



II. Fragile Cohabitations

Transhumance in the Time of UNESCO: Political Narratives, Rhetorical Representations, Enhancement Practices

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of tourist and economic interest in transhumance in Sardinia and more generally Italy. Previously viewed as a hindrance to sheep farming development and associated with isolation, sacrifice, and uncertainty for the people involved, transhumance is now being reconsidered. This study aims to explore the impact of this renewed attention by examining the new transhumance routes, identifying its advocates, and understanding why pastoral mobility was once deemed as a sign of cultural backwardness but is now celebrated as a heritage object and identity trait. The paper also investigates how transhumance has been integrated into territorial marketing efforts, often through rhetorical appeals to pastoral identity and authenticity and nostalgic and poetical depictions of a mythologized past. In fact, the emotional peak following UNESCO's recognition of transhumance as intangible heritage is not the sole driver of this trend, as Sardinia has been focusing on the heritage value of pastoral mobility since the early 2000s. This paper emphasizes the role that rural space and landscape revaluation, sustainable tourism promotion, new pastoralism models, and local agri-food production revitalization play in driving this shift, aligning with current environmental and cultural heritage conservation and enhancement policies.

KEYWORDS

Transhumance; UNESCO; Sardinia; pastoral culture; rural development; heritagization policies.



"Transhumance with no sheep nor shepherd": introductory remarks

In 2019, following the nomination submitted by Italy, Austria, and Greece, UNESCO inscribed transhumance on its Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. According to the international organization's website, UNESCO has recognized two types of transhumance—horizontal transhumance, in plain or plateau regions; and vertical transhumance, typically in mountain regions—highlighting the cultural significance of a tradi-

tion that has shaped relations among people, animals and ecosystems. Transhumance has sparked rituals, festivities and social practices during the summer and autumn seasons, recurring symbols of a practice that has been repeating itself for centuries across the world with the cyclical nature of the seasons.¹

As we read further, we learn that transhumance is an ancient pastoral practice that involves the seasonal movement of livestock along migratory routes in the Mediterranean and the Alps: "The tradition of transhumance traces its roots back to prehistory and develops in Italy through the grassy pathways known as *tratturi* which continue to testify, today and

yesterday, to a balanced relationship between humans and nature and the sustainable use of natural resources.”²

On the one hand, the UNESCO document emphasizes the historical significance and depth of the transhumance practice, whose complex and diverse set of practices and knowledge must be preserved by collective memory. On the other hand, it highlights the current and future potential of transhumance to revitalize regions by leveraging their cultural and natural resources. Within this broad frame of reference, the heritage process has drawn attention to the transformation of transhumance³: residual in its traditional forms, this practice has undergone significant changes due to economic shifts in pastoral economies, especially in southern and insular Italy in the latter half of the previous century.⁴

As transhumance is acknowledged as heritage of humanity, it prompts us to ponder what has been officially and formally heritagized. In fact, UNESCO’s mission is to safeguard the heritage inscribed on its list by taking measures aimed at ensuring “the viability of the intangible cultural heritage, including the identification, documentation, research, preservation, protection, promotion, enhancement, transmission, particularly through formal and non-formal education, as well as the revitalization of the various aspects of such heritage.”⁵ The *tratturi* referred to on the UNESCO website, namely the transhumance routes in Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia, Campania, Basilicata, and Calabria (see Ballacchino and Bindi 2017; Bindi 2020), are currently deserted; but this discussion could also be extended to other realities where pastoral mobility was widespread and practiced, for example in Sardinia or Sicily (Mannia 2022). As Rossano Pazzagli (2021) has noted, with regard to Molise, one can speak of a “transhumance with no sheep nor shepherd,” where, nevertheless, narratives and identity representations converge, often encouraged by scholarly literature. Cultural practices become “objectified” when they are formally designated as heritage (Palumbo 2015-2016, 87). As a result, if the “heritage

framework” of transhumance inevitably leads to its transformation and recontextualization, we should emphasize that it is hardly applicable to what is now a marginal and episodic phenomenon, a veritable survival, in the larger Italian context.

