums have conditioned the emergence of mankind;

The future and very existence of mankind are inextricably linked with its natural environment;

The environment is the common heritage of all mankind;

Mankind exerts ever-increasing influence over the conditions for life and its own evolution;

Biological diversity, the fulfilment of the person and the progress of human societies are affected by certain types of consumption or production and by excessive exploitation of natural resources;

Care must be taken to safeguard the environment along with the other fundamental interests of the Nation;

In order to ensure sustainable development, choices designed to meet the needs of the present generation should not jeopardise the ability of future generations and other peoples to meet their own needs;

Hereby proclaim:

Art. 1 – Everyone has the right to live in a balanced environment which shows due respect for health ...

Art. 6 – Public policies shall promote sustainable development ...

Art. 10 – This Charter shall inspire France's actions at both European and international levels.'

Source: National Assembly (2010).

deadly serious challenges to its environment, and the security and sustainability of its food and energy supplies.

Just as France is increasingly turning to its neighbours and seeking to maximize its influence in international forums to resolve its environmental dilemmas, so its identity as a nation cannot be divorced from France's international context. France, we have said, is a country open in 3D to forces and flows of all kinds. These include the movement of people, and the French population is, indeed, cosmopolitan and ethnically-mixed, the result of a long history of immigration. These characteristics have given rise to all sorts of public policy dilemmas in a nation where abstract ideals of national unity, and equality between its nationals whatever their ethnic origins, are increasingly hard to fulfil. Deciding who has the right to be on French soil and what they can do when they are there – work, marry, vote, receive welfare assistance, acquire nationality? – are all matters of public policy that can neither be made in isolation from France's neighbouring countries, nor from the EU or other international bodies – nor, indeed, from the developing world, many of whose inhabitants would literally die for the freedoms of France. The explicit link drawn by President Nicolas Sarkozy after his election in 2007 between immigration, on the one hand, and national identity, on the other, set off a particularly heated debate around the question of what it means to be French, and to live as part of the French nation.

### Who Are the Twenty-First-Century French?

In the 1999 census, the total French population stood at 54.5 million and was growing. By 1 January 2009, the estimated population was 64.3 million, and still growing. These figures make France the second most highly-populated country in the EU27 after Germany (83.3 million inhabitants), accounting for around 14% of the EU27's total population. In 2007, for the first time in thirty years, the birth rate rose to an average of two children per woman, the highest in the EU along with Ireland, and far above the EU average of 1.48. At the same time, the French population is ageing, as in other European countries: French women, along with their Spanish counterparts, have the longest life expectancy in Europe, at 84 years (for men, 77). In 2007, just over 16% of the French population was aged 65 or over, with almost the same number of those aged under 20 years; whereas, in 1994, nearly 27% of the total population was aged under 20,