

Vocational education and training for transhumance practitioners

TRANSFARM



A transhumant herd in Piazzola sul Brenta, near Padova (photo: M. Fabbrizioli)

NATIONAL REPORT – ITALY

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1 Introduction

The Italian peninsula has a marked internal geographic diversity both latitudinal and longitudinal, and a complex political history, which saw the country divided into several small independent states until 1870, with different languages, laws, traditions, cultures. This has contributed to the development of several forms of transhumance, with unique characteristics, names, habits, fates, that conserve its diversity today. At the same time, this diversity makes it very difficult to accurately describe the current state of transhumance at the national level. For this reason, some premises are necessary. Firstly, as it will be explained later, for the purpose of this National Report, we found convenient to distinguish between a Northern Alpine - Po valley area and a Southern Mediterranean area, that are the main areas in which transhumance is still practised after the decline of the second half of the 19th century (fig. 1). This geographic partition of the peninsula seems very useful for practical reasons. Therefore, chapters of this report reflect it, by focusing on the Alps and on the Mediterranean area separately. Sardinia, that has a glorious and well documented story of transhumance (Le Lannou, 1941), as well as Sicily, are treated with Mediterranean regions.

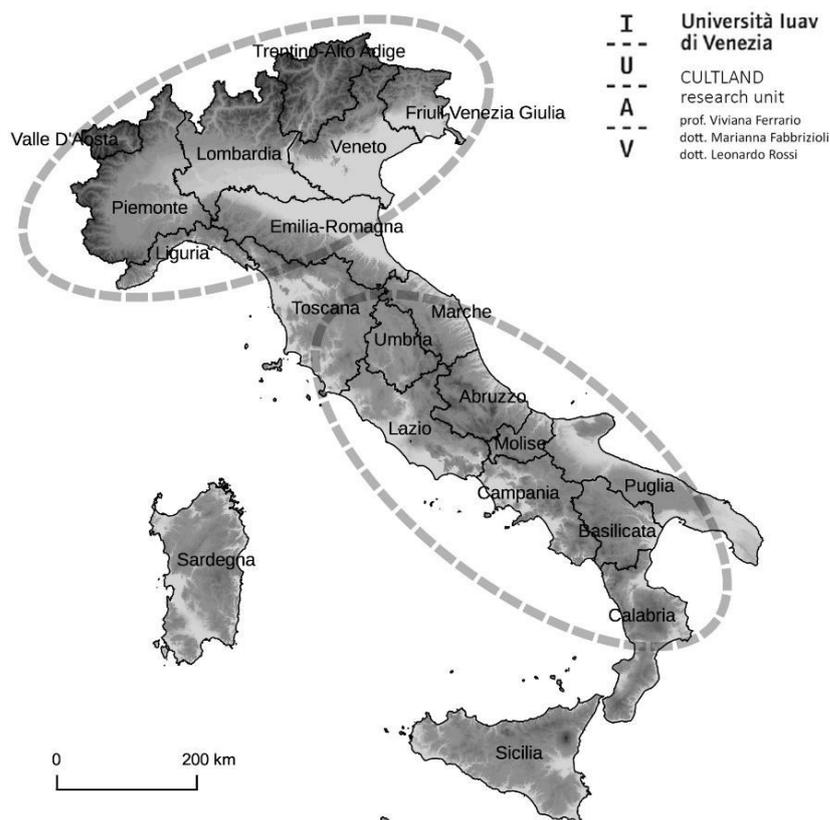


Fig. 1: Alpine - Po valley area (Northern regions) and Mediterranean area (Southern regions) where transhumance is still practised the most today in Italy (map by V. Ferrario).

Secondly, due to the morphological and historical complexity, literature about transhumance in Italy generally has a regional or even sub regional focus. Therefore, we have taken into account several regional studies, from the 19th century onwards.

In the case of the Alpine area, we have also considered the results of fieldwork in North-Eastern Italy, which is one of the areas crossed by transhumant practitioners. Interviews were made directly on the field, near the herds, focused on the herders, their problems, their backgrounds and motivations. It has been used also the description of the results of some interviews made by Silvio Dal Mas in his degree thesis (2018), about shepherds crossing Friuli's plain, in the North-East of Italy. It must be therefore considered that while for the Alpine area it has been possible to integrate literature with fieldwork results, for the Mediterranean area this report is exclusively based on scientific and grey literature.

Finally, it is important to point out that Italy, together with Austria and Greece, is one of the Countries involved in the UNESCO nomination about Transhumance, which in 2019 entered in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Dossier UNESCO, 2019).

2 Current situation of transhumance

In Italy, transhumance involves sheep, goats, cattle, a small number of buffalos and occasionally horses, with the cattle's transhumance being the largest in terms of livestock involved: in fact, according to 2021 National Livestock Registry's stats, there are 4904 cattle livestock, with 215.388 animals, against 2922 herds of goats and sheep, with 265.999 animals (it is worth noting that there are by far more sheep than goats, with the first being around 236.000, and second 30.000). These are, anyway, small numbers if compared to the total amount of bovines, ovines and goats breed in Italy (fig. 2).

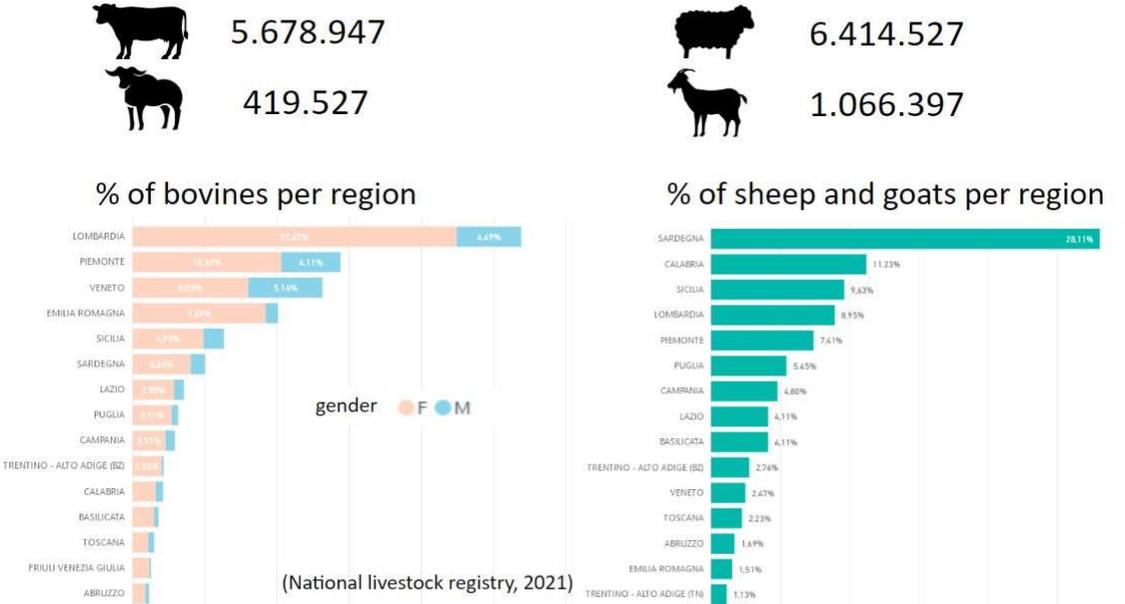


Fig. 2: The amount of bovines, sheep and goats in Italy and per region. (L. Rossi and V. Ferrario, modified from National Livestock Registry)



Fig. 3: Transhumant flock along a canal in the Veneto plain (photo by M. Fabbrizioli)

Traditionally, transhumance occurs both in Northern Italy, between the Alps and the vast Po valley (Pianura Padana), and in Central and Southern Italy, where herders move across Apennine mountains following ancient droves (locally called 'tratturi').

A major part of cattle transhumant herds are in Northern Italy, and especially in Piedmont (1979) and Valle d'Aosta (1845), regions in which transhumance is traditionally practised; by far less numerous but still relevant is the number of cattle breedings in Sicily (380), the third region per number of this kind of transhumance; all the other regions present less than 200 breedings (fig. 4).