On the other hand, it is possible to engage in a discussion about the *concept* of traditional transhumance without succumbing to the temptations of looking back and indulging in nostalgia. Instead, we can focus on a new approach based on revaluing local areas, preserving biodiversity, and promoting pastoralism, its products, and, most importantly, the role of the shepherd. This approach can also include the promotion of responsible and sustainable tourism, investments in multifunctional farm practices, and so on.⁶ For example, the reenactments of transhumance that have been widely promoted in Italy in recent years are insufficient to re-enhance pastoral mobility. On the contrary, they emphasize its historical and traditional dimension, as they look to the past and frequently appear to be overly folkloric—while not involving either shepherds or sheep. Even scholars’ and experts’ proposals and accounts of transhumance, primarily aimed at providing ideas for its enhancement, preservation, and revitalization, must confront the current dynamics of rural areas. These areas are exceptional preserves for biodiversity, landscapes, high-quality agricultural and food products, artisanal production, tangible and intangible cultural heritage, agro pastoral practices, and expertise. They are, however, increasingly facing depopulation, abandonment, and a lack of basic living conditions. Schools, doctors, medical clinics, hospital facilities, pharmacies, post offices, and banks, as well as digital connectivity, public transportation, and economic opportunities, are all lacking or insufficient (see, among others, Barbera, Cersosimo, and De Rossi 2022; De Rossi 2018; Lucatelli, Luisi, and Tantillo 2022; Marchetti, Panunzi, and Pazzagli 2017).

The revitalization of transhumance cannot advance without a broader revitalization of pastoralism and the role of the shepherd. The





Photo 1. The Transhumance of the Locci brothers, Desulo, 2015. Photo credit: Sardegna Live.

process of rethinking and redesigning local development must begin at the grassroots level, involving pastoral communities and engaging with local realities. External, romanticized, or heritage-driven perspectives that transform “artifacts, natural spaces, territories, places, practices, and knowledge into ‘cultural things,’ into symbols with some value for any collective subject” (Palumbo 2022, 148) are incapable of reversing a trend that is well-rooted in the contemporary context and manifests itself on political-economic and sociocultural levels. As Pazzagli also notes:

We must start from here, reintroducing sheep to pastures through regenerative livestock farming, restoring social and cultural dignity to the figures of the farmer and shepherd, enhancing their roles as genuine producers and guardians of the land, as landscape builders. We should allow cultivated areas, pastures, and forests to coexist as parts of a single narrative, acknowledging the services, particularly the ecosystem services, that these activities provide not only locally but

also to society as a whole. We must avoid the risk of transhumance without sheep, which would render any potential UNESCO designation meaningless as the umpteenth external recognition deluding us into thinking we have accomplished something special and ultimate. It would be necessary in some cases to shift from the intangible to the tangible. The solution is to be found in real and sustainable processes that in a given territory can be initiated with originality and specificity, with the participation and leadership of its residents and local communities. (2021, 79)

Starting with these broad considerations, this essay will focus on a specific case: transhumance in Sardinia, a region where long-distance pastoral mobility vanished in the 1970s, becoming the focus of heritage initiatives since the early 2000s. The following section examines the transformations and rise of pastoralism in Sardinia, which was facilitated by the absence of pastoral mobility. The third section looks at recent projects and their actual impact



Photo 2. Transhumance over short distance, Lula, 2010. Photo credit: Sebastiano Mannia.

on rural development, while the final section summarizes the opportunities and challenges associated with transhumance, its representations, and narratives.

The findings of this research are based on ongoing ethnographic work spanning almost twenty years in the rural areas of Sardinia, particularly in the inland areas of the province of Nuoro. In this case, in addition to recent systematic fieldwork observations, I conducted informal conversations and several interviews with institutional figures, cultural operators, and social players.



Pastoralism and transhumance in Sardinia

The short story entitled “The Shepherd’s Dream” (1908) by the Sardinian Nobel laureate Grazia Deledda, narrates of a shepherd leaving the frigid pastures of his native highlands and descending with his flock into the plain. Although he has a large family in the mountain village, he is a nomad. On Christmas night, as he is guarding his flock, he falls asleep and dreams of his rustic wood and stone house where his loved ones live, of the hearth where a large black pot boils, and of a plenty of wood, lard, potatoes, and beans.

However, the *maggiore*—that is, the family head—fantasizes about being rich enough to hire a shepherd servant to look after the sheep:

Ah, so he will no longer need to be losing his hair over saving those sheep. The servant will oversee them, and even if one single sheep goes astray, woe unto him! He, the shepherd, very rich by then, will sit by the hearth, blowing on the fire with his staff of elder wood, looking into the pot from time to time, chatting with his women and spitting into the ashes. His beard will be white and long; he will be fat and red. His son-in-law will come, and both will start singing an impromptu contest, every now and again having a drink of wine and brandy. Ah, this will be the truly happy life! But how long will it take to achieve the reality of this dream, how many Christmases will still have to be spent away from the family, in the desolation of the nights on the plain! (Deledda 1996, 127–8)

To achieve his goal, in the dream the shepherd decides to murder his pasture neighbor, who, having sold his sheep to become a grain dealer, now keeps a bag full of money. The shepherd carries out the murder, but as he removes the stone that conceals the neighbor’s money, instead of the bag he finds a swarm of worms. Terrified and shaking, he searches the



whole shed, but the bag cannot be found: his crime has been useless. So he runs away. After wandering around for some time, he eventually returns to the sheepfold, only to find that his sheep have been stolen. He then begins his quest for the stolen animals out of desperation, but when he attempts at crossing the river in the point where he would have led the herd, he quickly disappears in the water.

