

PEFC Policy Conference

Challenges related to the social representations of the forest in our urbanized societies

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Avec le soutien du Ministre wallon
ayant les forêts dans ses attributions





The concept of social representation

Definitions :

« A social representation is an **organized set of information**, opinions, attitudes and beliefs about a particular object. » (Abric 2003)

« A form of **knowledge, socially elaborated and shared**, with a practical aim and **contributing to the construction of a reality common to a social group.** »
(Jodelet 1989)

Important to know...

Social representations are mainly **transmitted by communication.**

Social representations **guide our behaviors.**

Evolution of social representations of the forest

Common to all eras (unconscious mythology) :

- Space filled with **higher entity**, place of **mystery** and revelation
- We get **lost**, we find his way, we find ourselves
- To access it, you need to **be strong** : hunter, priest, king or ... brigand
- **Inhospitable** and threatening space that we cross
- **Initiatory** space

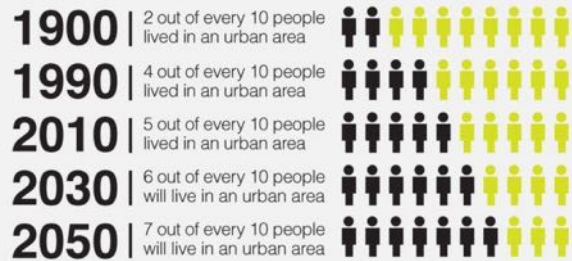


The forest evoking myths and legends,
Cahiers of the environemnt, INRA

Evolution of social representations of the forest

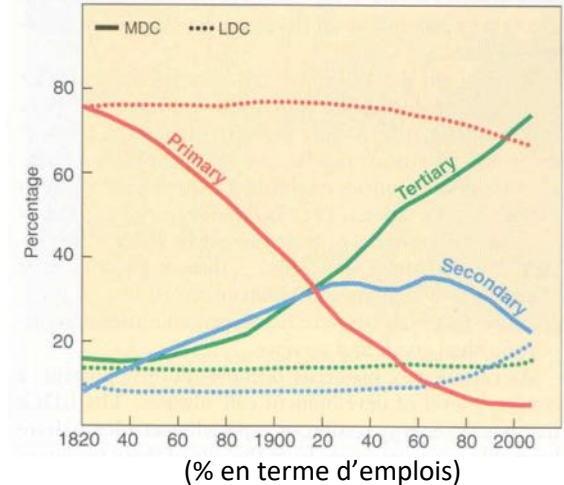
Today

Urbanization



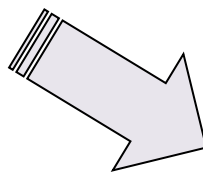
Defined by UN HABITAT as a city with a population of more than 10 million

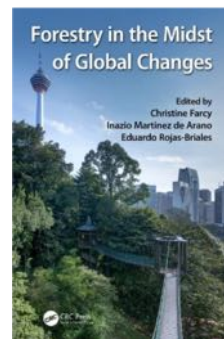
Tertiairisation de l'économie



Globalisation



- 
- **Virtual**
 - **Immaterial**
 - **Distant**
 - **Representation built by media**





The main social representations

- **Pessimism about the forest and their future**
- A part of the public struggling to know **who owns the forest**
- The general public considers that the main function of the forest is **ecological**

(Ramesteiner & Kraxner, 2003; Ramesteiner & al., 2007; Eurobaromètre PAC 2016; Bodson, 2005; Bowyer, 1995, Farcy & al. 2015, Matagne, 2016)

