

## CHAPTER 7

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# Transhumance Is the New Black

## *Fragile Rangelands and Local Regeneration*

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### Introduction

New studies and policies have been conducted and subsequently set up in Italy to safeguard and promote: ancient pastoral tracks and landscapes; transhumance as a cultural system; and the relationships between pastoralism, agriculture, and rural communities. For centuries, Italy has hosted transversal transhumance from the inner, mountainous areas of the south-central Apennines (Abruzzo, Molise, Basilicata, Campania) to the coasts, and plains transhumance is also widespread in northern Alpine regions (Grasseni 2003; Viazzo 1989) as well as southern regions such as Abruzzo, Molise, and Apulia (Petrocelli 1999; Russo 2002). Vertical transhumance is also practiced in the central regions of Italy, as seen in Tuscany and Lazio (Trinchieri 1953; Metalli 1903) and the islands of Sicily and Sardinia. This ancient practice, deeply rooted since the Roman Empire, has influenced settlements and routes, local landscapes, and sociocultural structures (Ballacchino and Bindi 2017).

One of the fieldwork-based studies on this phenomenon focused particularly on the centuries-old system connecting the southern and inner regions of Italy to the planes of Apulia, where during the winter cattle were driven on foot as far as Foggia, where the sheep customs station was located from 1468 to 1806. Today the associated system of breeding and moving flocks has been substantially abandoned. Current ethnography thus focuses on “heritagization” processes, consequent conservation policies, and the exploitation of biocultural heritage for tourism purposes.

In the last few decades, Italian regions have been radically affected by the dismantling of transhumant sheep breeding, a productive practice that contributed to structuring the kinship relations, symbols and settlements

of Mediterranean and Alpine communities over the centuries. This form of breeding, selecting and managing flocks and herds, effectively contributed to shaping the landscapes in which it was practiced. It also holds a very significant place in the family, social, and political structures of local communities and, finally, the practice of transhumance represented a sense of identity and belonging, despite the ambivalent connotations of these notions for the social sciences.

A second field involving traditional pastoralism is the heritagization process unfolding in Amatrice and the Laga and Gran Sasso mountains. The 2016 earthquake severely affected these areas, almost completely destroying the urban settlement of Amatrice as well as other small towns and villages in the area and, ultimately, interrupting the breeding activities that previously took place in the surrounding mountains. In recent years, however, there have been efforts to revive transhumance. Indeed, this revival was underway in neighboring areas before the earthquake and it remains effective in pushing communities towards new forms of regeneration.

## A Local Issue

In the last ten years, there have been a number of regional initiatives (often conducted through the mediation of Local Action Groups (LAGs) or NGOs such as Legambiente, Italia Nostra, etc.) aimed at defining and protecting residual regional sites of transhumance and mapping these places.

The conservation and valorization of natural and cultural landscapes has been much less systematic. Nevertheless, scholars have noted that many agricultural and planning permits were still granted during this period despite the recommendations and planning constraints of the Regional Superintendence of the Ministry for Cultural Heritage. In 2011, the Regional Superintendence of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage reaffirmed the significance and cultural scope of this archaeological and environmental heritage, and asked for a regional *tratturi* (herd path) plan to map all the transhumance tracks throughout the region so as to establish buffers<sup>1</sup> around them and the built heritage in need of protection. The intention of this legal intervention was to assess the value of environmental biodiversity as well as its relative cultural and social expression. However, what followed was a process in which the regional institutions responsible for this policy area ended up considering a significant number of exemptions to the initial assessment. It was not until a few years ago that the bio-cultural value of *tratturi* was officially confirmed, and many issues still remain unresolved.

Legal and political quarrels and debates over *tratturi* uses and permissions make the “heritage field” controversial and challenging (Herzfeld 2004). The subsequent redefinition of agency and governance over local areas affects institutions at different levels; indeed, Cultural Heritage Ministry offices at the regional level, as well as various communities of practice, have found themselves grappling with this issue.

In the background, the 2004 Council of Europe’s Landscape Convention has paid increasing attention to sustainable rural development policies, calling for the participation of the communities involved while providing expertise on safeguarding and enhancing rural areas and new policy-making strategies for developing marginal and peripheral areas (Papa 2013; Barlett 2016; Cejudo Garcia and Navarro Valverde 2020). Communities are thus redefining their relationship to the past (Herzfeld 1985) which is part of a wider discussion on the future of regional/transregional inland areas. The current debate on this issue is being carried forward by the National Strategy on Inner Areas (a governmental program set up to monitor and intervene on specific critical issues facing inland regions in Italy). This move reflects the current framework in which all of these concepts are being addressed and taken into consideration. The last element of debate we need to consider is the one around land use (the officially, but not effectively, protected *tratturi* lands). This is a very contentious territorial and legal issue. It is particularly significant in a number of marginalized areas that have long been considered a sort of “no man’s land,” free to be utilized, basically without the application of already existing rules and permits despite their being formally/legally defined as public and common goods.

Those herders who still practice the transhumance in Molise, as well as in the other southern mostly mountainous areas of Lazio, Abruzzo, Campania, Basilicata, and Apulia, have decreased dramatically in last few decades, as the research and studies into the history and cultural significance of the transhumance increased.