Thus, the shepherd wakes up from the dream trembling, and, still oppressed by the nightmare, slowly returns to reality. Pervaded by sadness, he gets up and shakes himself off, haunted by remorse and by the feeling that the dream will bring him bad luck: it seems to him that he has actually committed the murder. In atonement for his sense of guilt, he decides that the next day he will tell everything to his neighbor but without mentioning the murder. They will eventually sacrifice a sheep and offer it to the poor of the village while they too will be eating together the juiciest mutton.

Ethical issues, the complex anthropological problem of evil and guilt, of guilt and punishment, of sacrifice and redemption, but also the anthropological, existential condition of the Sardinian shepherd or the precarious condition of the transhumant shepherd—these are all themes present in Deledda's novella. Delving into a dreamlike as well as a real dimension, the writer emphasizes the need for a change, for the transformation of the Sardinian shepherd and shepherding.

The underlying message of the novella is echoed in the scholarly literature on this subject. For example, in 1941, in one of the most important studies on Sardinian sheep farming, Maurice Le Lannou, wrote:

If the living conditions of the flocks changed, that is, if instead of being strictly nomadic, pastoralism were established on fixed pastures and around an actual farm, one could hypothesize a complete disappearance of transhumance in Sardinia. Only outside of Barbagia has the experiment been attempted, and only for large livestock. In the absence of any artificial shelter, however precarious,

the sheep of the central mountains have no other defense against the dangers of winter than the transhumance that takes them to the warmth of the lowlands. (1992, 172)⁷

Before and after the French geographer, other authoritative scholars, from different disciplines and using different methodologies and approaches, have discussed the herders' sedentarization and the rationalization of pastoral farms, which have contributed after World War II to stimulating the transition from mobile to fixed pastoralism, that is, the transfer of many farmers from the mountains to the plains and the sea coasts.⁸ Also, herders in inland and mountainous areas, which are primarily involved in pastoral mobility, have purchased land and agricultural machinery, built infrastructures, installed mechanical milking machines, and invested resources in the genetic selection of livestock (see Mannia 2014).

With the disappearance of the long transhumance routes⁹—for example, the Iglesias trail was about 100–150 km; the Oristanese was about 80–100 km; the Sarrabus was 100–120 km, with the herders leaving between October and December to return in May—sheep husbandry in Sardinia has taken a complex path of modernization, which began at the end of the nineteenth century with the establishment of the dairy industry from Lazio, today one of the most competitive pastoral sectors in Europe. The island currently raises 2,873,647 sheep, accounting for nearly 50 percent of the national stock,¹⁰ and there are more than 12,000 farms.¹¹ They produce nearly 300 M Liters of milk, i.e., 68.4 percent of Italy's production, placing Italy on the third position (21 percent) in Europe, behind Greece and Spain. The majority of this milk (approximately 50–55 percent) is used for the production of Pecorino Romano cheese, and over 95 percent of this cheese is made in Sardinia. Its traditional outlet is the American market, a capitalistic marketplace that over time has caused to entrench breeders' dependence on the price of milk, and is punctuated by periodic



crises (Mannia 2014; Zerilli and Pitzalis 2019).

During the twentieth century, Sardinian herders eventually transitioned from being cheese producers to becoming milk sellers and, as a result, contributed to the development of a productive monoculture based on Pecorino Romano cheese, marketed only along few channels. If, on the one hand, this massive transformation has resulted in the expansion of the island's ovine sector, it has also trapped breeders within a production system hardly replaceable by other production models. To summarize, the herders rely primarily on the market trends for Pecorino Romano, which determine the price of milk and its volatility (Idda, Furesi, and Pulina 2010; Mannia 2014; Zerilli and Pitzalis 2019).¹²



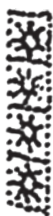
Post-transhumance between rural development and heritage-oriented focus

