

Submitted Abstract

ID IMC22-FSAbstr- 509

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Country	Italy
Region	Western Europe
Title	From Local To Global Perspective: An Integrated Approach To Analyse Initiatives For Sustainable Development Of Livestock Farming Systems In Mountain Areas.
Keywords	Local Sustainable Development, Mountain Areas, Farming Systems, Local Initiatives, Highlands.3
Type	List Of Focus Session
Focus Session ID	17

Abstract

In the last decades, mountain livestock farming systems have been affected by a strong abandonment mainly due to a lack of generational turnover and the increasing competition with other economic sectors. Livestock farming systems located in mountain areas, due to their free grazing characteristics, provide a series of benefits to human well-being, known as Ecosystem Services (ES), such as landscape maintenance, as well as safeguarding cultural heritage and biodiversity. Besides, these type of livestock systems are characterized by high feed self-sufficiency with low off-farms inputs as they are mainly based on natural pastures and meadows. As the title suggests, this study presents the methodology adopted during the first Research & Innovation Session (R&IS) which took place in the Regional Natural Park of Livradois-Forez (France) and in the Catalan Pyrenees (Spain) in September and October 2021. This study is part of the HIGHLANDS.3 project, funded by the European Union, aiming at the promotion of sustainable development in mountain areas involving different local initiatives and using an integrated inclusive approach. A semi-structured interview scheme resulting from the multidisciplinary Highlands.3 process, contributed by experts from different fields such as agronomy, veterinary science, geography and forestry, was used to interview stakeholders from Epirus region (Greece) and the abovementioned areas. The interview included general, social, economic, environmental and cultural features, closing with a brief future perspectives question. The qualitative data collected during the interviews was used to create a database which included all initiatives and was made accessible to all stakeholders, in order to promote the inter-sector cooperation and good practices. Farmers can share their knowledge and advice to contribute to local sustainable development, thus awarding added value to mountain areas. The interviews revealed that initiative stakeholders agreed that it is not only important to sell a high-quality product but also to convey to the consumer the environmental benefits and cultural heritage that these low-input traditional farming systems maintain. Indeed, initiative stakeholders agreed that in addition to European funding there should be local development projects. This trans-disciplinary approach as well as the information on social, cultural and economic context of initiatives collected during the interview could give indications about future livestock management as well as promote the collaboration between farmers and managers of local initiatives to ensure the sustainable use of local resources.