Meanwhile, other problems and difficulties are emerging for the sector as well. One of the most severe of these is the increasing misuse of pastures in which they are allocated for animal-breeding activities on false premises, only to secure the funding provided by the CAP (EU Common Agricultural Policy), a phenomenon commonly called pasture *mafias* (Calandra 2019; Mencini 2021). This trend reveals the harsh contradictions systematically facing contemporary shepherds and herders and how hard it is for them to remain in their local areas and continue practicing the forms of breeding and production they inherited from previous generations and are trying to maintain. At the same time, it also points to the continuous alternation of aspects more closely connected to the safe-

guarding of a heritage of practices and knowledge forms and the concrete sustainability of traditional agropastoral production within the gears of the neoliberal food market.

There has recently been renewed interest in traditional breeding activities and pastoralism. Alongside such interest, cultural associations—particularly those engaged in slow tourism projects—as well as innovative, public-oriented small farms leaning towards more sustainable, high quality, and ecological goals have shown a strong commitment to developing national/regional development programs for inner areas. These projects link up with local promotional initiatives and people involved in high quality agrifood production (cheese, meat, herbs, phytopharmacological products, and so on) as well as Slow Movement proposals for healthy and experiential tourism.

This connubium of actors and projects provides the perfect metaphor for heritagization processes. Examining UNESCO applications, data collection and various promotional activities, we see an increasing shift towards conservation and the valorization of biocultural goods coupled with an evident focus on valorizing local areas. Some young and return herders are organizing various projects to revive traditional and nomadic pastoralism (e.g., short transhumant pathways for tourists to follow, educational farms, and experiential cheese-making workshops for tourists). Moreover, a new commitment to creating short supply chains goes hand in hand with growing attention on the quality of local products. Natural feeding methods and stock movements lead to a consistent improvement in milk, meat, and wool production while ensuring a better quality of life for animals.

Meanwhile, greater environmental sustainability and the appeal of pastoral landscapes have proven fertile grounds for the growth of experiential tourism in which visitors share in the spaces and practices typical of local communities (Palladino 2017) such as transhumance routes, processing raw materials (milk, wool, handcrafts), and nomadic/semi-nomadic regimes. This transformation has been recognized and shared by shepherds and herders: they have made it their own and integrated it into some of their behaviors and routines as well as their overall approach to production. Discourses are framing “bone lands” as resilient in contrast to the “pulp lands” of coastal areas, the dilemma of whether to leave or remain, the dichotomy between traditional and innovative: all of these elements constitute a sort of semantic carpet on which the people who graze animals make choices and carry out actions, choices and actions that are actually very concrete and pedestrian.

In addition to this new interest in extensive pastoralism shown by the National Strategy for Internal Areas, another project dedicated to this is-

sue has been launched and sustained by the local groups and associations taking part in the APPIA Network for Pastoralism ([www.retepastorizia.it](http://www.retepastorizia.it)). This network of practitioners, activists, and experts on extensive pastoralism has worked together with other groups and institutions, such as Riabitare l'Italia (an association aimed at fostering innovative ways of considering and planning Italy's inland areas) and CREA (the National Council for Research on Agriculture and analysis of the Agrarian Economy) to establish a National School of Pastoralism (SNAP) modeled after similar schools already active in France and Spain. This development also took place as part of programs for valorizing sustainable breeding and supporting so-called return shepherds in various European areas (École des Bergers du Domaine du Merle / Escuela de Pastores de Andalucía). (Lebaudy 2016; Ugarte et al. 2014).

In the Molise region, transhumance has deep historical roots and was once recognized as one of the area's main rural activities; today, however, it has decreased markedly. Its continuity and visibility have been ensured in the last decade by the Colantuono family from Frosolone, traditional herders who continue to practice the transhumance tradition of moving their cattle from the Molise mountains to the plains of Apulia every year. Meanwhile, other families of shepherds and herders are reactivating small to medium-sized transhumance routes. Antonio Innamorato has conducted an interesting case study in this area. He restored the ancient transhumance track between Campitello Matese and the archaeological site of Sepino—along the main, larger *tratturo* between Pescasseroli and Candela—which has attracted an increasing number of tourists since 2017 and received significant media coverage over the last three years.

These activities are highly ambivalent and interesting from an ethnographic point of view, particularly in relation to the process of reviving rural and pastoral practices in Italy's inner areas as a way of linking up heritage communities and researchers with the aim of uncovering and recovering memories of local transhumance. During these revivals, local actors often present contradictory tales of the past and ambivalent representations of what they consider to be their own cultural heritage. One key aspect of such work is that the presence of ethnographers in the field has implicitly encouraged shepherds to think about and acknowledge the cultural value of their practices. A second important element to take into consideration is the rise in funding for and legal frameworks focused on *tratturi* and transhumance conservation and valorization as a potential resource for new rural development.

The heritagization process underway around transhumance highlights the link between local practice, landscape conservation, and cultural heritage as well as the powerful associations surrounding these routes, from



**Figure 7.1.** Lu vic p'dent, Bojano, 2017. © Rossella De Rosa

religious and cultural to fitness and wellness associations. Today, these associations are increasingly evoked, sustained, and promoted at the national and European levels as a key element for fostering sustainable tourism, local development, and the empowerment of heritage communities, especially in inland areas of Europe (Council of Europe 2019).