The abovementioned disruptive modernization is largely due to a shift in the mentality of Sardinian shepherds, which has resulted in the epochal change of traditional pastoralism and the subsequent disappearance of transhumance. Hence, we might ask: Why is it that in Sardinia—but obviously the question can be extended to other realities—new attention is being paid to the practice of transhumance, which was long opposed and regarded as a major impediment to the development of pastoralism on the island? How is it that pastoral mobility, which was once an exacting task associated with isolation, emotional loneliness, suffering, sacrifice, pain, and uncertainty, is now connected with tourist-economic development and sociocultural enhancement?¹³ What is the actual impact of such a renewed attention, or, in other words, what are the transhumance new routes, and who are its proponents? To summarize, why was transhumance once regarded as a sign of the backwardness of pastoral cultures

in mountainous areas, but has now been repurposed as a commercial item, an identity trait, and a useful and functional tool for certain forms of territorial marketing, most of which are based on the rhetoric of identity and pastoral authenticity, as well as on nostalgic lyricism looking towards a mythicized past? To be sure, the answers to these questions are not to be found in the short-lived excitement following UNESCO's inclusion of transhumance on the list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. In fact, attention had been paid to pastoral mobility in Sardinia since the early 2000s, by funding projects that have resulted in the identification of transhumance trails, preparation of tour guides, production of brochures and advertising materials, and installation of posters along the routes (Mannia 2010). I rather believe that the interest in revaluing rural spaces and landscapes, the promotion of new forms of sustainable tourism attached to them, the incentives to new models of pastoralism, and the revitalization of local food production are playing a major role in line with the new policies aimed at protecting and enhancing environmental and cultural heritage.¹⁴

Therefore, what is discussed here is inextricably tied to the new role that rural regions have taken on, or rather the functions that have been assigned to them, for they are no longer seen as peripheral spaces but as areas of considerable environmental, productive, and cultural importance. They are no longer solely agropastoral areas, since they can potentially open up to a wide range of other economic activities and stimulate new business opportunities.

As a result, the social dimension takes on greater significance, because it is the local population that encourages local development by boosting endogenous resources with the goal of sparking beneficial spillovers to the surrounding region. Growth is planned in accordance with the needs and expectations of local stakeholders, and their participation serves as the foundation for



development action. It is simple to comprehend the critical role they play, as well as the various forms of interaction and cooperation that exist between social groups and between them and non-local stakeholders. In this perspective,

local players (businesses, citizens, institutions) are being asked to develop strategies and development programs that will allow for the enhancement of local resources, particularly specific local resources, which are less likely to be repurposed in standardized and homogenized production processes, and are difficult to transfer to other economic sectors and/or other territories. These are not only resources that businesses can use directly for economic purposes, but also local, collective resources on which each business can rely in the value creation process, such as natural, landscape, and valuable artistic resources, as well as local traditions in their diverse forms. (Belletti and Marescotti 2020, 137)

This shift in perspective could indeed open up new horizons for transhumance as cultural and economic heritage, particularly in inland areas,¹⁵ but this can happen only if the role of pastoral communities as the primary resource for local development is prioritized.¹⁶

So far, the initiatives launched on the island have been primarily aimed at providing moments of recreation and entertainment, with the re-enhancement of transhumance practices being channeled through the promotion of hiking, horseback riding, or donkey rides along the old paths travelled by the flocks. Equestrian tourism is one of the main driving forces in the tourism industry, serving as an alternative to the inflated and standardized routes and aiming at developing the economy of the areas involved, as well as safeguarding and enhancing the island's rural, environmental, and cultural heritage. In this regard, the *Sardegna en Liberté* ecotourism agency's project is especially interesting. Its main goal is to promote eco-responsible, ethical, and fair tourism by enhancing rural land-

scapes through the reduction of tourism's environmental impact, encouraging the consumption and sale of local products, and promoting the role of communities and their culture. Among other things, this travel agency offers donkey trekking, an eight-day tour along the transhumance trails in the Ogliastra area. The director of the agency told me:

The idea of transhumance arose from the interest expressed by foreigners in this practice and in the pastoral world. Transhumance is a phenomenon that has always allowed sustainable activities, the fight against fires, the protection of the environment. Enhancing it today means enhancing the territory and local communities, improving the environment, promoting local products, helping the shepherds develop a brand of transhumance products with an added value. It is a political matter that should be made heard in Sardinia. In addition to the tours we offer, we have been working on a project for almost three years, and in 2019 we organized the first transhumance in which more than 100 people participated. In 2020, because of COVID, we could not repeat it and we created a live broadcast on Facebook: more than 12 thousand people followed the event. We hope to organize it again next year, in different periods and in different areas of Sardinia. (J.-L. M., interview of June 12, 2020)

The person who leads the *Sardegna en Liberté* transhumance is a 35-year-old young shepherd who said to me in an interview:

What I have been doing in October and May, I have been doing for 13 years every year. In 2019, a hundred tourists followed the flock, and the tour guide and I would answer their questions. After a couple of hours, at around midday, we arrived at the farm, where my relatives greeted us with drinks and sweets, and then we had lunch with sheep meat, roasted goat, and cheese. Many people are becoming interested in transhumance, especially since the rise of live streaming on



Facebook. We will do it again as soon as COVID is over. My friend and I were discussing doing a transhumance in May with my animals, and a longer one in June with his. (V. L., Arzana, interview of June 9, 2020)

The Centro Equestre Taloro in Fonni has launched the project *Alla riscoperta delle vie della transumanza dei pastori della Barbagia* [Rediscovering Barbagia shepherds' transhumance routes] with financial support from Regione Sardegna as well as private sponsors. This project consists of a horseback riding route that aims at rediscovering old paths beaten by transhumant shepherds. On October 29–31, 2021—but the event was repeated the following year—about twenty participants first listened to three shepherds from Fonni tell them about their personal experiences, recalling the sacrifices and dangers of transhumance. The group then rode the 80-kilometer route from Fonni to Siamaggiore on horseback—the historical arrival point of the Fonni transhumant shepherds. The riders travelled through the countryside, stopping for lunch and staying overnight in agritourism farms. In the words of one of the organizers:

The horseback excursions along the historic transhumance trails began in 2008. It all started with a hike with friends who wanted to pay a visit to a long-time transhumant shepherd friend who had settled in Campidano. On that occasion, I began to assess if the project was feasible, and went to see if the trails were still there. I then asked several elderly shepherds about the route followed by the flocks from the Fonnese territory to Siamaggiore. In 2009, together with Associazione cavalieri di Santa Barbara in Iglesias—a partnership between people from Fonni and Desulo—I organized another, more complex excursion. At that time, I considered drawing up a sightseeing itinerary and marketing it, given that my job is to organize horseback riding excursions. We organized the event until 2019, when we had to stop due to COVID-19. In 2021, we resumed

it, retracing almost exactly the ancient route of the transhumant Fonnese shepherds. (M. C., Fonni, interview of November 22, 2021)

The Centro Equestre's event attracted a low number of tourists, counting islanders and non-islanders. For the organizer, this is due to the people's lack of spirit of sacrifice and desire for too many comforts. Twenty-four people participated in the last excursion:

a few professionals, some horse lovers, some members of an association. They were especially motivated because I was able to schedule many activities. The day before, on the 29, they arrived at the Centro and could listen to the stories told by Fonni's elderly transhumant shepherds. This event provided a sort of cultural atmosphere, eliciting people's curiosity as well as their memories of past experiences. We left the next day and, cutting across Ovodda's territory, we reached the village of Tiana. From there, we went *su mullone*, the most challenging stretch for the transhumant shepherds: a steep passage particularly arduous for the ewes with their newborns. As you leave it behind you, more than half the job is done, people would say: "*si che olas su pettorru de Anna Poru, che brincat su mullone e che ses in Campidanu* [if you go past Anna Poru salita, you leave *su mullone* behind and you are in Campidano]." We traveled 42 kilometers on the first day. Friends brought us food for lunch, and we ate near the country church of the Angel of Neoneli, a historical resting place where transhumant herders would stop to milk, nurse the lambs, and rest. We stayed in a farmhouse for the night. On the way, we stopped at a few archaeological sites in Fonni and Ovodda, as well as Tiana's fulling mills. Stories of rustling and brigandage were told in the places where they occurred. Normally, I explain what we are seeing and have tour guides accompany me who go into great detail. The next day we continued towards the Santa Chiara dam, in the territory of Ula Tirso, and we had lunch in Fordongianus. When we arrived in Siamaggiore in the evening,





Photo 3. The transhumance of *Sardegna en Liberté*, Arzana, 2019.
Photo credit: Anna e Fabrizio Piroddi.



Photo 4. The transhumance of *Sardegna en Liberté*, Arzana, 2019.
Photo credit: Anna e Fabrizio Piroddi.

we stayed at an agritourism farm run by a transhumant shepherd. (M. C., Fonni, interview of November 22, 2021)