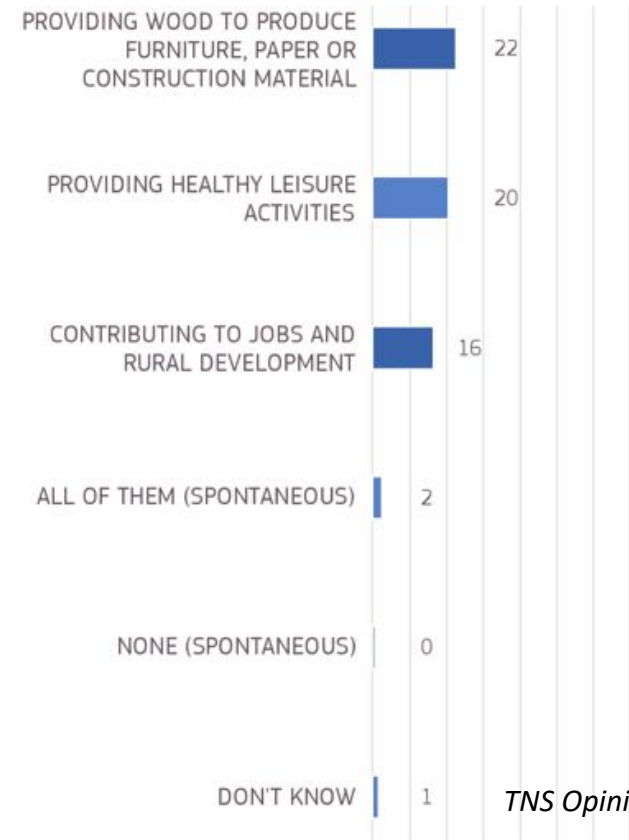
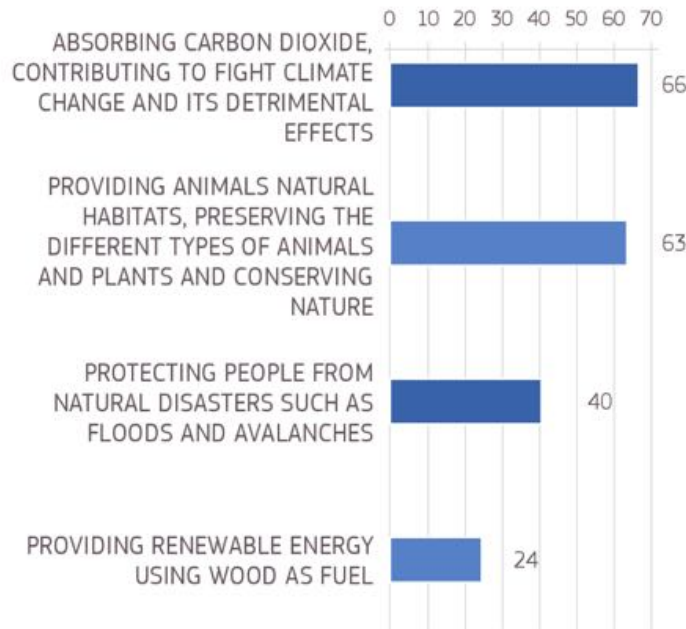


Eurobarometer CAP

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/survey/index_en.htm

QC13 What do you think are the most important benefits provided by forests? (MAX. 3 ANSWERS)
(% - EU)

(All countries combined)



28 members states of the EU
27 822 people interviewed
October 2015

TNS Opinion, 2016



Eurobarometer CAP



Top 1/country

Protecting people from floods & avalanches



Providing renewable energy



Providing wood

Absorbing CO₂



Providing habitats, preserving biodiversity, conserving nature



Jobs and RD

Providing healthy leisure activities

Probable effet COP21 !