## A Long Way to Go

Since 2008, Colantuono's, a well-known cheese producer in the Frosolone area, has launched a campaign of transhumance revitalization. The Colantuono farm is located in an inner area of the Molise region, which has been supported over the last decade by local institutional funds and especially impacted by LEADER Strategy and the activities of an area LAG (Local Action Group). They move their cattle along the traditional "green highway," a 300-kilometer-long track from Frosolone in Molise to San Marco in Lamis, where their farm in Apulia is located, following in the footsteps of their ancestors.

Over the last decade, this newly revitalized transhumance has become a popular tourist attraction in which many local associations, public institutions, and private citizens take part. The abovementioned Local Action Group also oversaw the first attempt to submit a dossier to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites list. The submission was not accepted as written, but UNESCO did request a reformulation and, as a result, the application was shifted from a tangible heritage/landscape submission to an intangible cultural heritage one. This shift has had certain consequences and implications in terms of strategies for safeguarding and valorizing the heritage in question. First, it led the applicants to instead present an International Network application, including Austria and Greece in the ICH element submitted for inclusion in 2018. The dossier was presented by the Italian Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Forests in collaboration with other national authorities for Austria and Greece (the Ministries of Culture, in these cases) and brought in multidisciplinary clusters of researchers as experts to establish the scope of transhumance as an intangible cultural heritage through significant studies of this phenomenon.

As a result, the National Ministry for Agricultural Policies supported the Local Development Agency and regional institution in shifting from a local/regional process of safeguarding and valorization to a national one and, finally, in ratifying the international network application. This process entailed registering *tratturi* in the national inventory of historical rural landscapes and, subsequently, providing support with the set of pro-

cedures required to present the UNESCO ICH List application. Through this process transhumance has been granted greater visibility and institutional attention, but it has also been packaged in a markedly hierarchical way through safeguarding measures and protocols and been framed as a consumable good in keeping with today's marketing-oriented logics for promoting pastoral routes.

Meanwhile associations, NGOs, and more informal movements and groups of citizens have also been involved in the implicit heritagization of the landscapes and cultures of ancient pastoralism in various areas. There are many associations and voluntary groups engaged in promoting local areas through forms of slow and experiential tourism, for example. These include activities such as taking tourists along drovers' routes from one farm to the next as well as small breeding units and other medium-sized enterprises. There are walking groups both large and small, horse riders, and cyclists as well many other people involved in public events and ceremonial occasions linked to transhumance in the various regions I have been monitoring through my multisited ethnography. Similarly, many local communities, even ones only marginally connected to transhumance and animal breeding, are working to preserve a significant number of practices such as food traditions and narratives (oral poetry, folk songs, and dances, and so on) and traditional beliefs despite the intense socio-political and biocultural changes they have experienced in the last few decades.

Through such activities, transhumance-as-an-event has undergone a process of commodification and rhetorical/mediatic reshaping. At the 2015 Milan Expo, an image of Carmelina Colantuono was used to symbolically represent the Molise region. This choice was highly significant in many ways. Carmelina is often represented in the local and national media as "the cowgirl of Molise" or a sort of "native American horse rider who takes care of her cattle along the pathway" (Bindi 2012). At the Expo, she became an iconic image representing a region nestled between rural pastoral society and a brand-new range of themed attractions revolving around ancient, revitalized, and heritagized practices. This representation has exalted what had been in the past marginal and invisible and made it visible on the national/international tourist destinations and foodscapes markets.

The 2015 Slow Food Convention for the Apennine Communities was organized in Castel del Giudice, a small village in Molise considered an excellent example of local area regeneration processes. At this convention, a group of young rural entrepreneurs presented a potential new model for rural economic development in the region, a model focused on new rural and breeding activities based on sustainability and typicality as well



innovative, social, and inclusive ways of producing agri-food products (Goodman, Dupuis, and Goodman 2012). Many of the presenters were and are returning farmers, breeders, or herders. Although the trend of return farmers and herders remains quite elitist at the moment (Van der Ploeg 2008; Padiglione 2014), events such as this represent extremely interesting examples of the emergence of a “new ruralist” movement.

At the political level, there are various critical issues affecting the legal frameworks characterizing conservation/valorization policies. As mentioned above, many conservation laws are unclear or inconsistent, and the same is true of those relating to regional planning and systems of distribution.

At the same time, in recent years, ecological movements and heritage communities’ concerns are growing up as well as the vigilance on uses and misuses of the lands by informal groups of private citizens.

In at least one case in Molise, an ecomuseum has been established that organizes experiential walks along the sheep tracks. This ecomuseum, called *Itinerari Frentani*, is modeled after other similar initiatives in Italy and other parts of Europe (such as the Ponteb Bernardo Ecomuseum of pastoralism that includes walkways, training camps, and farms and sells natural, ethically produced food and other goods).

This question seems have become increasingly an object of crucial confrontation among different institutional levels, civil society, associations, and private citizens and the issue of consensus-building on the territory is not exempt from this theme. In this sense transhumance is transformed into a privileged context for evaluating institutional and power relationships at a local level, and into an ethnographic context to highlight the role anthropologists play at the local level, their engagement with and service to the communities with which they work.