According to the organizer, one of the biggest drawbacks of the event is a lack of extensive accommodation facilities. To this end, he is considering introducing route changes or organizing a shuttle service to take the hikers to the farms or even selling his service “*nudu e crudu comente lu achian sos pastores*” [nitty-gritty as the shepherds would do], perhaps setting up a tent camp when the weather permits. According to M.C., the event

is a worthwhile initiative that is receiving positive feedback, but it has yet to wait before being marketed because it needs to be perfected, particularly in terms of the hospitality infrastructure. Furthermore, the excursion must take place at the end of October, as is customary; otherwise, it is pointless. Making it at a different time of year would result in a horseback riding experience that you could get anywhere else. I intend to hold it twice a year as an event to publicize. Then I want to actually move the livestock in order to create an authentic event rather than simply sell a product to tourists. It should allow for the creation of positive spin-offs on all other activities involved, such as local

craftsmanship, agribusiness, and others. It must serve as a catalyst for development rather than being just a hike—we can do that all year round. I want it to be a cultural event where people are willing to learn about transhumance. So, I’d be delighted if someone else joined in: “*sa collaborazione, sa zente, batit sa cosa, s’omine solu non battit mai nudda. Arrivat a unu puntu chi si devet firmare*” [things get done if you work together; a single person can’t get anything done, for he reaches a point where he must stop]. In the past, transhumance was very inconvenient, but it had to be done once a year. It was inescapable. People dreaded the day when they had to leave. During the winter, it was deserted because everybody would leave. Their return, after five-six months, was greeted with joy. In my opinion, today transhumance should become a brand for Fonni, for it has been historically home to transhumant shepherds. “*Prima sa transumanza achiat parte de s’ignoranza, como achet parte de sa cultura*” [Once transhumance went arm in arm with ignorance. Today, with culture]. (M. C., Fonni, interview of November 22, 2021)

Chronologically, the most recent project related to transhumance in the island is “CAMmini e BIODiversità: Valorizzazione Itinerari e Accessibilità per la Transumanza”

("CAMBIO-VIA") within the framework of the Programma di Cooperazione Transfrontaliera Interreg Italia-Francia Marittimo 2014–2020 [Maritime Cross-Border Cooperation Program Interreg Italy-France 2014–2020]. The project was officially launched on June 1, 2019, with the goal of preserving and promoting the natural and cultural heritage found along transhumant shepherds' traditional routes. This includes traditional products and manufacturing sites, with the goal of encouraging the development of new markets. In addition, the project intends to revitalize rural areas by establishing an economic model based on their social and environmental values. It promotes forms of sustainable tourism that involve local communities and offer high-quality services and products.

In the short term, the Province of Nuoro has been identifying, restoring, and making traditional transhumant shepherd routes more accessible. The emphasis has been on developing a hiking trail connecting the historically transhumant towns of "Tascus" in the Desulo region and "Su separadorgiu" in Fonni. The trail is approximately 13 kilometers long and takes about four-five hours to complete, with trail markers, information boards, and carriageway markings.



Concluding remarks

Studying the aforementioned cases has revealed, on the one hand, the initiatives' positive impact, while, on the other, it has highlighted the passive participation of the communities involved in the transhumance routes. Those working to add value to the practice of transhumance are, in fact, tour operators and isolated local associations that, in many cases, struggle to establish relationships and interact with the other local realities. So far, it seems that the inclusion of transhumance on the UNESCO's

list of Intangible Cultural Heritage has had little or no beneficial effect on, nor positive spillovers to the analysis, safeguard, enhancement, or even "exploitation" of that practice. Political institutions, which seem to be irrelevant and isolated, appear to have little interest and to be involved only to a limited extent. In contrast to other Italian realities, the international recognition of transhumance has had little impact on transhumance visibility and has only had minor effects on the promotion of "slow tourism" along transhumance trails and in farms and pastoral businesses (see Belliggiano, Bindi, and Ievoli 2021).¹⁷

To be sure, the limited participation of people who have personally experienced transhumance has certainly had an impact on the process we have described. In fact, what is missing in transhumance enhancement and revival are the shepherds—a lack that is likely to be explained by the memories that transhumance evokes, which strongly conflict with the new goals set for this practice. It is the shepherds who are familiar with the territory, being also the keepers of the attendant practices and knowledge, but there is no systematic and strategic project aimed at redefining and reusing transhumance with widespread awareness in rural development and enhancement. There is also a lack of sensitivity to the ecological and social dimensions inherent in new forms of tourism, as well as a lack of connection with pastoralism, the flocks, and pastoral culture in its broadest sense. Much more attention has been paid to identifying, cataloguing, and, at times, reclaiming the transhumance routes than to the revitalization of productive activities, sustainable territorial development, or forms of responsible tourism. It should also be noted that the accommodation facilities issues affecting the communities and, more broadly, the latter's poor tourist attractiveness are inextricably linked to many factors, including: the depopulation of most inland villages; the ongoing processes of abandonment of peripheral areas; the inability to repurpose the rural areas and

redirect their cultural and environmental heritage potential toward tourism; and the slight inclination to envisage new strategies of sustainable development. As has already been mentioned, what is especially missing is the awareness on the part of local stakeholders and communities that a region's resources, such as agribusiness, craftsmanship products, archaeological sites and landscapes, artistic and architectural heritage, cultural assets with possible positive spin-offs and value-generation capability form an interrelated system. The value thus generated,

which can be created within a local quality promotion strategy, stems from a network effect caused by the act of purchasing a given product in a specific context defined by a set of goods and services as well as environmental, cultural, and landscape resources. The appropriation of surplus by stakeholders is of a collective nature, based on network strategies that rest not only on economic interests but also on shared local values. (Belletti and Marescotti 2020, 137)