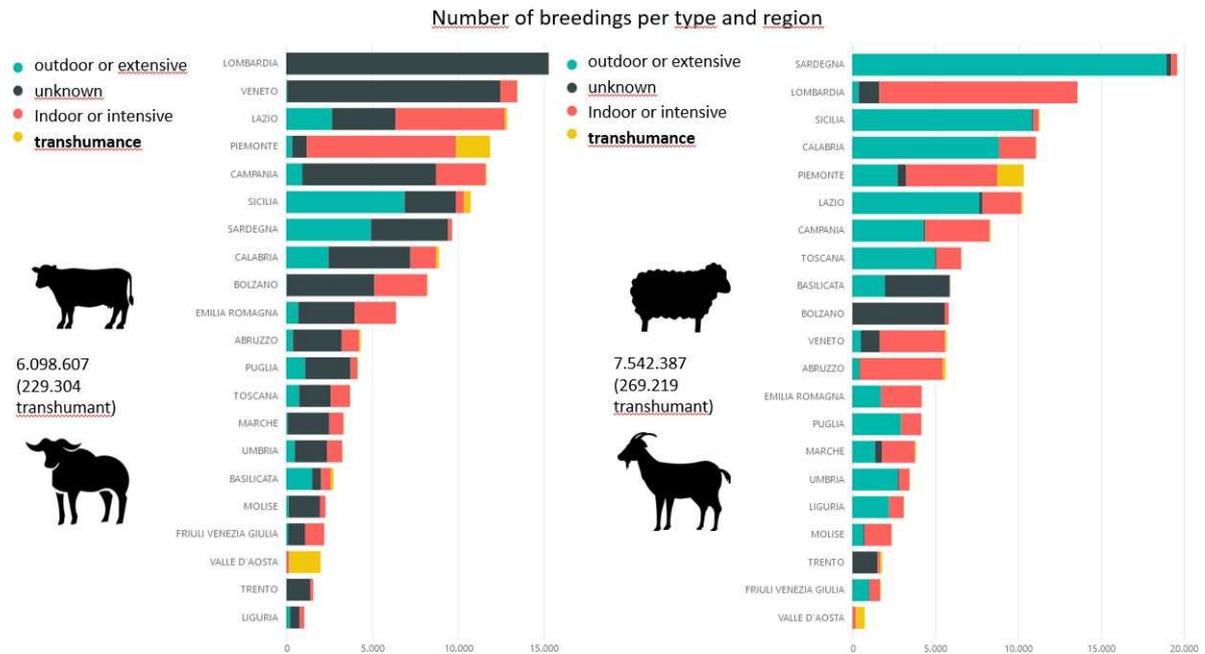


Fig. 4: The amount and distribution of bovines, sheep and goats breeding (both transhumant and stable) (L. Rossi and V. Ferrario, modified from: National Livestock Registry 2021)

In the case of sheep and goats, quite interestingly, the major part of transhumant herds are still in Piedmont (1609) and Valle d'Aosta (534), and they are followed distantly by Abruzzo (164), Trentino (129) and Veneto (98) (fig. 3 and 5).



Fig. 5: A shepherd and his herd in Veneto, near Padova (photo by M. Fabbrizioli).

It's worth already observing that this information regards only the distribution of the registered locations of these herds. Because of their nomadic nature, transhumant herds move also to other regions throughout the year, and for example many breedings registered in Trentino, during winter, graze in Veneto (and during summer, instead, they go back to the mountains).

All these animals are kept mostly for meat and milk productions (fig. 6): The traditional product of sheep, wool, is today considered as a special waste, because it hasn't a commercial value. The herders must pay for its disposal.

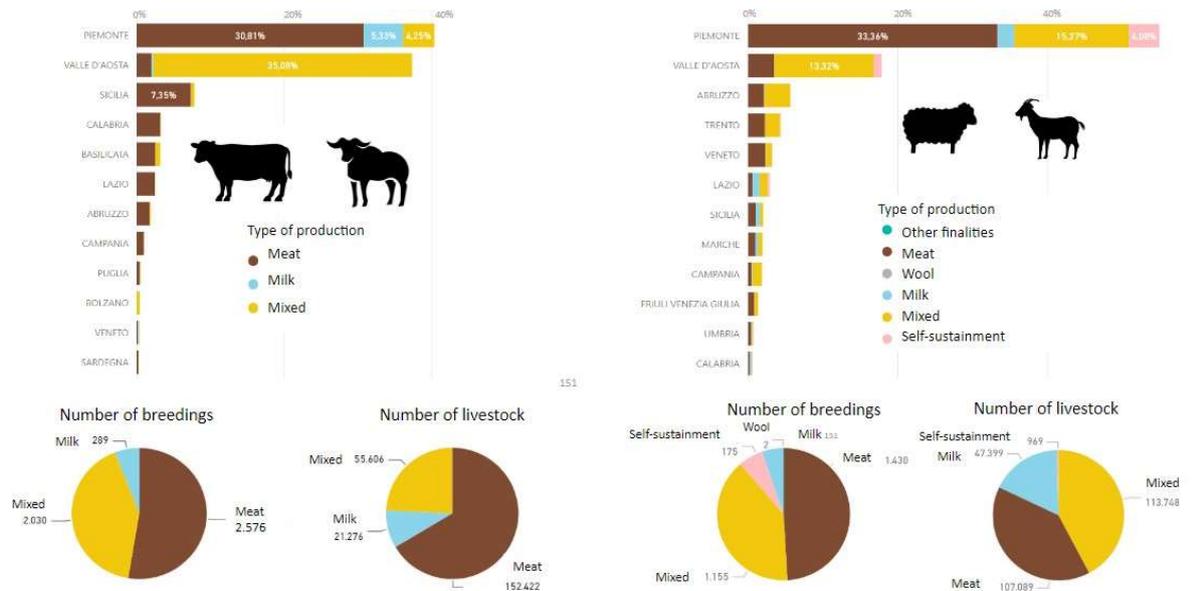


Fig. 6: Transhumant production and livestock divided per production (L. Rossi and V. Ferrario, modified from National Livestock Registry 2021)

2.1 Number of practitioners and their sociology

While an official comprehensive data about the number of transhumance practitioners in Italy is not available, an estimation can be made indirectly by the number of transhumant herds, which in total are about 7800. Therefore, we can estimate that there are at least 8000 transhumant practitioners, but the number is probably too low, because at least half of the herds are guided by the owner and an employed worker (but often there is more than one employee).

These practitioners are shepherds and drovers, and often they move with their families (UNESCO dossier, 2019); historically, there were many families whose tradition was to pass transhumance's knowledge from father to son, but today many herders don't descend directly from a shepherds' family, and sometimes they are a sort of "2.0 rural and herder peoples" (Bindi, 2019). The situation is fairly mixed: in our case study, involving eight herders, at least seven of them said that their parents weren't transhumant herders. In Silvio Dal Mas' study, instead, which focused on seven herders in Friuli's plain, every shepherd except one was the descendant of a traditional family of transhumance practitioners (Dal Mas, 2018).

Another interesting phenomenon is the diffusion of migrants from Africa and Eastern Europe as employees in the herds, a result of out-migration and ageing of the traditional pastoral population. This kind of foreign and often non-formalised shepherds is a specific niche of the increasing presence of non-EU workers in Italian countryside, which in 2011 was estimated as representing 10 % of all rural workers in Italy (Coldiretti, 2011; Veneto Lavoro, 2011; Pardi and Nori, 2011).

2.2 Kind of transhumance

In his *European patterns of transhumance*, E. Davies (1941) proposed to distinguish between “Alpine” and “Mediterranean”, instead of “horizontal” and “vertical” transhumance¹. According to the English geographer, to understand transhumance patterns one must consider its relationship with local climate and local farming practices, while the vertical/horizontal classification “often groups together movements which arise from different causes and have diverse economic and social implications” (Davies, 1941, p. 156). It must be said that this proposal seems adapt to the Italian peninsula, where a real “horizontal” transhumance can hardly be recognised and eventually only in the longest *tratturi* in the Apennines. In Italy, due to its morphology, its history and its population density, all the slopes and the rare lowlands have been intensely cultivated for ages, while the coastal wetlands (where the only really horizontal transhumance used to be practised in Italy in the antiquity) have been almost completely drained for agricultural purposes before the second half of 20th century. Therefore, if we want to keep the vertical/horizontal classification, we could say that in Italy transhumance is today mostly vertical, since herders always cover a conspicuous difference in altitude, and the altitude itself is always crucial in herders’ choices because of its difference of climate and vegetation.

Vertical transhumance is practised in diverse and distant areas, such as the Alpine regions, Sardinia, Tuscany (from Apennines to the Maremma region), Abruzzo (from the Apennines to the seaside) and even Calabria (from the Sila and Aspromonte mountains to the coast (Susmel, Fabro, Filacorda, 2004; Bevilacqua, 1988) with diverse patterns.