A multidisciplinary approach can help us to understand the extent to which inland areas are affected by neo-endogenous development models as well as processes that redefine local identities and senses of belonging (Bender 2001; Yuval-Davis 2006; Mee and Wright 2009; Wright 2014) and that repurpose local areas as tourist destinations based on the marketability of a food heritage-scape (Bindi and Grasseni 2014) and “authentic/genuine” products (handcrafts, events). This complex scenario proves even more important for economically and sometimes socially depressed areas. National governmental strategies for Europe’s inner regions, including programs protecting transhumant tracks and recovering civic uses of the land and protected areas, constitute a challenging site in which to ethnographically investigate local development policies and the ways communities care for their own areas and landscapes. Meanwhile, given these complex factors, we as researchers must also reconsider regional/

national policies and supernational “heritage regimes” as well as the very definition of an embedded cultural asset.

Ultimately, intangible cultural heritage could represent a promising but also controversial opportunity for local development and the enhancement of sustainable tourism. It could be a real turning point for inner regions and a shift in the way a traditional practice such as transhumance interacts with the regional/national/global frameworks of local regeneration and development by rearticulating the link between the mountain and the plains, inner areas and the coasts. In other words, a return to the relationship of the past based not on hegemonic differentiations between different areas but rather a recognition that all are necessary and complementary.

### **A Pathway Toward Regeneration**

In the area of Amatrice and the Park of Gran Sasso-Laga, the process of safeguarding and valorizing transhumance has grown to become a widespread discourse on mountains and fragile areas. In recent years, this discourse has become part of a reflection on the opportunities and potential for rethinking the country’s backbone, a point made by many observers including and especially during the months of pandemic isolation. The mountain-herding-depopulation nexus plays an increasingly role in structuring the narrative on these places, mixing with concepts such as taking care, proximity, staying, and regenerating (De Rossi 2018; Teti 2016).

In this context of renewed attention to internal, mountainous, secluded, peripheral, and pastoral areas, Amatrice undoubtedly plays a role. The regeneration of wandering pasturage and revival of all the activities related to sustainable and eco-ethical livestock breeding has come to represent a significant site of local engagement through multidisciplinary cooperation with social scientists, economists, agronomists, zootechnics, jurists, and eco-systemic services experts. This approach has the potential to effectively address research concerns alongside institutional policies through participatory interaction with local communities. More recently, the mountains, along with fragile internal areas, have been reconsidered as sites for investing in the kind of short food supply chains and proximity food production evoked by “feeding the planet” advocates (as it was evoked in the 2015 World Expo in Milan) in intersection with the desires of communities and those calling for regeneration.

“Transhumance-as-an-event” can be seen as part of this rearticulated rural narrative on the past and present, encompassing as it does the memory of traditional practices and the forms of local knowledge evoked in



Figure 7.2. The route of transhumance, Amatrice, 2019. © Letizia Bindi

multiple Italian poems. “The *pecoraro* (shepherd) did not lack anything, yet there was an economy and a hierarchy among shepherds” recounts a poet-shepherd in a recital at the occasion of the last *Via della transumanza*, a festival and reenactment of historical transhumance held in Amatrice in September of 2019.

Oral poetry alludes to a rigid internal organization designed to ensure survival and mutual support, articulating an opposition between high and low, white-collar and rural blue-collar workers, between cooperative human/animal relationships and relationships that recognize animals’ value exclusively in terms of economic purchasing power. Traditional poets still highlight the distinction between their world and a sanitized, medicalized, urban world as well as the public’s lack of knowledge about mutton and lamb, products that have become less attractive for city-based consumers. Today, after months of pandemic-inspired speeches on health precautions, this theme appears extraordinarily topical and significant. In the abovementioned song presented by Mario, the “learned shepherd” (Ciaralli 1997), herders—erroneously and hegemonically represented from the outside as isolated, backward, and almost savage people—make a claim for the past and the present alike.

In a significant passage from one of these songs, the two singers challenging each other present the clash between a *laudator temporis acti* (one who praises past times) and a voice exalting the present and its virtues.

At the end of one of these exchanges, one of the two poets celebrates the return to bartering, that is, exchanging the products derived from agricultural and pastoral work. Through its registers and messages, oral and traditional poetry presents a case for supporting sustainability and equal exchange, in contrast with the inequalities of capitalist society. It would be mistaken to consider these poetical improvisations nothing more than a poetic cliché. Rather, they are conscious rearticulations of a local way of thinking that calls into question modernity and the very idea of local development. At the same time, they are both a *mise en forme* as well as, at times, an almost mystical approach to the pastoral way of life coupled with discourses on sustainability and the value of reconnecting human to animals, culture, and nature in a way that goes beyond strictly economic considerations and the possibly unpleasant aspects of this practice.

Local ways of narrating transhumance deal with the present and future of communities, their “conscience du lieu” and new “worlds of life” (Magnaghi 2017; Poli 2019). As a further demonstration of the value of this art of speaking, shepherd-poets speak to the present and help us to navigate it. At times, poets also adopt a more intimate register. For instance, Antonio Cannavicci does this when he proposes another way of dealing with trauma by rehabilitating local areas through an exercise of remembering the area’s pastoral roots.

