

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

Since Neolithic times highland areas long distance heard transhumance played a major role in the seasonal movement of livestock, predominantly sheep and goats, and less common cows and horses, to high elevations during summer and low elevations during winter (Festi, 2012; García-Ruiz et al., 2020; Makarewicz, 2017; Sutliff, 2015). The knowledge of natural climatic cycles and landscape resource composition allowed communities to explore the diversity that altitudinal catena offers under seasonal variation regimes (Aguilera et al., 2020; Vigan et al., 2017)

The last long-distance active transhumance record in the Portuguese territory is from 1999 on Serra de Montemuro. The reasons behind transhumance disappearance are deeply connected with the Portuguese socio-political reality. To a great extent, the territorial reorganization after the 25th of April 1974 revolution brought opportunities for people to seek better living conditions in the large metropolitan areas and outside the country. Transhumance was a way of life, a narrow relationship established for millennia between man and animals, balancing territories in a sweet rhythmicised manner. Presently transhumance is perceived as a historical activity, part of the Portuguese cultural heritage, an asset for tourism and local economic development. This use of such a rich activity diminishes the potential for implementing sustainable development in several fields. Intensive animal farming is far more detrimental to the environment than free-range herds and if these are mobile the impact is even less detrimental. The quality of the products is far better and can be further valued, even certified, reassuring the marketing trends of environmental protection. Soils are less impacted where compaction is less severe, riparian forests are less impacted, fire hazards are reduced, ecosystem services are maintained, overall a better way of achieving sustainability.

This research presents solutions, based on territorial planning and ecosystem availability to propose social, economic and environmental models to bring back this practice, thus presenting the advantages it can bring to the environment and people alike.