According to Davies, in Central and Southern Italy “the coastal lowlands are best adapted to the cultivation of winter crops and summer fruits, which has long been the typical economy here. Where the traditional economy has maintained or re-established itself, pastoral farming has been

¹ “The fundamental factor underlying Mediterranean transhumance is the desert-border conditions of climate which prevail on the lower lands in summer. Then the grass becomes parched, but the cooler and moister uplands provide pasture, and the animals are driven into the hills. In winter, the vegetation of the lower lands revives under temperate rainy conditions, but the uplands become inhospitable, and the animals are driven to the lowlands. The patterns of Alpine transhumance arise from different circumstances. Here transhumance is more closely related to cultivation, and the movements of livestock to alpine pastures arise from the need for clearing the lower-lying land for cultivation, especially of fodder crops and hay, to provide winter feed for the animals during the cold winter, when they must be kept indoors. The schemes of Alpine transhumance are thus not so much movements in search of available pastures rendered fleeting by facts of climate, as in the Mediterranean regions, nor are they due to the seasonal uselessness of the lower land, but are, rather, movements due to the greater usefulness of the lower acres for crops, to the need for using the alpine pastures in summer, and to the necessity for growing, in summer, fodder for winter when alpine grazing is not available” Davies, 1941, p. 155.

confined to the higher lands where conditions are not favourable to tillage. These higher lands are unable to support livestock in winter, and they have shallow soils which make it difficult to grow fodder crops for winter keep; the animals are driven downhill to the cultivated lowlands for the winter and occupy hired grazings” Davies, p. 157. The famous D’Annunzio poem “Shepherds” (1903) is dedicated to this kind of transhumance in the Abruzzo region.

September, let's go. It is time to migrate.
Now in the land of Abruzzi my shepherds
leave the sheepfolds and go to the sea:
they descend to the wild Adriatic
that is green like the pastures of the mountains.

They longly drank at the alpine
spring, so that the flavor of native water
may dwell in their exiled hearts as a comfort,
and deceive at length their thirst on the way.
They renewed their hazel crook.

And so they walk the ancient path to the plain,
almost as through a silent river of grass,
following the vestiges of the forefathers.
Oh, voice of whom for the first time
knows the shimmering of the sea!

By the coastline presently walks
the flock. Motionless is the air.
The sun lights up the blonde living wool
that almost does not differ from the sand.
Splashing, stamping, sweet sounds.

Alas, why am I not with my shepherds?

(English translation: literaryjoint.blogspot.com)

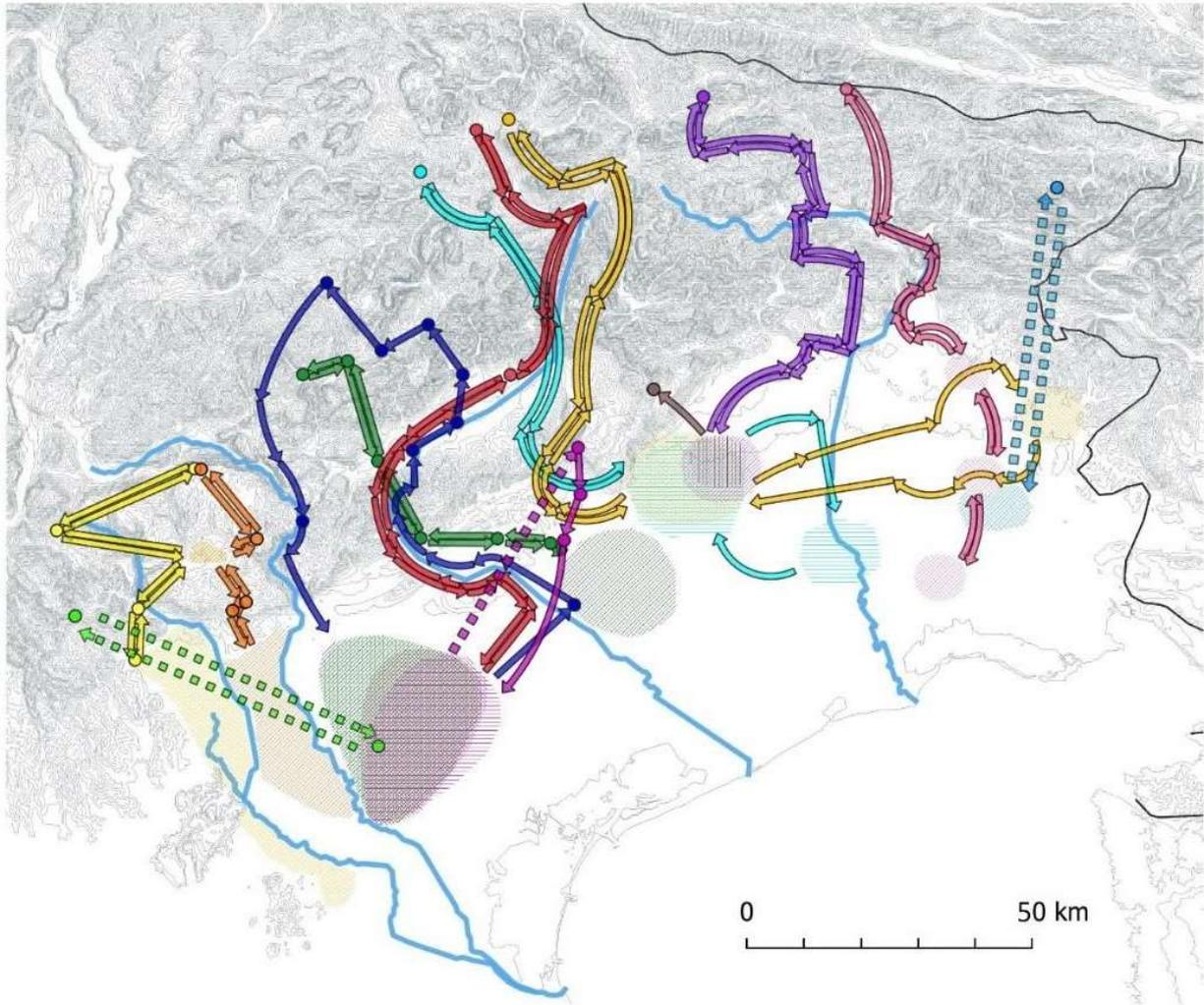
Herders and their livestock migrate to distant summer pastures from winter pastures close to their homes, in the Apennines (UNESCO, 2019). These large distances are covered mostly via some very old grassy sheep routes, called *tratturi*, which used to connect, and somewhere still connect, Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Puglia and Basilicata regions (Minotti et al., 2018). The original length of this network was of about 3000 km, and it involves several *tratturi*, together with other narrow routes crossing them called *tratturielli* and *bracci* (Mastronardi et al., 2021). These drove routes, which have been used for centuries, played a key role in the history of these lands, and rural and urban settlements were developed according to their direction, and in their intersections (Meini et al., 2014). This is particularly true in Molise’s case, where much of the current structure of urban

settlements originates from the pattern of *tratturi* (Mastronardi et al., 2014). This region, moreover, has also the broadest historic traces of these routes (Meini et al., 2014).

In Northern Italy two main pattern of transhumance can be identified.

A first pattern is technically called “monticazione”, and it is the movement of animals (bovines in particular) in the summer, from the bottom to the top of the same (alpine) valley, to exploit high-altitude pastures (alpeggio). These temporary high-altitude farms, often belonging to village communities, are called malghe or casère, and they are sometimes very ancient (Zendri et al., 2016). While in the 19th and 20th century the “monticazione” used to be practiced with all kinds of animals (and particularly with bovines to produce summer high-altitude milk and cheese), nowadays dairy cows in the Alps stay in their stable all year round and breeders only take only take heifers or cows bred for meat in the alpeggi during the summer. Bovine summer transhumance can also take place between the Po-plain and the mountains around, covering often more than 50 kilometres.

A second one involves ovine herds moving in winter from the Pre-Alpine mountains to the lowlands in the Po valley, where animals graze over the fields in-between two crops (for example wheat and corn) or along the main rivers. Due to the minor pressure on high-altitude pastures in the Alps, today, in Northern Italy, transhumance practitioners seem to practice a sort of intermediate kind of vertical Alpine transhumance: they keep moving the whole year, grazing in the plain in winter, and renting high-altitude pastures in the summer, never stopping in stables of their own property. A major part of the herders interviewed in the North-Eastern Italy case study practices this type of transhumance; in the image below (fig. 8) are showed their routes, with the herders interviewed in our case study indicated with numbers, and those in S. Dal Mas’ research indicated in capital letters.



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Transhumance in the study area - the herders' routes in North-East Italy

→ herder's route

• landmark crossed by the herd

▨ pasture in the plain

••• motorized animal transportation

— main rivers

herder 1

herder 5

herder A

herder D

herder 2

herder 7

herder B

herder E

herder 3

herder 8

herder C

herder F

herder 4

Fig. 8: The routes followed usually by the herders interviewed in spring 2022 (map by M. Fabbrizioli).

