

Maintaining Pastoralism in a Context of Competition for Land

Marie Guitton



Pastureland, Romania. Photo: Danut Ungureanu (CEFIDEC, Romania)

This article is based on the report prepared by Euromontana "The Challenges of Pastoralism: Exchange of Innovative Experiences for Sustainable Development with a Future in Mountainous Areas" (Guitton M, Levret C., Delefortrie R., 2008). It presents the problem of the maintaining pastoral activities in a context of the competition for land and gives three examples of tools that can, at least partly, help in solving the problem of access to land.

Pastoralism is a stockbreeding activity in which natural spaces are used in an extensive and seasonal way. The activity may require the use of two (or more) farms: there is generally a main one where the family lives; and a second one, used during a shorter period in the year and that might consist of a small cabin or be more sophisticated. The migration from one farm to another is called transhumance. The territories used for grazing vary in diversity of vegetation (meadow, pasture, rangeland, undergrowth) and diversity in location from lowland to high altitude in mountains. Pastoralism is first of all a production activity: production of meat and of dairy products, mainly from cows, sheep and goats. Pastoralism also produces positive externalities: the grazing of the animals prevents bushes and scrubs from growing; maintains an open landscape appreciated by tourists and is also beneficial for biodiversity (habitats for wildlife). Finally, it also plays a role in the prevention of natural hazards, especially of fire in Mediterranean areas.

However, pastoralism has become a fragile activity in Europe. Apart from general economic difficulties, the question of access to land, especially in valleys and intermediate zones (zones of middle altitude, used generally in spring and autumn), remains a crucial issue. Those areas are used by breeders to make hay as reserves for the winter, but there is often competition for the use of land. The growth of transport networks and of urban areas leads to an encroachment of agricultural land. What makes it all the more problematic is that it is firstly the best land, in flat areas, that is bought for urbanisation purposes. Farmers are then forced to use the less productive and less mechanisable land that remains for agriculture. This implies that farmers will need additional land and working hours to collect enough hay for the winter season. It also makes it more difficult and expensive when they need to build new buildings.

Competition also exists within the agricultural sector, between breeding and other activities. In the case of fruit production, the return from land is much higher than for pastoralism and it is very likely that pastures will become orchards. The consequences on pastoralism are that if breeders can not find enough land in the valleys, they can not make enough fodder reserves for the winter and they have to reduce the size of their herds. As long as large enough herds can be maintained, breeders still can continue their activity and they will just use less pastures

or range in summer. There is therefore an abandonment of the most remote, the most difficult to access or lower quality land. In more serious cases, farmers may have to stop their activities altogether, if a herd of a sufficient size can not be maintained. In the central Pyrenees, it is estimated that the loss of 1 ha in valleys causes the loss of 2 ha in intermediate zones and of 10 ha in high pastures (D. Buffiere, written contribution, 2007).

In addition to the direct impact, the future of agriculture and of pastoralism is also threatened by the rise of land prices caused by competition. It is particularly difficult for young people to settle and to start farming when such high amounts of capital are required to buy land. The problems concern also farms where urban inhabitants in some regions have become very interested in buying summer farms or barns to transform into second homes. Often better off than people interested to start farming, city-dwellers are more likely to offer higher prices and buy farm buildings to the detriment of farmers needing new buildings (a problem encountered in Norway, Scotland, France and many other places).

Several types of solutions can be encountered across Europe to at least partly address the problem, such as the three initiatives from Italy, Spain and France presented below:

- **Urban planning: Example of the province of Trento, Italy (Piano urbanistico provinciale)**

The urban planning scheme was revised in 2007. The agricultural land can now be classified in three categories: agricultural zone (various cultures, fallow and uncultivated land), distinctive agricultural zone (permanent culture, arable land and pastures over 20 ha) and pasture zone. Two rules protect land used for pastoralism from being transferred to other uses. The main one concerns the protection of distinctive agricultural zone: the total surface area should not decrease. In the case some land classified in the category has to be used for other purposes, such as for projects of general interest, replacing land from forest land or urban wasteland should be reclassified as agricultural area.

- **Land Bank: Example of the province of Asturias, Spain (Banco de Tierras)**

The land bank is made up of land belonging to the province of Asturias, managed by a regional body. The agricultural land is entrusted to farmers, who have to request the use of land through a formal procedure. The Land Bank also manages the termination of activities of farmers which allows the identification of farms to be taken over and facilitate their transfer to new farmers. That way, land that would be otherwise be used for non agricultural purposes because no interested farmer can be found by the original user can be maintained as agricultural land.

- **Rural area management scheme in valleys: Example of Canton of Luchon, France**

The purpose of the management scheme at the scale of a valley, is to integrate the needs of different activities for a sustainable development of the territory. Thus, the scheme aims to take into account agriculture, tourism, urban needs, etc. All the stakeholders of a valley participate in the development. An architectural and landscape charter is established to improve the urban planning scheme of the valleys and measures are taken to favour pastoralism and to raise awareness of the importance of pastoralism for the sustainability of the economy of the valleys.

These three examples show that in order to support pastoralism and access to land, different kinds of tools can be used: urban planning schemes with rules to limit the reduction of agricultural area; anticipating the generation changes in farming to facilitate the taking over of land by another farmer; and involving not only farmers but also other economic stakeholders

for a better recognition of the role and importance of pastoralism. In particular, initiatives to raise awareness of the benefits of pastoralism among local economic stakeholders should not be neglected. A better understanding of the importance of the activity would help people to better take into consideration the needs to sustain that activity.

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Marie Guitton (marie.guitton@euromontana.org) is a French agro-economist with an MSc from the Wageningen University in rural development and agricultural policies. Very interested in the issue of mountain development and in acting at the European level, she joined Euromontana in 2007 where she works as a project manager.

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Euromontana

2, Place du Champ de Mars
B-1050 Bruxelles

Tel: +32-(0)2-280-42-83
Fax: +32-(0)2-28042-85
www.euromontana.org