

PASTORALISM CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AND NATURE CONSERVATION: THE CASE OF “MONTI AURUNCI” REGIONAL PARK (CENTRAL ITALY)

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In Southern/Central Italy, as elsewhere, shepherds and their livestock have coevolved in unique ways to the extent that grazing patterns, animals' behavioral traits and pastureland characteristics closely impinge on each other (Novellino 2011).



As of now, behavioral traits of livestock raised by the last transhumant shepherds in southern/central Italy have much in common with that of their wild populations (e.g. ability to defend themselves from predators, instinct to seasonally go on migration, capacity to feed on a large number of non-cultivated plants, etc.). This collective heritage, selected over hundreds of years, cannot be conserved outside of the socio-cultural and ecological context from which it has originated (cf. Ilse Köhler-Rollefson and the Life Network 2007).



On the other hand, governments and conservation organizations alike, often tend to associate mobile grazing and transhumances with backwards and precarious life-styles, potentially inimical to environmental conservation. As a result, shepherds are often being asked to move away from protected areas or, at the best, their activities are being subject to various degrees of restriction.

However, evidence indicates that the progressive abandonment of pastoralism in Italy is rather contributing

to the erosion of locally adapted livestock breeds and to the transformation of grazing dominated landscapes into fire-dominated landscapes (cf. Rackham, O. 2003).



Research carried out in the Mediterranean (e.g. Italy and Spain) has shown that those places where pastoralists have been forced to move are now more vulnerable to soil erosion. This, in turn, has created more uniform environments where diversity of plant species has dramatically decreased (de Lillis, M. and M. Testi. 1992). More specifically, evidence indicates that the exclusion of sheep and goats from the environment allows flammable vegetation (grasses and shrubs) to grow up and accumulate fuel. As a result, biologically rich pastures are now changing into fire-dominated landscapes, to the benefit of a prosperous fire-fighting industry (cf. Rackham, O. 2003). Shepherds, in turn, are being blamed for spreading fires.





The positive socio-ecological trends of pastoralism in Italy and the Mediterranean cannot be easily summarized. However, some common positive features can be outlined as it follows: **1)** livestock grazing contributes to reduce fire events and control the growth of undesirable fire-prone species; **2)** livestock browsing can stimulate trees to branch and develop a more vigorous canopy, and contribute to a better development of the root system; **3)** mobile livestock play an important role in the germination and dispersal of seeds; **4)** moving livestock contributes to the maintenance of soil fertility through the production of organic manure; **5)** controlled fire can contribute to the creation of highly diverse and biologically valuable ecosystems with thriving plant and animal species that could not survive in 'natural' forest (Novellino 2007a).

The primary objective of this presentation is to analyze some of these trends in the context of the "Monti Aurunci" Regional Park (Central Italy) taking into account also other aspects of shepherds-related traditional knowledge such as basket weaving, wild plants management, utilitarian and aesthetic criteria of breeds' selection (Novellino 2007a, 2007b, 2007c).



Since its establishment in 1997, the "Monti Aurunci" Regional Park has been confronted with the conflict of interests between the implementation of protected areas and the practice of local shepherds. Moreover, the increase of wolfs population in the area (celebrated as a success by most environmentalists) has been perceived by the shepherds as a curse (Novellino 2007a).



In response to such conflicts and contrasting perspectives, in 2007, local shepherds have constituted their own organization: the Alliance of Aurunci and Ciociari Shepherds (APAC) [<http://www.pastori-apac.org/CHISIAMO.htm>] to better negotiate their interests with park authorities and especially, the continuation of traditional grazing activities and transhumances in

the context of protected areas. APAC representatives are now in the process of establishing audio-visual exchanges with other pastoralists groups around the globe, especially with those living in Kyrgyzstan (see related videos: <http://vimeo.com/grassrootsvoices>). Such exchanges are based on the selection of topics and issues dealing with biocultural diversity that are chosen and developed by the people themselves through participatory and jointly created videos.



Overall, such exchanges promotes the sharing of experiences as a way of 1) fostering reflection and joint actions through the establishment of strategic alliances; and 2) addressing common problems regarding pastoralists' rights and claims over cultural landscapes. The envisaged goal is to enable the production of jointly produced video materials that could be used to exert pressure at a national and international policy level.

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