To summarize, the discussions around transhumance are plagued with rhetoric and slogans, but at present, there is no careful planning aimed at relaunching that practice. Equally rhetorical and evanescent appear to be the attendant projects concerning the local development, the enhancement of rural areas, the centralization of depopulated villages, the re-purposing of peripheral areas. While in the summer, Sardinia's beaches remain a popular tourist destination, the inland areas keep plodding on provisory and fragile forms of tourism and cultural development (see Mannia 2023). Also, if, on the one hand,

recent trends in sustainable, immersive, and slow tourism, as well as the development of hiking trails and proximity to local communities and landscapes, encourage and strengthen the regeneration of the most vulnerable areas, on the other hand, focusing

exclusively on the tourism market risks further engendering them, for they would depend on seasonality as well as on the environmental and social sustainability of hospitality activities. (Bindi 2021, 9–10)

The practice of transhumance along with its satellite activities could be useful and profitable tangible and intangible cultural heritage if properly reconsidered. In other words, they should not be taken as an object to be paraded because of the UNESCO-recognition aura, but as a cultural trait identifying areas that ought to be first and foremost experienced and familiarized with by their residents, even before tourists or travelers. This can be done, as has been mentioned earlier, by promoting projects aimed at enhancing the local areas' attractiveness in economic, but especially, in social terms.

As a result, transhumance, which is frequently invoked in the institutional discourse, is an empty label whose economic value as a practice does not appear to have been translated into systematic and far-reaching political and planning action to date. As has recently been pointed out:

[W]ithout a strong community awareness and a fully shared and participatory agenda, it is impossible to realize the desirable synergy between responsibility and sustainability, enabling the revitalization of the local productive practices and non-episodic actions of the cultural and tourist-related valorisation of local territories. (Belliggiano, Bindi, and Ievoli 2021, 17)



NOTES

1. English translation of <https://www.unesco.it/it/PatrimonioImmateriale/Detail/820>, last accessed on September 20, 2023. I would like to thank Francesco Caruso who translated this essay into English.

2. *Ibid.*

3. In the last years, a vast output of studies has been published on the anthropology of cultural heritage and the heritage processes, see, for example, the monographic issues of *Antropologia Museale* (2011; 2015-2016); see also Bonetti and Simonicca (2017); Bortolotto (2008); Dei (2018); Palumbo (2006).

4. On transhumance forms in Italy, in addition to the references in the bibliography, see: Bindi (2022); Mannia (2009-2010).

5. See <https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention>, last accessed on September 21, 2023.

6. See the recent single-topic issue of "I Georgofili," *Ripensare la transumanza*, 2022-IV (Nanni 2023).

7. Transhumance, according to the majority of the transhumant shepherds interviewed, has severely hampered the development of Sardinian pastoralism. For example, in Orgosolo, a now retired shepherd told me that the most important problem impacting local sheep herding is "su vinti 'e maju" or "May 20," i.e. the date when all the transhumant farmers would return to the village and take their herds to publicly owned land. According to my interlocutor, the custom of having to transfer the animals from November to May would have impeded the establishment of a more modern and rational pastoralism (G. C., Orgosolo, interview of December 28, 2015).

8. See, for example, the documents attached to the report drafted by the Parliamentary Committee of Inquiry on crime in Sardinia in 1972. In general, on transhumance and sedentariness there is ample literature: see, for instance, Angioni (1989), Bergeron (1967), Caltagirone (1986), Le Lannou (1992), Mannia (2010, 2014, 2022), Meloni (1984), Murru (1990, 1998), Olla (1969), Ortu (1988).