2.3 Type/purpose of transhumance

Today transhumance is almost everywhere a professional activity: all the herders interviewed in North-Eastern Italy consider transhumance their primary and only job, which gives them the economic resources they need: several of them started by keeping a very small herd, while studying or doing another work, but as soon as they acquired a consistent number of livestock, they left all their other occupations. The modern shepherds view themselves as entrepreneurs, which must take decisions of management of their capital, the herd; moreover, they are exposed to all the risks of this particular kind of 'entrepreneurship', and therefore they must be able to modify the way of conducting the activity (family, employees) according to the present's needs, even by adopting new technologies and changing 'some traditions' (De Marchi, 2009).

Among the herders interviewed one moves his sheep by van for a part of his route, and all of them make use of cars, campers where they sleep; some of them, moreover, communicate and share photos via social networks. Almost all of them have a small number of donkeys and mules, which traditionally had the same function of modern-day pick-ups (to bring goods and new-born lambs, which can't already walk): today shepherds keep these animals more for folkloristic reasons than real needs, since for all the other functions they use cars (except in case of some very steep mountains); there's still one case, however, where one herder still puts the new-born lambs inside some sacks hanging by the donkeys' backs, as in the traditional way.

These peculiarities reflect one particular tendency among the shepherds, which De Marchi describes as the choice to 'adhere to the imaginary which people project on them, stressing their bonds with past and tradition, as in clothing' (Ibid., p. XXVII), or in the use of almost obsolete ways of transport.

This way of showing themselves in traditional manners to people is counterbalanced by transhumant herders' quest for a certain "invisibility", as a form of resistance and protection against a society, which often consider them as unwanted intruders (all the problematics and competitions deriving from this opposition will be described later). This results in a situation, common at least in the Po valley, where often transhumance practitioners and other people live in two different spheres, ignoring each other at least until livestock must cross some major roads and block traffic.

In Southern Italy the situation is, by some aspects, different: here there are some quite well-known realities, where transhumance is coherent to a system which still recognises to a certain extent this practice as part of local identity. This is, for example, the case of Carrino Brothers' farm, in Lucera, in Puglia. They practice transhumance of sheep, between Apennines and Tavoliere in a multifunctional agricultural context, with wheat cultivation and breedings of cows and buffalos. This family's work and effort in local people's awareness has produced, over the years, a return of interest in transhumance in local decision makers, from the creation of a successful Festa della transumanza, to the contribution to the UNESCO candidacy (Rinella and Rinella, 2021). Something similar could be said for the Colantuono family's case, a farm practising transhumance, which in the last years became the subject of a number of articles in national newspapers, thanks also to a careful building of the brand [[http1](#)].

If the relevance of transhumance for the preservation of cultural heritage is therefore being acknowledged at least in Central-Southern Italy, the key role in maintaining landscape is still far by being taken in consideration: this passage is quite important, and as wrote De Marchi in the above quoted article, “the future of vagant activity depends necessarily on the comprehension and acknowledgment of social and ecological benefits which this activity produces on territory” (p. XXIX).

2.4 Available knowledge

Academic knowledge about transhumance in Italy comes mostly by a literature, which is primarily regional: this fragmentation reflects the diversity of transhumance in the country, both regarding their features and the different values attributed to it. Regional literature appear to have been produced since the second half of 20th century, and vary from more divulgative publications to more academic works. In the bibliography collected for this report there are examples of both kinds of literature: there are local works like “La pastorizia transumante del Feltrino” (1982), a collection of essays by several scholars and local experts, published by the Centre for documentation of popular culture of *Comunità Montana Feltrina*, and at the same time there are also different sources, like “La transumanza in Calabria” (1988), which was addressed to an academic environment. These very specific works allow deep insight in many particularities of the different local and regional variants of transhumance. Being literature about transhumance at the national level very scarce, for the general information of this report it has been necessary to use the statistics furnished by the National Database of National Registry, instituted by the Health Ministry in the National Centre of Service, based in Institute “G. Caporale”, Teramo: These information can be found in the site of Sistema Informativo Veterinario (SIV), which can be found in the websites’ section of bibliography [http2].

With the entrance of transhumance in the UNESCO list there has been an increase in publications about transhumance with a more interregional focus, following the work made for the candidacy report; and a number of academic projects have started as well, in the last years. ASVR Moligal, (Agency of Rural Development, a Local Action Group situated in Molise) for example, is involved in a research project called “Rete dei tratturi regionali della Transumanza” (Net of regional drove roads of Transhumance), developed by the Italian Geographic Society, with the aim of studying and piecing together the heritage of transhumance and its dynamics in Lazio’s Appenines [http3]. University of Molise, instead, has joined an Erasmus + research called ‘EARTH - Education, Agriculture, and Resources for Territories and Heritage’, with other European and South American countries: in this frame six best practices were found, and they are now part of the publications produced by this project [http4]. The general coordinator, professor L. Bindi, is involved also in ‘TraPP / Rutas PatagonAppenninicas’, an international project of compared research between drove roads in Appenines and rutas of transhumance in Argentinian Patagonia [http5]. These figures have worked as well in the development of two other important results: one is the Pastoralist map, supported by the League for Pastoral Peoples and Endogenous Livestock Development, and which presents 7 profiles about Italian forms of transhumance [http6]; and the other is declaration by United Nations, last year, of 2026 as the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists [http7].

Other two sources of knowledge come from festivals and social events related to transhumance and their websites, and from museums dedicated to the matter, as it will be described in the following chapter. It's worth noting, anyway, that transhumance-related events appears to be in decline, and some of them stopped definitively during the Covid-19 pandemic.

2.5 Awareness about transhumance

Even though, according to transhumant practitioners, the real problems and challenges of transhumance still remain unknown to almost everybody except herders, in the last years there has been quite a renewed interest in the wide public for what remains of traditional transhumance.

The two most evident manifestations of this trend are surely the inscription of transhumance in the National Register of Rural Landscapes, Agricultural Practices and Traditional Knowledges in 2017 (National Register in the followings), and the subsequent entry in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2019 (UNESCO list in the followings) (fig. 9).

The candidacy to the National Register was prepared by A.Svi.R Moligal (above mentioned). This is why, despite the general name (La Transumanza), the candidacy is in truth addressed only to Southern Italy's transhumance, and in particular to the five regions traditionally crossed by tratturi: Abruzzo, Molise, Puglia, Campania, Basilicata (Scheda registro, 2017). This practice will remain inside the National Register until it will maintain the traditional features which survived at the moment of the entrance, and which are threatened by "the standardisation of productive processes" (Motivazione di entrata, 2017).

UNESCO's dossier written for transhumance has instead a more national character. The candidacy was supported by Italy, Greece and Austria, and the dossier describes some practices of all the three countries. The list of communities and representatives concerned in fact is quite wide and comprises associations and names from many regions. However, there are some areas missing, as is the case of Veneto, and in fact the information inserted isn't representative of all the different forms of Italian transhumance.

The UNESCO candidacy was supported by the Ministry of Agriculture, but as it can be seen by the National Register example, the interest for transhumance is more a bottom-up process, coming from the citizens gathering in associations, usually of amateurs, interested in preserving the remainings of transhumance's practices: this is especially true in Southern and Central Italy, where there are dozens of small museums of transhumance (especially in Abruzzo) and many associations, such as the Associazione Tratturi e Transumanze, or the project Le vie dei tratturi, supported by the Chambers of commerce of all the regions between Toscana and Abruzzo regions.

LA TRANSMANZA

CANDIDATURA PRESENTATA DALL'A.SVI.R. MOLIGAL



Il concetto di Pratica della Transumanza è complesso ed applica la conoscenza e la cultura dell'utilizzo delle risorse naturali in modo sostenibile per realizzare prodotti, alimentari e non, nel rispetto dell'ambiente, della natura, del benessere animale ed umano.

[SCARICA IL DECRETO DI ISCRIZIONE \(97.12 KB\)](#)

[MENZIONE D'ISCRIZIONE "TRANSMANZA" \(133.29 KB\)](#)

[SCARICA IL DOSSIER \(6.77 MB\)](#)

[SCARICA L'ARCHIVIO FOTOGRAFICO](#)

L' A.Svi.R. Moligal presenta la pratica agricola: La Transumanza

by EmbedSocial

Fig. 9: Transhumance has been inscribed in the Italian National Register as a “traditional agricultural practice” in 2017 [http8]

The screenshot shows the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage website. The header includes the UNESCO logo and the text 'Intangible cultural heritage'. A search bar is visible with the text 'Search ICH website' and 'Webpages, elements, decisions'. The navigation menu includes 'NEWS', 'EVENTS', 'CONVENTION', 'LISTS', 'SAFEGUARDING', 'ACTORS', 'THEMES', and 'COUNTRY'. The main content area features a video player with a play button and a progress bar. To the left of the video player is a sidebar with sections: 'Nomination file No. 01470', 'Decision', and 'Periodic reporting'. The main text area contains the title 'Transhumance, the seasonal driving of livestock along migratory routes in the Mediterranean and in the Alps' and the subtitle 'Austria, Greece and Italy'. Below the subtitle, it states 'Inscribed in 2019 (14.COM) on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity'. The video player shows a scene of a herd of sheep in a mountainous landscape.