These narratives encompass principals, knowledge archives, transmission tools, and frames for interpreting the world. Their words reconstruct the inhabitability of the land and use language as a way of reshaping places. Indeed, Ingold and Vergunst have noted this when observing that the rhythm of writing-narration can be compared to the beat of footsteps: a pedestrian grammar for a well-planted reading of the world through the feet (Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Bindi 2020).

## **Walking with Animals after an Earthquake**

Every year around the end of September, in proximity to the emblematic date of 29 September dedicated to honoring St. Michael as the protector of wanderers and walkers, people gather to celebrate a pastoral trail, with the flocks flowing along urban streets leading down from the mountain and heading towards the Pontine countryside (Metalli 1903; Trinchieri 1953).

In Amatrice, this “reenactment” of transhumance—an ambivalent practice located somewhere between memory and performance—took place even before 2016. *La via della transumanza* (route of transhumance) project gained greater momentum after 2011 as part of “Ecoroutour,” a

component of the EU's LIFE program.<sup>2</sup> The program also involved other such projects organized in the same period in various regions of southwestern Europe such as: "Pasturismo" (Monllor and Soy 2015), conceived and created in Catalonia; and the Italian-French project *La Routo* (Lebaudy et al. 2012) connecting the abovementioned Ecomuseum of Pastoralism in Pontebernardo to the Domaine du Merle along a sheep track shepherds traditionally used to move their flocks.

From the beginning, *La via della transumanza* has been engaged in recovering the history and culture of local communities and promoting tourism. In this project, transhumance has been associated with a narrative of the land based on agricultural and pastoral identity, the abovementioned discourse of mountains, and sustainable development linked to biocultural heritage.

Reenactment is, in fact, an activity of reinventing history fueled by a series of phenomena specific to contemporary culture: the growing importance of visual and media aspects, the acceptance of new forms of relative authenticity, the now nearly consolidated interconnection between leisure and culture in many tourist and cultural consumption practices, the preponderant role of experience and sensitivity, the growing need to focus, recover or invent new individual and collective identities so as to face the identity liquidity of contemporary society, and the strong need, from this point of view, for the past and roots. It is this latter that partly explains the renewed interest in history, archeology, and local identities, not only at a tourist level but also in televised dissemination and practices of consumption. (Melotti 2013: 147)

The idea, therefore, was to develop sustainable tourism mobility in the area of Amatrice, province of Rieti (but also Accumoli and Arquata), the Central Italian Apennines, and Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga National Park. For three years this initiative involved the local population, administration, and civic association members in a common project of revitalizing and rediscovering the promotional value of pastoralism in this area. Some tensions and misunderstandings arose between local shepherding/breeding families and public administrations, with the latter probably considering the community-based initiative to be excessively autonomous and free from political constraints. As in many other cases, it was families of shepherds and breeders who ensured the continuity and durability of the project after the initial startup period, and this increased frustration among project proponents as they experienced this disinterest and opposition on the part of the administration with great disappointment.

In 2017, after the inevitable period of discomfort and disorientation following the 2016 earthquake, a number of actors proposed the idea of resuming the practice of transhumance (descent from the high summer pastures). These actors included several local associations (Laga Insieme,

and Appennino Solidale) as well as The Magnificent Lands of Centro project and CAI (Italian Alpine Club). A series of entrepreneurial subjects (primarily restaurateurs in the “area of taste,” a brand-new part of the city totally reconstructed after the earthquake and presently occupied only by restaurants and a Congress Hall), but also several breeders with pastures in the area such as the Scialanga family and others, also lent their support alongside the municipal administration, determined to relaunch sustainable tourism in this area. These historical, heritage reenactments are often framed as leisure and tourism events located between infotainment, recreation, and play. They often convey an idea of history and memory as supposedly nonpolitical or post-political, unrelated to a political commitment to local areas and communities (Carnegie and Maccabe 2008).

At the same time, both before and after the earthquake, *La via della transumanza* in Amatrice definitely appears aimed at conveying or articulating “new forms of local resistance to globalization or new regionalisms or anti-national hyper-localisms” (Melotti 2013: 150), but also resilience in the face of depopulation (Cejudo Garcia and Navarro Valverde 2020 and the abandonment of cropland and pastureland (Bakudila 2017). Such projects to relaunch tourism-cultural promotion and the local economy as a whole in a lasting and sustainable way is therefore a way of “reinhabiting” depressed and isolated regions and places (De Rossi 2018; Teti 2016). These initiatives involve rebuilding an imaginary and giving meaning back to the land, reconnecting breeding practices, and reorienting production from a focus on agri-food chains to a focus on landscape, biodiversity, and intangible cultural heritage made up of trails and sheep-raising products (handcrafts, food and conviviality, soundscapes and oral histories). The “heritage turn” has allowed communities to look at extensive pastoralism not as an exclusive mode of production, but also as a cultural asset and potential tourism resource (Bindi 2020).