TNS Opinion, 2016



The main social representations

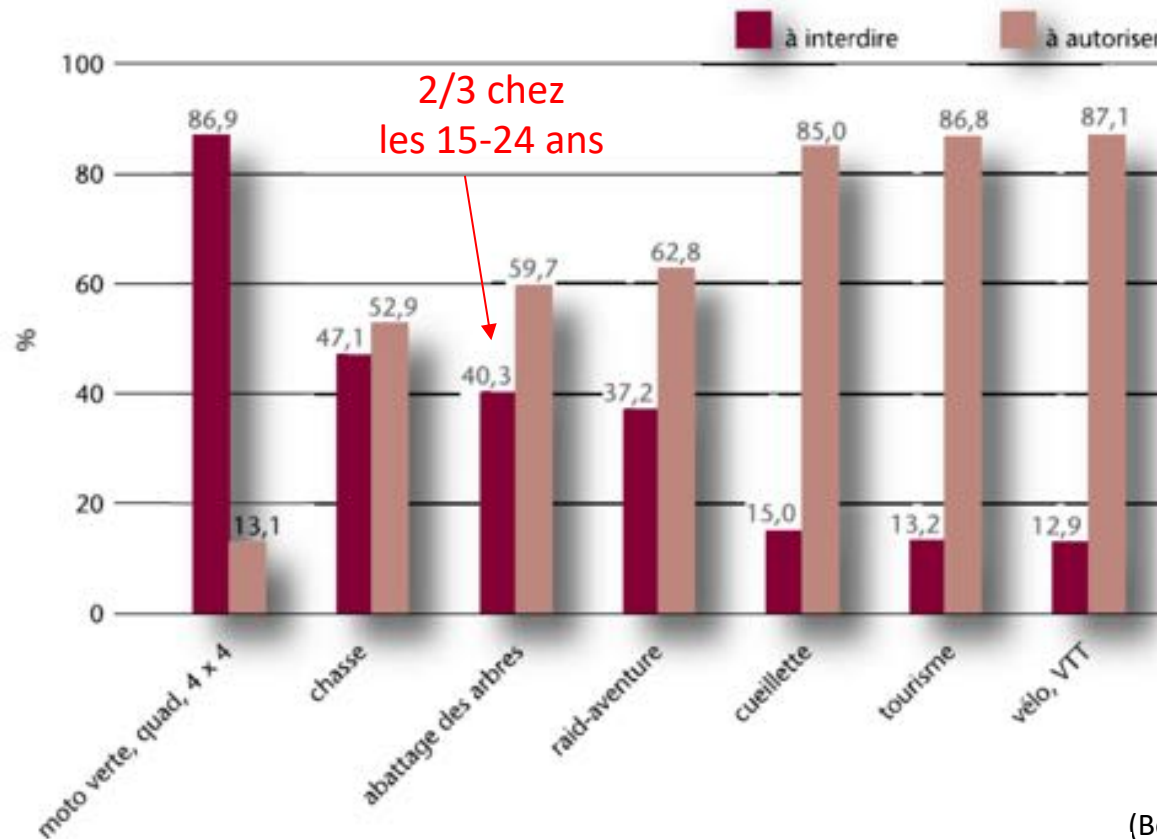
- **Pessimism about the forest and their future**
- A part of the public struggling to know **who owns the forest**
- The general public considers that the main function of the forest is **ecological**
- A large part of the public is **opposed to cutting down trees**, an act which it equates to “killing the forest”.

(Ramesteiner & Kraxner, 2003; Ramesteiner & al., 2007; Eurobaromètre PAC 2016; Bodson, 2005; Bowyer, 1995, Farcy & al. 2015, Matagne, 2016)

« Understand perceptions, uses et meanings of the forest in 2005 »

Activities to allow or prohibit (list)

(Wallonia and Brussels, 1038 people)



**Is it possible to discuss
forest management with
someone who believes
trees will live forever if not
cut down ?**

(Jim Bowyer, Fact vs. Perception, Forest product journal, vol.45, no.11/12, p.20)



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- Growing **divide between the forest sector and the society**

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« **Attitudes towards the forest according to the forest or not forest profile** »
(2017) N=120 belgian students

1. **Forest destroyed by human being**

« *the human beings put in danger the ecosystem of the forest, because of its leisures but especially because of the exploitation (even if it's acknowledged that human beings can access to forests for their leisures and need wook to live) »*

2,5% of foresters - 47,5% of non-foresters

2. **Ambivalent vision of the role of human being on the forest**

« *the human being destroys forest when it exploits it, but wood is necessary for man. The good health of forest does not depend so much on the intervention of man, although if man must make every effort to protect it. »*

27,5% of foresters - 38,75% of non-foresters

3. **Forest managed sustainably by human being :**

« *the human being protects forest and can exploit it, live there, practice its leasure, without destroying it. »*

70% of foresters - 13,75% of non-foresters

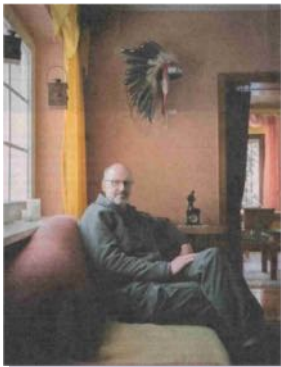




Courrier International n° 1324 from 17th to 23th March, 2016

« The Germans have always displayed a visceral attachment to their forests. Today, more than ever, it is in the middle of beeches, oaks and spruces that they will revitalize themselves. Yet, their consumption of firewood and construction wood is skyrocketing. **Dilemma** » (*Die Zeit*, Henning Sussebach, Florian Janicke).