Fig. 10: Transhumance has been inscribed in the UNESCO list in 2019 [http9]

Awareness about transhumance is often raised by local voluntary Associations. In Northern Italy it's worth mentioning the Associazione pastoralismo alpino, in Bergamo, which organises the Festival del pastoralismo [http10], gathering in a period between late September and the beginning of October both herders, amateurs and people fascinated by this practice. Something similar happens in the same period in Bressanvido (Vicenza), with the Festa della transumanza [http11], and in Fiera di Primiero (Trento), with the Gran Festa del Desmontegar [fig. 11].

In Central and Southern there are even more festivals and associations, especially in areas where transhumance is still felt as part of the community's identity. One example could be Pastorizia in Festival, taking place in Picinisco (in the province of Frosinone, Lazio) [http12], or the nearby Associazione Calamus, completely devoted to the rediscovery of 'zampogna', a sort of bagpipe strongly linked to transhumance and its practitioners [http13].

The landscape of organisations linked to transhumance is variegated, and relevant is the connection with tourism: in Sardinia, for example, there is Tramudas association, developed by the cooperation of three GAL (GAL Mare e monti, GAL Barbagie e Mondrolisai, GAL Ogliastra), and which brings tourist to discover traditional transhumance's routes, by following herds and their shepherds [http14].



Fig. 11 - Some examples of social events involving transhumance (collage by Marianna Fabbrizioli)

Lastly, a renewed interest in transhumance can be detected also in the Internet and social networks, with many groups, mostly on Facebook (fig. 12), where people (often the same shepherds) share photos, articles and other media concerning transhumant livestock and practice.

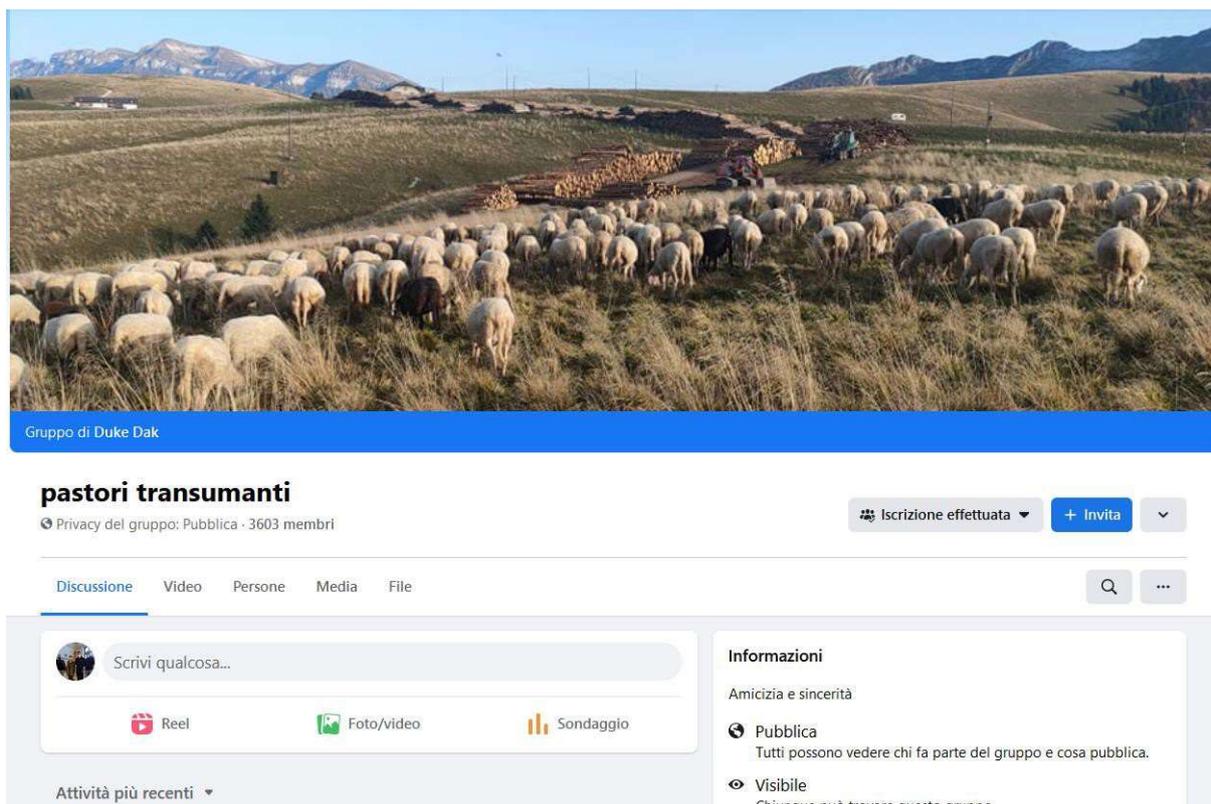


Fig. 12 – A Facebook group about transhumance

2.6 Legal and funding situation

The legal status of transhumance practitioners and their herds is quite unique. Transhumance is subjected to “a notable legislative body multi-layered and on continuous evolution” (Dal Mas, 2018, p. 107), which try to impose a certain regulation: the livestock must undergo several analysis and vaccinations, during the year, and their stops on private fields, when allowed by the local administration (a problem which will be explained later), should be documented, with papers signed by them and the field’s owner. This is in contrast with a unique feature of transhumance occurring in North-Eastern Italy, which is the shepherds’ habitude to have access to resources often without asking an agreement with the owners: this is more true in the most industrialised plain (while in more marginal areas the shepherds tell they usually know and are known by all the owners). This is a habitude not recognized by the law, obviously, as in the case of the block of traffic caused by their crossing of major roads; this peculiar way of working and living results in what De Marchi describes as the shepherds’ tendency “to consider their work almost as an abusive practice” (p. XXVII), even though they all possess a Vat number. Since all these violations often result in fines, the herders every year pre-allocate some of the money they earn to pay the fines.

In the mountains, the situation is different: the shepherds rent *malghe* and their pastures, after auctions prepared by local administrations: and it’s here that these herders receive the only form of UE funding, given because of the possession and use of pastures. According to an interviewed shepherd, money coming from this funding are the only form of net profit of their activity, since all the money gained by meat’s selling are counterbalanced by the expenses that they must sustain every year.

Another form of refunding is granted by the State when some animals are eaten by wolves (a problem which, as will be explained later, is growing): but all the interviewed herders agree on the fact that these money never represent the real value of the livestock lost.

2.7 Vet offer for transhumance practitioners and training gaps

Traditionally, all the features and challenges of this work were transmitted from older shepherds to beginners, passing across the generations; however, a number of schools of pastoralism have been created, with the aim of widening the training offer for herders.

The Agrarian Institute Giuseppe Garibaldi of Macerata, in Molise, from February up to April 2022 has held a formative online course called “Il pastore è un guardiano di futuro” (The shepherd is a guardian of future) (fig. 13), with the aim of reflecting on pastoralism, protection and regenerations of landscapes. The lessons were held mostly by experts coming from several Italian universities, and they addressed to 56 applicants from Italy, Spain, France, Brazil and Canada.



Fig. 13: The introduction of Macerata's course of pastoralism (Agrarian Institute of Macerata 'Giuseppe Garibaldi') [http15].

This first online course is part of a wider and multi-situated process of elaboration and definition of a National School of Shepherd (SNAP), a project which is oriented to coordinate multiple and more embedded schools of pastoralism. About these schools, the last year saw the birth of the School "Young Shepherd" in Piedmont [http16], the Sardinian School for pastoralists [http17], and the Casentino Schools of the Life Project 'Shep4Bio' (in the Appennines between Tuscany and Emilia - Romagna) [http18]: these are all schools united by the aim to enhance the diffusion and

development of multifunctional breeding, attract human resources in the agro-pastoral sector, and qualify those already existing, and protect pastoralism's identity and culture, while stressing its way of management, respectful of the environment and ecological balances [http19].

Another example, slightly different, is Alte Imprese, Scuola internazionale dei Formaggi della Montagna e dell'Appennino (High Enterprises, International school of Cheese of Mountain and Appenines, [http20]) which is addressed to transumant herders, especially those who rent malghe (see above), with the aim of conjugating knowledges of animals and herds with those of cheese making, keeping an eye on the development of managerial and communicative skill. The school is divided into masterclass, which are made of several online lectures, and a final experience on the field, of a few days. A quick glance at the formative offer can be interesting; there are six modules, whose titles are the following: history, animals and pasture, milk and cheese, high enterprise, gastronomy and reception, witnesses.