After the earthquake, relaunching the *La via della transumanza* project represented not only a revival but also a real sign of rebirth after the trauma suffered by the community. It has involved focusing on collective memories, family landscapes, and a world of shared practices and knowledge that, over the centuries, has allowed these settlements to maintain and perpetuate their own forms of life and internal organization.

The revitalization of transhumance in a post-disaster context like that of Amatrice must be read as a form of resilience: a perspective in which environments and communities are closely interconnected (Folke 2006), implying the need for a radically multidisciplinary approach. Multidisciplinary is needed not only as an interpretative tool but also a means of supporting a governance of these processes necessarily characterized by adaptive and self-organizing skills (Adger 2000). “Socioecological resil-

ience” is the process by which ecosystems adapt by trying to absorb shocks and disturbances, putting more emphasis on the element of resilience than on that of sustainability. This approach enhances the concrete possibilities available to a given biocultural context before the abrupt break caused by the earthquake or any other form of change (Cork 2010).

According to this perspective, the reenactment of transhumance beginning in 2017 should be read as a form of local-area regeneration involving families as well as a grouping of institutions, associations, private entrepreneurial actors, and the general public. The Scialanga family and its flock of Comisane sheep (not an autochthonous type of livestock) remain on their farm in Pratica di Mare, near Rome during the winter season; they return to the mountains in springtime along a route that takes several days of walking, although today the move is carried out largely with trucks. They voluntarily resumed this practice of returning to their grazing areas after the earthquake despite the logistical difficulties involved, including an old, damaged farmhouse, and agreed to do a section of *demonticazione* (descending with the flock from the high pasture on foot). Over time, this has become a strongly symbolic act and a sort of celebration for the local community. When I observed this event, on their arrival in the Amatrice town square in front of the recently rebuilt “House of the Mountain,” a show of transhumance took place displaying a lively mix of colors and gestures, practitioners and visitors. Silvestro Scialanga, head of the flock, assisted by his sister Vittoria and other collaborators, walked solemnly, accompanied by people in traditional costumes and decorated sheep as well as photographers, journalists, and researchers.

An enthusiastic audience watched the parade, supporting and appreciating it. They took photographs and made short video recordings with their mobile phones, devices that have become people’s main tool for asserting their own presence at an event and participating in ceremonial occasions and historical reenactments, essentially as spectators. At a certain point, the procession took the road towards the former school building, a prestigious and emblematic all-inclusive structure in Amatrice that had welcomed elementary, middle, and high school children over the decades. Locally, the school is familiarly known as Don Minozzi after the priest who originally founded it. Today, the building no longer exists. Nonetheless, Don Minozzi was at the center of an image also used for the poster publicizing the *La via della transumanza*; the image depicts an austere shepherd in traditional costume standing in front of the colonnade of this building as portrayed in an old postcard from the early twentieth century.

The symbolic association between past and present was condensed into two, superimposed images: the historical photo of the shepherd in front of

Don Minozzi and the reenacted scene featuring Silvestro Scialanga with his flock entering the battered historic center of Amatrice. Like a missing limb that the amputee still feels, we are once again reminded of the power of images when the memory captured by photography projects the image of the past onto the present. The past is like a thin veil laying atop the current state of things, allowing us to see the invisible and to imagine what is no longer or has not yet occurred. Between multiple uses of the past and the emotions triggered by heritage, between reenactment and commemoration, the shepherd in gaiters and a wide-brimmed hat becomes a guiding image, a condensation of the past and a prospect for the future in an ambivalent arena characterized by both a need to relaunch and spectacularize the event and the urgent need for the town to recover and regain its resilience.

At the same time, the multidisciplinary research (anthropology, agrarian economy, and zootechnics) carried out in this field has revealed people's explicit aspirations of reviving extensive pastoralism, both as a provider of eco-systemic services and as a way of bolstering a niche agri-food market oriented towards short supply chains, responsible consumption, and the valorization of local areas but also as a source of tourism development based on the paths once tread by wandering pastoralists. The governmental institutions involved, civic associations, and the producers themselves all aim to pursue an integrated approach. Despite these intentions, however, I found that the various political, economic, and association-based actors struggle to develop effective internal synergies.

The ancient idea of commonalities shared among the pastoral communities of these areas until at least the end of the nineteenth century has been threatened by the growing privatization of businesses and farming practices. In addition, traditional pastoralism has become less and less economically sustainable due to the need to buy pastures and the tendency to optimize farming costs through the stabling and consequent sedentarization of flocks. At the same time, herders face challenges in using pastures: once largely civic and common lands, these fields are increasingly privatized and broken up. Such parceling also tends to dismantle the network of proximity and cooperation that was historically embedded in the practices and uses associated with shared land. In Amatrice as in Molise more generally, there is clearly a clash between two different visions: a heritagizing move that evokes and supports the value of traditional and transhumant pastoralist practices as a potential driver of rebirth for areas and communities plagued by depopulation, economic degrowth, and social disaggregation, on one hand, and a productive, intensive concept of breeding on the other hand that is indifferent to the environmental and sociocultural impact of intensive farming practices. Indeed, such inten-



sive production is increasingly aimed at meeting the demands of—and, in many cases the extortion exerted by—large-scale distribution channels, thereby further undermining transhumant shepherds and exacerbating their precarious conditions.