« Are trees the new whales ? Noble creatures massacred by men? »



« The secret life of trees »
400.000 copies sold. Best sales
for an essay, 2015



« Nonsense ! If
we plant trees,
it is to cut
them »



*Cemeteries in forests. 3400
funerary urns (3000 euros each).
It finances integral reserves*

Today 650.000 translates
copies in 35 countries

« The more urbanization
accelerates, the more
nature is sacralized »

*Firewood : 10 m3 wood/year
instead of 1,06 national*



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- Growing **divide between the forest sector and the society**
- The functions of forest **preservation** and forest **exploitation** are **incompatibles for the public**

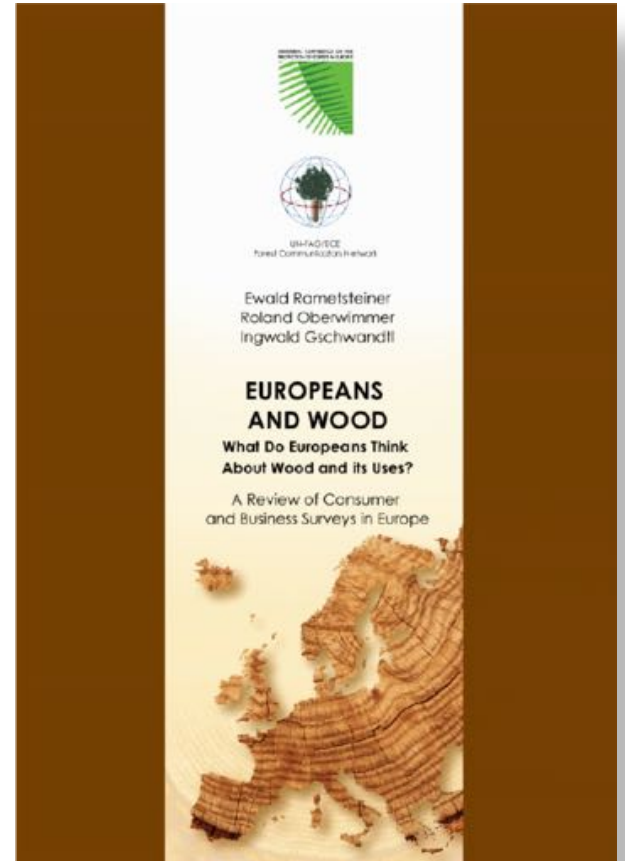
(Ramesteiner & Kraxner, 2003; Ramesteiner & al., 2007; Eurobaromètre PAC 2016; Bodson, 2005; Bowyer, 1995, Farcy & al. 2015, Matagne, 2016)

However...

*« Wood is nature,
warm and friendly »*

**... but no link with
forest management!**

*« Its like a good steak! ... Wood material
and steak have become things in
themselves in our perception, put at a
distance or even cut from their origin by
the shaping they have undergone »*
Bodson, 2017



Tracks of explanation

1. A particular societal context

- *a strong emotional context with climate changes*
- *Collapsology*
- *Sense of urgency*
- *Collective citizen awareness*



For the forest...

- Rise in strength of the **symbolic value** of the forest
- **Emotional relationship** between the humans and the forest
- Object of **deep and ancestral attachment** to the forest (archaic)
- Fear of loss of **access to a collective memory** (Harrison1992)

Tracks of explanation

2. Complexity of forest issues for the general public

- **Multifunctionality**, network of actors, more and more distant link, multiplication and imbrication of issues
- **Hypocognition** problem : lack of sufficient cognitive frameworks to capture every dimensions of the complex reality of environmental issues (Lakoff, 2010)





La petite forêt née d'un crowdfunding est menacée: "On m'avait parlé de lapins mais pas de chevreuils"

Pierre Fagnart, publié le 27 septembre 2018 à 06h04



La plantation de la forêt, en avril 2018

"1000 arbres plantés au cœur d'un zoning industriel", "une forêt primitive à Péruwelz", "une zone tampon pour absorber le bruit",... Fin avril, la plantation annoncée de plusieurs centaines d'arbres dans une parcelle appartenant à l'intercommunale IDETA avait fait les gros titres de plusieurs médias. Tout le monde s'accordait pour saluer la portée écologique d'un projet novateur. Cinq mois plus tard, la forêt en croissance est devenue le garde-manger de chevreuils et si personne n'intervient, elle aura disparu avant la fin de l'année.