Beside these very recent projects, anyway, the most common way to learn the herder's profession is by fieldwork, assisting an older herder; and it's the case of every shepherd interviewed in this research: all of them have started under another herder, and soon they created their own herd. A good number of them, six out of eight, still move their herd together, during winter, with another shepherd, and they help each other when needed. However, also those who graze on their own are used to calling other shepherds when they need any kind of suggestion. The knowledge a shepherd must possess, anyway, is wide, and as one of them said, it ranges from veterinary to their legal rights and prohibitions.

3 History

Transhumance in Italy, as in the other Mediterranean countries, is a very ancient activity. In Central and Southern Italy archaeological evidence, witness the diffusion of this practice in Samnites' society, around 6th-4th century BC. This transhumance followed natural routes, which remained almost unchanged across the centuries, becoming the traditional *tratturi* (Rinella, Rinella, 2021; Aromatario, 1992). In 111 BC., under the Roman domination, *Lex agraria* (agrian law) was introduced, with the aim of regulating the use of public pastures and *calles* (roads) where livestock was driven (Pasquinucci, 1979). These *calles*, afterwards, were called *tractoria*, and from this late- Latin term came the traditional Italian word *tratturi* (fig. 12).

A very important reorganisation arrives in 1447, with the creation, by King Alfonso I d'Aragona, of "*Regia Dogana della mena delle pecore*" (Royal Customs of sheep transfer) that regulated the relationship between pastoralism and agriculture. With this action, transhumance starts to become the principal core of Southern Italy's economy, and the system gradually evolves from a simple subsistence activity of shepherds to a form of 'livestock's capitalism'.

This development brought also a regulation of *tratturi*'s sizes and way of use, with the consequent construction of shelters and other buildings for shepherds and their flocks (Di Cicco, 1992; Marino, 1992).



Fig. 14: Transhumance along a “tratturo” in Molise region (photo by: Cammino Sanniti, 3 giorni sul= Tratturo - Molise - ANSA.it)

At the beginning of the 19th century cultivated land starts to become larger than pastures for transhumance, because of a demographic increase, and of a decrease of wool’s commercial value; these changes lead to the *Dogana*’s abolition in 1801, under Napoleon’s laws, and later in the century, in 1865, to the liberalisation and privatisation of all the public land involved, except for *tratturi* and shelters (Tessitore, 1992).

This evolution marked the beginning of Southern Italy’s transhumance’s decline, and in the beginning of 20th century the number of sheep and shepherds was reduced by almost two thirds if compared to the 18th century’s situation. By the half of the century the process was still undergoing, and there were still places where the practice was consistent, as explained by E. Davies, writing in 1941 that “transhumance is now vigorous only where lowlands [...] have long remained backward agriculturally” (Davies, 1941, p. 157).

Also, the first archaeological evidence of Northern Italy’s transhumance is very old, dating back to prehistoric times. Between the Prealps and the Po valley especially around Padova (the area we took as case-study), in Roman times there was a prosperous wool industry, with sheep moving in spring and autumn, described also by the Greek historian Strabo: this left, as evidence, the remaining of two very ancient streets, which were followed by shepherds and their herds moving between the mountains and the plain (Bonetto, 1998). These streets were, in a way, almost like ‘green highways’, which connected different trades, from the already mentioned wool sector to goods arriving from Venice’s lagoon and the sea (Malacarne, 2009).

Some mountain communities developed around this practice, as in the case of *Altopiano dei Sette Comuni* (Plateau of Seven Communes), in Vicenza's Pre-Alps, and Lamon, near Feltre, in Belluno's province. In this area, where it was bred also a native race of sheep, the Lamon breed, transhumance and all the connected activities acquired a key role in all the political and economic decisions since XII century. All the rules and customs were regulated by local statutes (in written from since 1330), which were suppressed only in 1806 by Napoleonic reforms (Conte, 1982). As in Southern Italy, also in this area the 19th century saw a progressive decline of sheep's transhumance, with the introduction of sedentary breeding of cows, and the abolition of *Pensionatico* (1856), a very ancient law, which gave transhumant shepherds the right to let their herds graze in private fields. (Conte, 1982b).

From the mid to the end of the 20th century, transhumance's decline reached its peak in several parts of Italy. In Lamon and in the nearby mountains transhumant pastoralism was almost completely extinguished by the end of the 1950s (Malacarne, 1982), and today, according to witnesses collected during our fieldwork, it remains only one herder coming from there. An analogue decline took place also in the rest of Alps, and in 1977 grazing pressure in high pastures, in Western Alps, was less than half of what it had been in 1850 (Gomez-Ibanez, 1977). Even if transhumance was at that time already described as a declining practice, still in late 19th century some new practices were starting. One example is the case of several families from Vicenza's Prealpes (*Altopiano dei Sette Comuni*) moving with their cows in the springs' area in the plain, between Astico and Brenta rivers. Here, they started a peculiar bovine transhumance between the mountains and Venice's lagoon, lasting roughly from 1850 to 1930 (Varini, 2008).

In Southern Italy, specialised cultures such as vineyards and olive groves gradually substitute the ancient pastures, and between the 1950s and 1970s the number of transhumant sheep decreased from 120.000 units to 35.000 (Ficarelli, 2018, p. 483; Russo, 2002). There have been laws protecting the main *tratturi* as national heritage since 1939, but these areas received new national and regional regulations in 1970s and 1980s (Bindi, 2019). The resulting legal framework, shared between national and regional competences, was causing a sort of indecision in management of territories, until 2001, when the Ministry of Agriculture and Environment created the 'National Coordinating Board on *Tratturi* and transhumance Civilization', with the aim 'to define sites, itineraries, tangible and intangible cultural goods having historical, cultural, archaeological, economic and social relevance related to transhumance and sustainable development'. The target of this project are especially the inner regions, 'where depopulation, abandonment and economic depression were harder than it was in the areas that were declining towards the coasts' (Bindi, 2019, page 112).

Other important elements which must be added to this overview are the profound changes which affected the Italian society in the last decades. In particular, socio-economic conditions of extensive livestock systems have not been favourable, with a trend of decreasing payoffs for meat and milk products: this, together with the ageing of traditional herders, has contributed to the decrease of the number of Italian shepherds, and, as explained before, to the need for foreign transhumant practitioners (Pardini and Nori, 2011).

Anyway, in some areas, there has been a certain trend inversion, since the beginning of the XXI century, especially in the number of sheep and goats: and this evolution has come with a strengthening of professionalism of pastoral activity, being in some ways more profitable than in the past (Varotti, 2000). National Livestock Registry's statistics witness this trend, showing a marked increase in the number of transhumant sheep, goats and cows, at least until 2019 (fig. 15).

Social changes in the Italy of the 21st century have brought also new opportunities of trade and profit for these practitioners, at least in sheep's case: With the increase of immigrants and new citizen of Muslim religion, there has been also a raise of request of sheep's meat, traditionally sold in Halal butcheries.