## **Resilient Pastoralism**

Local systems manage to change by adapting to ongoing transformations; at the same time, they tend to generate enrichment and the mobilization of available resources, sometimes hidden, unexplored, or underutilized ones (Steiner and Markantoni 2013). Active participation in change—as in the case of the community engaged in reviving transhumance in the Monte Laga area—can therefore be read as a way of creating and enhancing intangible resources connected to social, symbolic, and cultural capital. This process begins from relationships between local actors and the biocultural landscape in question, from the imaginary of this practice understood as a revival but also as the potential for a new eco-systemic approach to reconstruction and a context in which to observe the capacity of local agency in terms of rebuilding and escaping the post-disaster crisis (Herzfeld 2001; Norris et al. 2008).

In this way, reenacted transhumance is conceived as a powerful form of sociocultural as well as environmental capital (Putnam 2000, 2007; Breda and Lai 2011) to be deployed in the post-disaster scenario. It empowers people's sense of belonging and participation in the community as a proactive way of responding to changes by creating social bonds, external networks, and relationships of trust among citizens and towards the local and super-local institutions supporting these kinds of initiatives. Regenerating the transhumance route plays a powerful symbolic role in that it encourages people to think about their belonging to a local area and sharing in a knowledge-practice system. Nonetheless, such an approach implies a holistic concept of community, a concept that has been discussed by the social sciences and which leads to a reconsideration of the very notion of resilience (Wilson 2012; Steiner and Markantoni 2013).

More generally, we have documented a flourishing range of initiatives, conferences, trails, and walks dedicated to protecting, rediscovering, and valorizing sheep tracks after transhumance was included in the UNESCO ICH List. This new degree of attention counterbalances the relative neglect characterizing the past as well as the fact that this phenomenon is often merely evoked and allocated funds are regularly diverted rather than actually being used for projects related to safeguarding and valorizing this important form of biocultural heritage.

In order to support agropastoral development, especially in fragile and depopulated areas, draft laws have recently been written, regional offices have been set up, and PSR funds and other local development measures, such as LEADER strategy funds—through the mediation of Local Action Groups—have been established. Meanwhile, on a different scale, a widespread discourse has been produced, framing transhumance as a keystone for promoting local areas traditionally characterized by the knowledge-practice system of wandering pastoralism.

Transhumance is frequently presented as an opportunity for overall development and for rethinking the tourist market, alongside the promotion of artisan products and related agri-food chains. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen if this process, passing through a network of municipalities and declaring transhumance as a transversal and participatory vocation, can potentially consolidate a strategic vision of safeguarding and valorization, ultimately enabling an integrated array of interventions and a brand-new cultural approach to this issue.

The theme of pastoral routes and transhumance is not at all backward or atavistic, but it needs to be framed outside of late modern “structural nostalgia” for societies’ agropastoral roots (Herzfeld 2004). Moreover, the question is how to take care of the sheep tracks as well as herders’ communities, documenting the agricultural permits that authorities have continued to grant despite the superintendency’s rules protecting transhumant routes since 1939.

Similarly, it is necessary to reconstruct the system of mobility that allowed men and flocks as well as ideas, relationships, craftsmanship, words, attachments, rituals, and biocultural knowledge to travel. Extensive breeding also contributes to the depopulation of the inner and fragile areas of the Apennine ridge, all of which are fighting their increasing marginalization and the negative representations of shepherds that are nowadays tinged with new connotations and expectations.

At the same time, the theme of transhumant sheep farming raises very urgent issues linked to the today’s most pressing concerns, such as the conservation of biodiversity and the landscapes connected to these paths, the artisan practices associated with this traditional activity, and the increasing attention to animal welfare as well opportunities for a new form of experiential and slow tourism. Multispecies heritage has recently become established as a field of research considering more-than-human communities (Morris 2014: 51) and the interrelationships and “contact zones” (Haraway 2008: 244) “where human and animal lives biologically, culturally and politically intertwine” (Aisher and Damodaran 2016). These studies question human/animal co-being (Davis, Maurstad, and Cowles 2013) in a fiercely critical perspective that forges connections between the

social sciences and animal studies as an alternative way of dealing with natural and land resource management, ideas about development, ways of inhabiting places and, obviously, interspecies ethics. Processes of protecting and valorizing sheep tracks as well as transhumance constitute a highly political arena, one that encompasses aims of environmental and landscape protection, place-based knowledge about conserving the land in connection with a sense of identity. These aims can be reached through a participatory decision-making process that ensures shared governance of land use as well as local public-private entrepreneurial activities. Today, therefore, both sheep track and transhumant experiences can be considered a predominantly cultural journey through which communities can become fully involved in heritagizing and planning for local development.

### **Transhumance at the Heritage Turn**

After the UNESCO nomination in December of 2019, transhumance has been continuously evoked as an antidote to depopulation and the progressive loss of soil and biodiversity, presented as a kind of panacea for crisis and a crucial element in the definition of local identity, supported by experts and policy makers.