Tracks of explanation

3. The dominant media model is inappropriate for understanding complex issues

Dominant Media model : persuasive communication



- **Simple messages**, most often decontextualized, visual and emotional
- The general public is conceived as a **massive and passive target** that react in a similar way to messages and needs to be impacted **repeatedly**
- Focus in the impact

Les actes de décès ne tueront plus la planète

MIS EN LIGNE LE 31/03/2019 À 17:52 / PAR MARC METZGERINGEN

f o v in

La numérisation des actes de l'état civil est d'application dès ce lundi. Sa justification devient aussi... climatique.

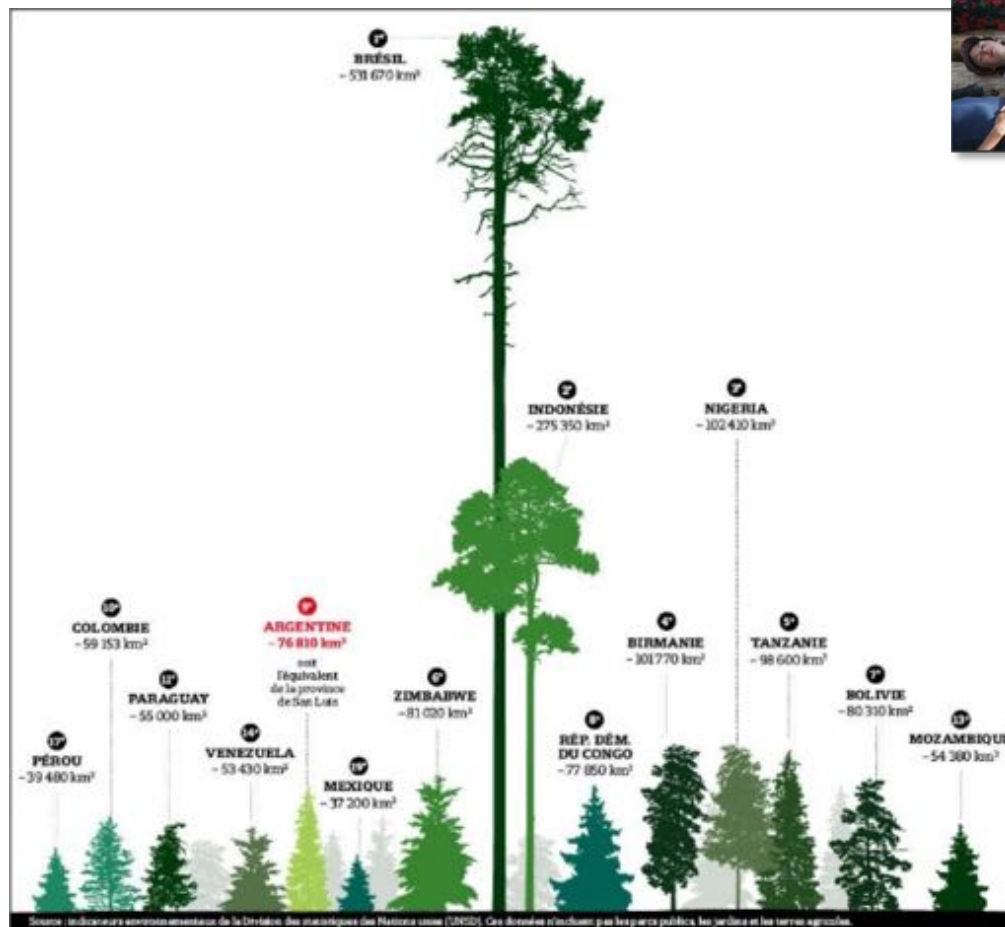


Selon Koen Geens, la numérisation des actes de l'état civil permettra de sauver plus de 850 arbres par an ! © Belga.

Les généalogistes peuvent être rassurés. La constitution d'un arbre généalogique ne sera plus entachée de la complicité au sacrifice de centaines d'arbres. Le ministre de la Justice Koen Geens (CD&V) l'a annoncé samedi, lors d'une conférence à Louvain : dès ce lundi, « les actes de naissance ou de mariage en papier feront définitivement partie des livres d'histoire. Ils seront remplacés par l'acte numérique, sauvegardé dans une banque de données centrale. »