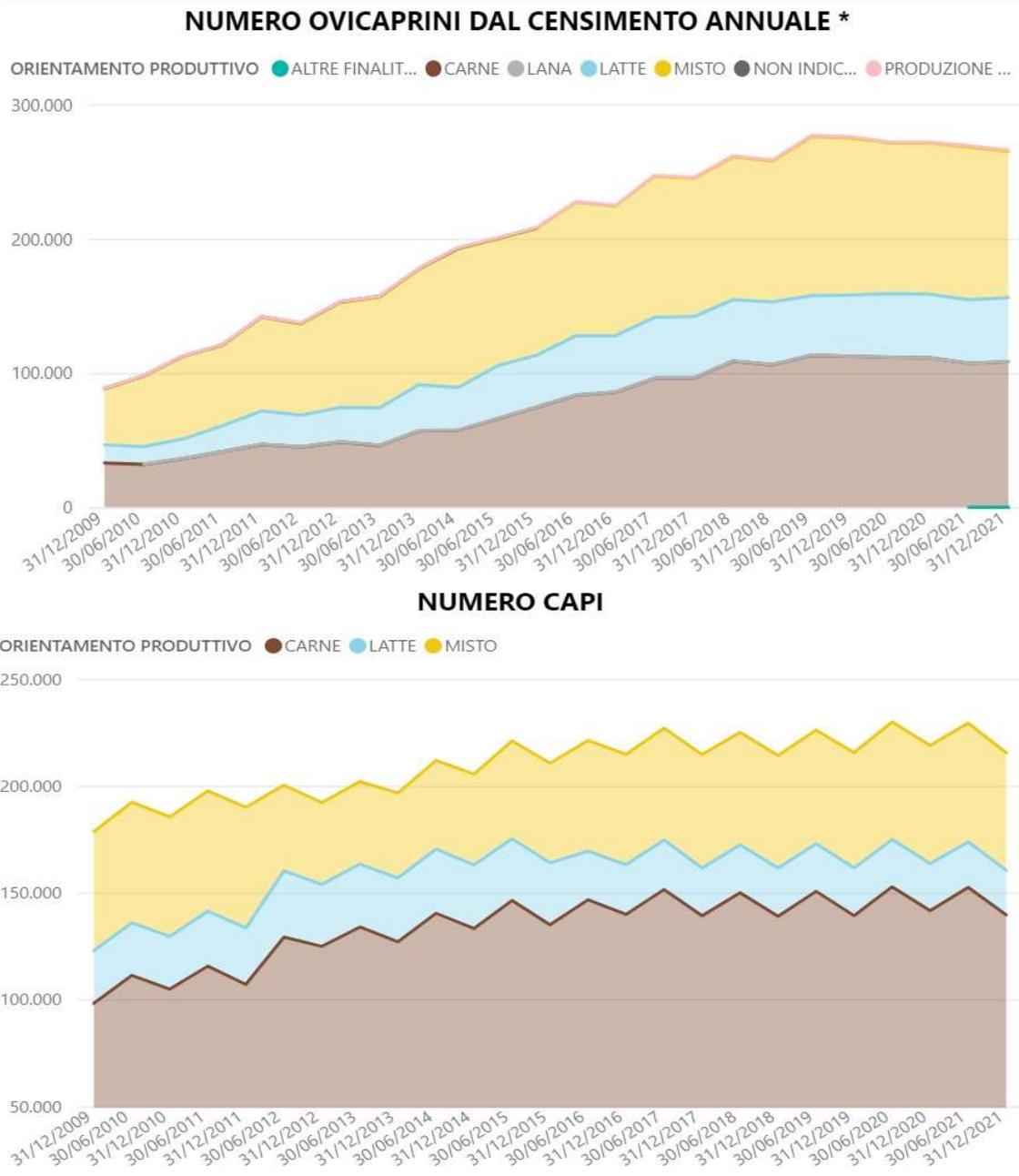


Fig. 15: The variations of the number of sheep and goats (above) and bovines (below) from 2009 to 2021 (SVI, 2021).

4 Values and meanings of transhumance

4.1 Meanings of transhumance - Historically and today

Historically, transhumance has been both a means of livelihood in some areas, and a key economic activity, capable of moving capitals of people, livestock and money. This is the case, as we have seen, of Southern Italy, where transhumance was at first a millennial subsistence activity, and with XV century's innovations (mostly, the invention of Regia Dogana) became quickly a form of capitalism of livestock, changing the landscape itself with the subsequent creation of related services, and the birth of new *iconemi* (a concept introduced by the Italian geographer Eugenio Turri (2006) meaning both an element representing the *genius loci* of a place, and a visual reference with a semantic relevance in showing the relation between a society and its territory).

Also in the Alps and Pre-Alpes transhumance was, for several small communities, an activity performing a key role in both culture and economy: it's the case of the already quoted town of Lamon, whose one of first historical mentions comes from a document written in 1177 by the Prince-Bishop of Feltre and regulating a controversy between shepherds from Lamon and nearby villages (Conte,1982).

Although a very ancient activity, for many centuries, transhumance was a harsh but quite lucrative work, and shepherds had enough money to grant to themselves and their family the possession of a stable, a house as well as some land (Varini, 2008).

The abolitions of the 19th century witnessed a change of values, with transhumance being less lucrative, and agriculture and sedentary breeding becoming more convenient and socially accepted. These changes of values were prepared by the abolitions of the Napoleonic era, where transhumance had been delegitimized and considered as an obsolete residue of the *Ancient Regime*.

Today, transhumance and its *iconemi* have gained new and different meanings. The case of *tratturi* is an example: from being "an artery of connection and interregional exchange" (Tessitore, 1992, page 64), these green routes are considered today "as a cultural journey through which communities become fully involved in the process of heritagization and the planning of territorial development" (Belligiano, Bindi and Ievoli, 2021, page 1).

This represents, as mentioned also before, a renewed interest and sometimes also a shift in the perception by the wide public. This is true both in Southern and in Northern Italy, and the interviewed herders spoke of a large group of people gathered to see their sheep every time they cross a village. This coexists with complaints made by other people because of a herd blocking the traffic, or dirtying the road, and reflects an ambiguity in the perception, with transhumance being also a relic of the past, which needs protection.

On one side, transhumance is connoted by a certain romantic idealization. On the other side, it is seen also as an annoying and obsolete relict, and even an intruder, especially locally in the territories where transhumance is still practiced.

The inscription both in the National Register and in the UNESCO's list follow the first attitude, advocating for more protection and valorisation of transhumance, by stressing its traditional features. However, as explained before, in the last years, the activity has absorbed many features of contemporaneity, and now it shows traits and problems common to other forms of modern entrepreneurship that the herders must face every year and which will be described in the followings.



Fig. 16 - Transhumant tracks and practice in Molise region (from: Bindi, 2019, p. 128)

4.2 Values (transhumance landscape)

Nowadays, scholars assign a notable value to the landscape shaped by transhumance and highlight the importance of maintaining the practice to maintain the landscape itself. The landscape around the ancient *tratturi* has been heavily marked by thousands of years of transhumance. Two processes took place: one was the creation and development of physical artefacts and immaterial *iconemi* – as well as the elements of rural landscapes associated with these areas, from *poste*, with buildings for sheep and men shelter, to the development of organised villages functional to all the processes around transhumance's practice (Rinella, Rinella, 2021) (fig. 14); and the other was the conservation of semi-natural ecosystems and their associated biodiversity (Olea and Mateo-Tomas, 2009). These landscapes, in fact, are unique for "their semi-natural traits, resulting from limited human interference, apart grazing management" (Cammerino, Biscotti, and others, 2018, page 3).

The decline of the practice, with the reduction of herds and flocks notably changed these landscapes, with the reintroduction of trees in pastures, cropped fields, and the diffusion of specialised tree plantations (Pardini and Nori, 2011).

Also in Northern Italy, transhumance's decline in the second half of 20th century has changed the landscapes. In the Alps the decrease of grazing activity allowed the invasion of plants which increase the slope's vulnerability to erosion and its geomorphic processes (one example is the invasion of *Trifolium alpinum* in abandoned pastures) (Gomez-Ibanez, 1977).

In the Po valley too, despite the massive presence of intensive agriculture transhumance has left a deep mark, and its decline did not come without noticeable effects. While Roman livestock routes between Padova and the Alps are mostly disappeared (fig. 15), and leave traces almost only on toponymies (Bonetto, 1998), transhumance, in thousands of years of activity, has brought social and ecological benefits to these areas, especially along the rivers, like "clearance of exceeding biomass, maintenance of pastures necessities for survival of wild animals, and destruction of non-native vegetation (De Marchi, 2009, p. XXIX). -

According both to the literature and our survey, shepherds don't show a particular consciousness of their role in preserving landscapes. However, they value its integrity, especially in the mountains, and one of them even said that 'staying in a high pasture, and looking at the valley lying below', reward all this work's harshness, and as De Marchi recollects, another said that they are the "real conservationists" (Ibid., p. XXIX). Actually, some signals of a new awareness about the landscaping role of transhumance is nowadays going to appear also in some of the transhumance practitioners.

