

## Submitted Abstract

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## Abstract

Summer pastures, also called alpine farming areas, are examples of semi-natural habitats created through an interaction between environmental factors like climate and topography, and human activities. The Italian province of South Tyrol is strongly characterized by its approximately 1600 summer pastures, which cover a third of the entire territory. On the one hand, these pastures guarantee the provision of forage to livestock and create work relief in the valley during the summer; on the other hand, their traditional agricultural use provides an important contribution to site-specific biodiversity and maintains the open spaces in the landscape, with high recreational, touristic and cultural value. For example, more than half of the annual tourist visit South Tyrol during the summer period and state hiking activities and the attractiveness of the traditional landscape as the main reasons for spending a holiday in this province.

Despite its importance, local summer pasture grazing is confronted with multiple ecological and socio-economic challenges. The low monetary rentability for livestock farmers and the decline of stocking numbers reflect, among other things, the general transformation processes in agriculture during the last decades which had an impact on pasture activities. Today, many summer pastures in South Tyrol are managed from the valley, and the majority of livestock graze freely and unattended. Consequently, maintenance measures are often neglected, and these areas suffer from afforestation in medium term which consequently causes biodiversity losses. A lack of staff also leads to an uneven grazing pressure causing under- and over-use of the area. Especially since the return of wolves, these and more problems but also adaptation possibilities for alpine farming areas are strongly discussed in public. Currently only few initiatives deal with and try to mitigate the challenges summer pastures are facing and aim to open new perspectives for this form of seasonal livestock husbandry.

This study describes the development of summer pasture grazing in South Tyrol and analyses the most important factors affecting its development during the last six decades. Based on a literature review, secondary data analysis and expert interviews, the most urgent challenges are defined which led to the current situation and should be tackled in future. Additionally, the study attempts to indicate the direction of changes needed to preserve summer pasture grazing for the future and ideally presents concrete proposals for decision-makers.