Pastoralism is an excellent multidisciplinary field for study, encompassing as it does biocultural heritage and ecology, rural economy, and geography as well as biodiversity and agrarian and landscape studies. Through such research, it is possible to assess environmental sustainability, ecological approaches, and participation in decision-making processes and the governance of territories as a strategy for inland and peripheral areas fighting depopulation and marginality in relation to global processes, the loss of biodiversity and cultural diversity in keeping with the agendas of the major global agencies.

At the same time, increasing animal welfare activism and concerns about healthy/natural and even ethically produced food is giving rise to new attention towards and investments in extensive pastoralism. More and more often, urban consumers are committed to animal welfare and environmental safeguards and tend to boycott products derived from intensive and industrial farming practices. At the same time, they are interested in buying natural milk/meat/wool products and in sustaining low-carbon-emissions extensive breeding (transhumance and wandering pasturage) (Soussana et al. 2007), and they voice an ethical commitment to the respect and valorization of local cultural communities. Similarly, legal debates over common lands and natural resource uses must be considered a way of “improving governance of the pastoral lands” (Davies et al. 2016;

Behnke and Freudenberger 2013). During and after the lockdown and isolation imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a greater recognition of the value of mountain footpaths and the chance to directly experience areas and landscapes along with a focus on sustainable, extensive, and animal welfare-oriented ways of farming, at least in European countries. This shift has also deeply influenced the representation of pastoral routes and trails. In this period, “at a distance” field studies and virtual interactions with locals revealed their experiences of social distancing and lockdown in the temporary residences, prefabricated houses, and empty streets of desolate towns. For farmers and breeders, the pandemic has further undermined the sustainability of their activities.

The UNESCO listing is often brandished as a seal of excellence rather than a pact for safeguarding and valorization; indeed, it is often treated as a sort of positive appraisal and a privilege for areas that usually lay outside the major economic and tourism circuits. In many cases, participatory processes are evoked rather than practiced. Herders and shepherds are often externally driven, sometimes inspired by the exceptional spectacularization of transhumance-as-an-event and the mirage of economic growth and support from external programs and funds. This can make them victims of facile marketing operations and/or the illusion of incontrovertible development processes.

Meanwhile, the discourse on internal areas has progressively shifted to a resilience-oriented “poetics of staying,” a new rhetoric of “small is good,” and a narrative of “belongingness” (Müller 2021). The social distancing imposed by the pandemic—certainly not looked-for, but still not to be wasted—put us face to face with the question of what this pandemic might imply for fragile areas, small villages, isolated parts of the countryside, and pastoral movements (Boeri 2020; Tantillo 2020; Zane 2020). The problematic aspects of the urban life system and the limits inherent in large concentrations of people became particularly clear (Moreno 2016; Hidalgo 2020) while the difficulties of coexistence and the wide-open character of the most depopulated areas displayed all its positive aspects in a time of social distancing, limited and exclusively internal tourism, and slow mobility. Inner and mountainous areas have been revealed to be hospitable contexts, beyond arcadian, picturesque tropes of the secluded, lonely mountain. People have begun to look to rural homes as new and alternative residences to recover from the city and to live in greater balance with nature, conceptualizing/creating a new life involving more time and more care. The transhumant mode of breeding and more generally extensive ways of livestock farming are presently recognized as more suitable and sustainable than before, in contrast to the unsustainability of intensive herding with its excessive pollution and land use.

The heritage turn—coupled with a critique of reckless, unsustainable post-capitalist economic growth—has finally enabled communities as well as policy makers to profoundly reconsider transhumance and extensive farming in terms of a multifunctional approach bringing together respectful animal breeding, artisanal cheese/meat/wool processing, biodiversity conservation, ecosystem services, landscape conservation, handcrafts revitalization, and slow and experiential tourism.

On one hand, the reenactment of transhumance implies a reconsideration of people's symbolic relationship with familiar landscapes and a strongly embodied sense of a human-animal community, suggesting a nostalgic and somehow neoatavistic, conservative, and arcadian representation of traditional breeding. On the other hand, traditional and extensive pastoralism calibrated to the climate crisis, changes in local land management and post-disaster transformations supports resilience discourses and practices as well as post-capitalist and participative, neo-endogenous processes of reconstruction and local development that are truly embedded in local rurality, giving them a common sense of belonging as heritage keepers as well as a renewed emotional commitment to the landscape and a reevaluated perception of their *savoir faire*. Transhumance thus allows for a rearticulation of the past/present relationship, a chance to reconcile with ancient modes of living and producing that were previously associated with backwardness and negativity but are now being seen as ecologically and ethically sustainable.

Policies of biocultural heritage conservation represent the real challenge and political field in which to critically understand new rhetorics and representations of rurality as well as new processes of decision-making around local development. The reshaped and narrated pastoral field becomes a stage in which the tensions of an increasingly competitive agri-food market and various policies of local/rural development surface clearly. This attests to the relevance of heritage rhetorics in the sense of belongingness, the local branding of food heritagization, symbolic and social capital for defining rural potential, and local identity in the multifaceted heritage framework.

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## Notes

1. Buffers are “areas of respect” located on both sides of the sheep track. It is advised to establish such buffers to protect the track from infrastructure and buildings so as to safeguard the visibility of the route and the maintenance of the landscape.
2. <http://www.transumanzaamatrice.it/Transdoc/presentaztransum.pdf>.

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