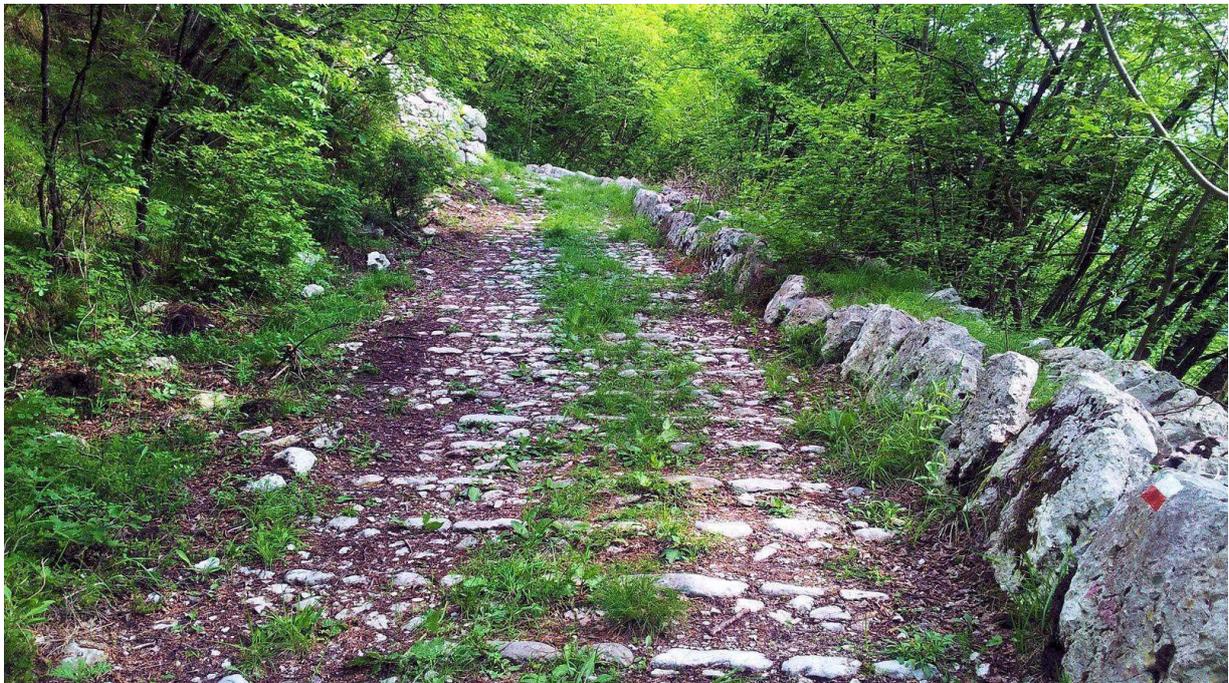


Fig. 15: The remaining of a sheep route connecting Po valley and Pre-Alps (Photo from the blog ' Famiglia Peruzzo [http21])

As for the national and local measures of protection of landscapes, they follow two opposite views. Paradoxically enough, on the one hand, transhumance is considered as a risk for the ecosystem's richness. For example, it is forbidden in protected areas like riverbeds, with great disappointment by the shepherds. This is more typical for the plain, where, as it will be described in the next chapter, transhumance practitioners are often considered as intruders. The problem is quite consistent, because the forbidden areas pertains to European policy "Natura 2000" 'ecological corridors' but they coincide with routes traditionally privileged by transhumant herders (Dal Mas, 2018).

On the other hand, especially in the mountains, shepherds begin or already are considered as partners for an eco-compatible and dynamic management of territory. Some practical consequences can be seen already, like a convention made between a shepherd and a village in Trentino, in Val di Rabbi, for the maintenance of some green areas (a story portrayed in the documentary "Cheyenne. Trent'anni", by director Michele Trentini, in 2008) (ibid.).



Fig. 16: Transhumant sheeps in the Veneto mountains (photo by Viviana Ferrario)

5 Challenges to face, needs/opportunities

As for many other features of Italian transhumance, also challenges and needs are different according to the area taken into consideration. In Southern and Central Italy, the areas crossed by *tratturi* are inner regions, which still today are subject to depopulation, abandonment, and economic depression.

In Northern Italy, instead, transhumance occurs both in somewhat marginal areas (the mountains, subject also here to depopulation) and in areas densely populated, the plains. They follow a traditional practice, while being part of a modern economy, and they must use “all those opportunities and spaces which an industrialised and technologically advanced society can offer” (De Marchi, p. XXVI). This is true, of course, for all transhumance in Italy, but is particularly characteristic of Po valley, the most industrialised part and at the same time the most intensely cultivated area of the country.

Here, the transhumance practitioner often face some problems, which are becoming increasingly relevant in the process of constant readjustment according to continuously changing needs and opportunities. According to the interviews collected in our study area, a very important problem is the growing presence of ‘closed municipalities’, administrative territories where it is forbidden to graze with a transhumant herd. The causes are several, and one of them is diffidence and sometimes fierce rivalry between shepherds and the owners of the land (which is almost always private). Despite the traditional benefits brought by sheep grazing for the fertility of the soil, it looks like there is an ideological hostility towards grazing, generally based on some isolated case of uncaring shepherds (a herd not controlled can damage crops), or on the fear of sicknesses and ticks being brought by sheep (which, according to shepherds, isn’t realistic anymore, because they have to check sheep’s health very often, during the year). This hostility is enhanced by the already described habitude of the shepherds of entering in the pastures often without an agreement with the owner: if there are some privates who tolerate this grazing, the hostility in others may also result in quite violent arguments. This explains the choice of some municipalities to prevent transhumance grazing through special ordinances, so closing their territories to the transhumant herders. Furthermore, a herd moving too close to residence buildings can be the target of similar instances. This can be observed with a particular intensity in the very area of our case study, a territory defined as ‘a diffused city’, or even a ‘agropolitan’ area, where towns and countryside are deeply interwoven (Ferrario, 2011). Here, it’s impossible for a shepherd and his herd, to keep themselves always distant from residential areas (fig. 16), with all the connected problems. One of the herders interviewed in the Veneto region, where the diffused urbanisation is stronger, told us that, because of this problematic, in the next year he will change his transhumance route and will move to Friuli, less interested by the diffused urbanisation by far.



Fig. 17 - A herd crossing a road near Padova (photo by Marianna Fabbrizioli).

Another relevant problem, typical of areas allocated to intensive agriculture like Po valley, is the heavy pollution of soil and waters, caused by a diffused use of chemicals and herbicides, used in agriculture. The problem, according to the interviewed herders, is more concrete in the plains, especially in the Polesine lowland, along the Po River, and in the central Po valley (Lombardy). This is one of the reasons why all interviewed shepherds in North-Eastern Italy don't go further south than Padova, during their winter and spring grazing. Polluted grass and channels' water can be very harmful for livestock, and one herder reported the loss of a donkey, dead a few days after having drunk water in a polluted area. In other herds, several pregnant sheep aborted, because of the same reason.

Another serious problem, which is worth reporting, since it's felt deeply by all interviewed shepherds, is the growing number of wolves in all the Alpine area. According to all witnesses, in the last years there has been a noticeable increase, which they attribute to a lack of control by the State Forestry Corp. It represents quite a new problem in areas where, in the last century at least, wolves were quite absent. The State refund the use of anti-wolves enclosures, but according to the herders, they aren't always successful. Furthermore, it happens easily, when the herd is sizeable, to forget one or two animals outside. These are usually the victims of wolves, whose presence near the herd can also make the sheep nervous and even bring the pregnant ones to abortion. Someone find a solution in the use of dogs trained for protection against the wolves, but in return, they are dangerous because they can attack also tourists, which are quite numerous in the mountains where these herders move. Other herders sometimes go to sleep near the sheep in order to wake up if wolves come too close, in order to frighten them themselves.

Everybody, anyway, agrees on the fact that the Forestry Corp should control the number of wolves, even by killing some of them.

Actually, the Ministry of Environment has published in 2019 the 'Plan for conservation and management of wolves in Italy', where 22 actions are proposed, trying to avoid the suppression of wolves (MITE, 2019). There are also some projects, which try to allow a coexistence between shepherds and wolves, like Progetto Pasturs, in Western Alps, involving surveillance made by volunteers, anti-wolf dogs, and enclosures (Pasturs, 2016) [http22].

Last but not least it is worth to mention some distortions of agricultural policies affecting pastures both in the Alps and in the Apennines. As denounced by journalists and scholars, the generous subsidies on animals and pastures attributed on the basis of questionable criteria are driving up the prices of pasture rents, which end up expelling local farmers and attracting speculators, interested not in the real use of pastures but only in financial aspects (Calandra, 2019; Mencini, 2021).

6 Conclusions

Considered from a general overview, transhumance today in Italy is still an interesting activity, but suffers several contrasts. It has been recently recognized as a traditional practice worth of protection, but it looks like that, for local administrations and decision makers, this activity is still quite invisible and a practitioner must overcome several difficulties and problems, which often are the result of a legislation who tends to see shepherds as intruders, or as remaining of a distant past. Nevertheless, transhumance isn't simply the result of an inertial process: its practitioners have managed to survive up to this century by adapting themselves to many innovations of present times. Only recently, their active role in protecting and maintaining the landscape they helped to create is coming to prominence. Here lies another contrast, because, transhumance activity is perceived both as a risk to the protection of some environments, and as a guarantee for the survival of others.

Maybe the development of an organised formative offer concerning transhumance, like the one which should start under the name of SNAP (see paragraph 2.7), could make herders more conscious about their role in complex systems and in landscapes. A similar operation of awareness raising should involve citizens and regional and local administrations.

A more developed consciousness of their importance could also help herders to cooperate among themselves, e.g. by creating associations - which appear to be almost absent in Italy - and other social organisations which could give to their requests more relevance. Despite some herders express the impression of an approaching extinction of transhumance, at the same time they all agree to the fact that the numbers of herders is growing, while the pastures at their disposal is decreasing. More 'teamwork' could give them useful instruments to handle this trend with all related problems.

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