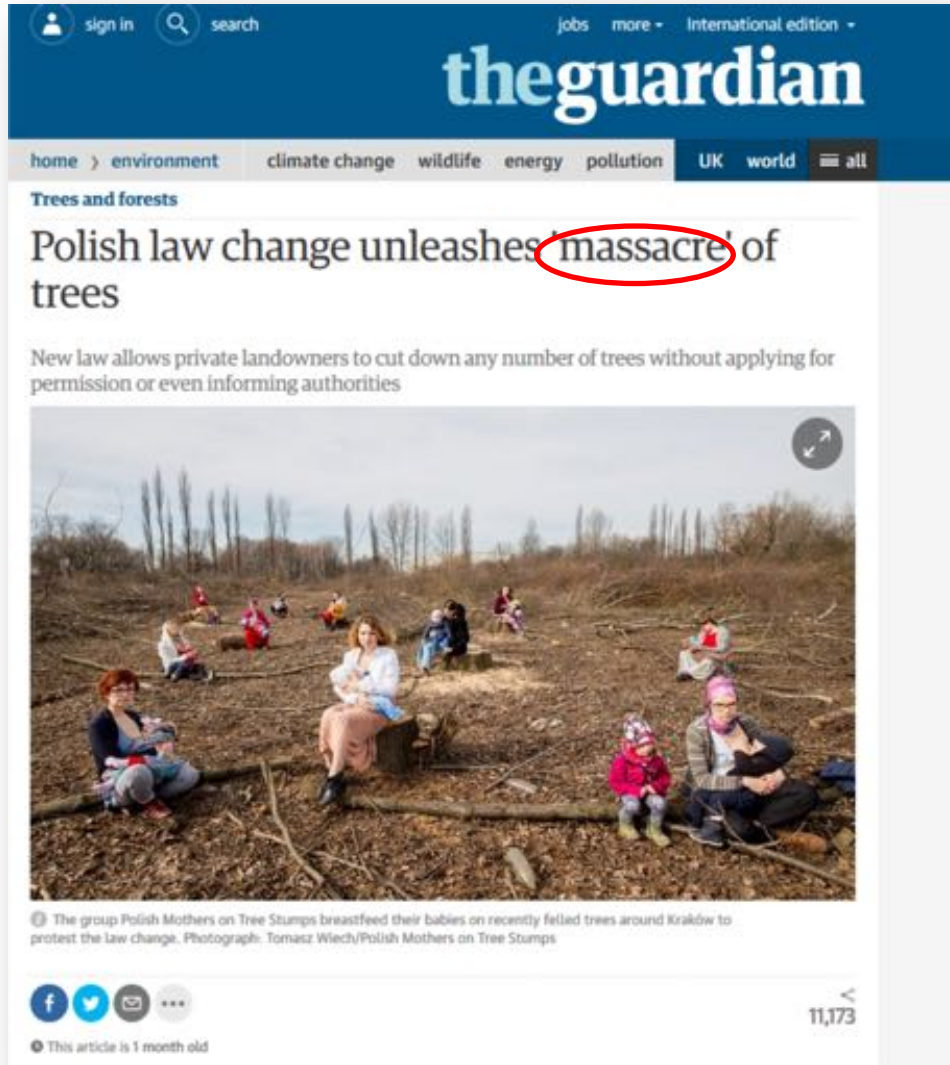


Media like controversy and highlight the extraordinary



Courrier International, 10 avril 2017

Power of media : illustration of a reaction of a new law in Poland



The screenshot shows the Guardian website interface. At the top, there are navigation links for 'sign in', 'search', 'jobs', 'more', and 'International edition'. The main header features the 'theguardian' logo. Below the header, there are category links: 'home', 'environment', 'climate change', 'wildlife', 'energy', 'pollution', 'UK', 'world', and 'all'. The article title is 'Polish law change unleashes massacre of trees', with the word 'massacre' circled in red. The sub-headline reads: 'New law allows private landowners to cut down any number of trees without applying for permission or even informing authorities'. The main image shows a group of people, including women and children, sitting on tree stumps in a cleared forest. A caption below the image states: 'The group Polish Mothers on Tree Stumps breastfeed their babies on recently felled trees around Kraków to protest the law change. Photograph: Tomasz Wiech/Polish Mothers on Tree Stumps'. At the bottom of the article, there are social media sharing icons for Facebook, Twitter, and Email, along with a share icon and a view count of 11,173. A note at the bottom left indicates 'This article is 1 month old'.



***Giant megaphones to listen to the forest
(Estonian students in design, 2015)***

Thank you for your attention !