9. They were gradually phased out in the 1940s and 1950s, but the process was completed in the 1970s and 1980s, along with the widespread use of trucks for animal transportation. There are sporadic instances of transhumant shepherds even in the following decades (see Mientjes 2008, 205), but today there are very few who resort to pastoral mobility, and vans are used to greatly reduce the hours of travel in most cases. Even today, there are some breeders in Fonni who practice long transhumance, but with trucks. In Desulo, another historical transhumance site, each year, at the end of October the Locci brothers move their flocks on foot along a 45-kilometer route between Laconi and Meana Sardo. They return in May or June—on foot—accompanied by their children and grandchildren. On the other hand, short-distance transhumance, or the movement of flocks from one pasture to another, usually within the same territory and covering only a few kilometers, is still common (see Bergeron 1967; Le Lannou 1992; Meloni 1984, 1988). Short transfers are affected by seasonal climatic trends, but also by the availability of pastures and forage crops. In addition to owned and rented lands, communal lands are of particular importance: a pasture quota is assigned to each shepherd who requests it, through the payment of a sum of money that varies depending on the number of animals to be put in the pastures.

10. Data updated at June 30, 2023, https://www.vetinfo.it/j6_statistiche/#/report-pbi/89, last accessed on September 4, 2023.

11. <http://dati.istat.it/index.aspx?queryid=31627>, last accessed on September 4, 2023.

12. This phenomenon has recently received much attention. It is concerned with "the negative effects of agricultural modernization processes that have disconnected agriculture from the land where it is practiced, and have increased the producers' reliance on the global market, causing the erosion of agricultural income ('agricultural squeeze'). These effects have gotten worse since the 1990s, with the rise of what McMichael refers to as the food regime of transnational food corporations, which play an oligopolistic role in food processing and distribution, taking advantage of information asymmetries and rents. Small producers, on the other hand, have demonstrated a capacity for adaptation and resilience, employing a variety of resistant strategies and remaining steadfast to their local vocation, despite their precarious positions and the threats coming from the global market" (Farinella 2018, 113).

13. These are the opening lines of a book that was recently published in Sardinia: "There were only two seasons for those of us who were children in the 1960s. The first, the anguishing season, began in early November, when our fathers would depart for the distant plains, leaving behind a distressed and lonely village. The second season began on May 25, when the town of Desulo opened its pastures and our fathers returned with their flocks to the grassy mountains, filling the town with joy and life once again" (Liori 2021, 7). On the self-representation of Desulo's transhumant shepherds, see in particular Caltagirone 2005, who also discusses their "mass sedentarization," i.e., the complex transition from mobility to sedentism. The ethics of duty and sacrifice, "to which they say they have devoted their existence and to which they owe their social recognition" (Caltagirone 2005, 328) have facilitated that process. Thus, a shepherd interviewed in 1984 affirmed: "What we earned, we Desulo people, we earned it through our strength of will [...] We, Desulesi, are admired. Iglesias, too, admired the Desulesi. There is no Gavoi or Fonnesi, there is no one like the Desulesi. So, many people left [due to transhumance] in the hope of saving their patrimony, braving the wind and snow and leaving their children. But when a mother from Desulo would send her husband and a small sum of money to Campidano, she would also send some of their children along. Would your mothers do the same?" (*Ibid.*, 328-9). Rhetoric aside, "the ethics of sacrifice has evolved into an 'epic' of sacrifice that does not retreat in the face of nature's adversity or the most deeply rooted local social conventions that state that children should not leave their mother's side. Those who speak individually in these narratives actually identify with the entire community: each shepherd speaks on behalf of them all, and their achievements are displayed as the group's accomplishments" (*Ibid.*, 329).

14. These considerations do not apply only to Sardinia, see Ballacchino and Bindi (2017); Bindi (2019a, b, 2020); Fossati and Nori (2017); Nori (2016, 2018); Verona (2016). On multifunctionality and rural development, see Balestrieri, Cicalò, and Ganciu (2018); Cois (2020); Idda and Pulina (2006); Meloni (2006); Meloni and Farinella (2013); Meloni and Pulina (2020); Tola (2010).

15. On the development of inland areas, see Carrosio (2019); Cois (2020); De Rossi (2018); Marchetti et al. (2017); Meloni (2015).

16. Over the past decades, the debate over the protection and enhancement of cultural heritage and landscape has sparked new approaches to involve local institutions and communities in the



management of human and territorial resources. In particular, the *Gruppi di Azione Locale* [Local Action Groups], together with local associations and political bodies, have intervened with programs targeted at a new development of rural areas, pastoralism-related practices and identities, and transhumance routes. For a more in-depth look at these subjects and the linked process of promotion of local heritage, see the attached bibliography.

17. The perspectives and motivations of the participants, on the other hand, are particularly significant, revealing a range of interconnected interests: knowledge of rural places and landscapes, material and immaterial cultural emergences, local culinary art, but also familiarity with the practices and knowledge of the people who shaped those territories, made those emergences live, and created that culinary art.



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