

Pastoralism in the Carpathians and the Carpathian Convention

Background Note for discussion

Pastoralism refers to the traditional practice of animal husbandry and transhumance, or seasonal migration, of livestock, which constitutes part of cultural heritage and cultural landscape management in the Carpathians region. Livestock mobility can take different forms, such as grazing within village territory or keeping sheep on mountain pastures, vertical mobility to mountain pastures and back, to long-range seasonal migrations (Ivaşcu, C.M. & Iuga, A. 2022¹; IUCN & UNEP, 2014²). Key actors are traditional herders of sheep, cattle and other ruminants who manage these movements, organize grazing, and often also the preparation of dairy products, health care, marketing etc.

“Pastoralism is increasingly recognized as one of the most sustainable production systems on the planet and plays a major role in safeguarding ecosystems and biodiversity in natural grasslands and rangelands” (Johnsen et al 2019, p.7³).

The multifaceted importance of Pastoralism, as well as identified gaps in knowledge about it at the global level³, lead to recognition of its importance at the highest international level, including:

- As a relevant aspect of the [UN Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028](#)
- As a relevant aspect of the [UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration, 2021-2030](#).
- In the Resolution UNEA 4/15 [“Innovations in Sustainable Rangelands and Pastoralism”](#) of the 4th United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-4, 11-03-2019). The resolution “invites all relevant stakeholders to raise awareness and promote innovative solutions for sustainable management of rangelands and pastoralism taking into account traditional knowledge on sectors such as agro-pastoralism...agroforestry, agriculture, renewable energy and ecotourism” and calls on UNEP to “to “support, upon request and subject to the availability of resources, those countries undertaking regional assessments of the status of, and conditions and trends in, rangeland, pastoral land and pastoralism”
- Pastoralism in the South-Eastern Carpathians (& Romania). Past, present and future
- Inscription of the Carpathian Transhumance in the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity
- [Transhumance in the Alps and in the Mediterranean](#) was inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2019.

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2026 as the [International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists](#)

¹ Ivaşcu, C.M and Iuga, A. 2022. Chapter 9 Contemporary Transformation of the Pastoral System in the Romanian Carpathian: A Case Study from Maramures Region. In: Bindi, L. [Grazing Communities: Pastoralism on the Move and Biocultural Heritage Frictions](#), Berghahn Books, Brooklyn NY

² IUCN and UNEP. 2014. Pastoralism and the green economy – a natural nexus? https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/13708/policy_brief_2014___english.pdf?sequence=1&%3BisAllowed=

³ Johnsen, K.I., M. Niamir-Fuller, A. Bensada, and A. Waters-Bayer. 2019. A case of benign neglect: Knowledge gaps about sustainability in pastoralism and rangelands. United Nations Environment Programme and GRID-Arendal, Nairobi and Arendal, www.grida.no.

Pastoralism in the Carpathians

Pastoralism is closely linked with ecological, social and economic aspects of sustainable development in the Carpathian region, and to specific topics covered by the Carpathian Convention: cultural heritage and traditional knowledge, maintaining biodiversity and ecosystem services, sustainable agriculture and rural development, sustainable tourism, as well as spatial development. Its cross-boundary nature also gives it regional significance. Threats to pastoralism are intrinsically linked to Carpathian mountainous areas, including effects of climate change, and other socio-economic transitions, including outmigration and land abandonment and loss of traditional knowledge, which can lead to loss of cultural landscapes.

Several Carpathian Convention provisions are directly related to Pastoralism:

- **Article 7 - Sustainable agriculture and forestry, para 1.** calls on the Parties to “maintain the management of land traditionally cultivated in a sustainable manner [...]”.
- **Article 11 - Cultural heritage and traditional knowledge calls for preservation of the** “traditional [...] land-use patterns”.
- **The Protocol on Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD), Article 1,** calls on the Parties to “cooperate especially on:
 - g) Implementing measures for preserving and promoting traditional farming practices and the related traditional knowledge;
 - d) Promoting the sustainable and/or extensive agro-environmental practices, land resource management practices [...] to protect biological and traditional cultural landscape diversity, natural and semi-natural habitats including grasslands and protected areas”.
- **The SARD Article 9, *Protection and management of traditional cultural landscapes,*** states that:
 - “1. The Parties shall take measures for the protection and management of traditional cultural landscapes of the Carpathians [...] in particular grasslands [...] and the related traditional ecological knowledge.
 2. The Parties shall support the maintenance and application of traditional, low-intensity agricultural practices and forms of management of cultural landscapes, traditional ruminants grazing.”
- **The SARD Article 12, *Traditional knowledge and practices,*** calls on the Convention Parties to “[...] take measures for the preservation and promotion of traditional farming practices, small agricultural holdings, cultural landscapes, traditional ecological and agricultural knowledge [...] which represent significant economic and social features of the rural cultural patrimony of the Carpathians”.

Despite its importance, there is **evidence of the lack of knowledge on traditional land-use management and governance in local communities in the Carpathians, the decline of**

knowledge exchange and skill transfer between generations, and threats to traditional livelihoods (Cudlin et al. 2022⁴, p. 53).

- The S4C Research Agenda for 2030 recommends, among other topics, to work on “Preservation of cultural landscapes, traditional land-use patterns, local agricultural practices and breeds” (p. 54) as well as “Strengthen[ing] the link between the protection and valorisation of cultural heritage and climate mitigation (p.51)⁴.”

Research and expertise on pastoralism is available in [Romania](#), [Poland](#), [Hungary](#). A transdisciplinary study conducted [throughout the Carpathians](#) identified that **Romanian and Ukrainian Carpathians “have the best maintained traditional grasslands and grassland management practices⁵”**.

Understanding and Highlighting Carpathian Pastoralism towards 2026

Given the importance and intrinsic links of Pastoralist traditions in the Carpathians, the spotlight given to this topic by the UN and the envisioned **2026 International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists provides an opportunity to assess the status, challenges and needs of pastoralism in the Carpathian region**, while at the same time **highlight the importance and contribution of the Carpathian region** to this important practice at the international level.

The activities could be inspired and built on the following activities and expertise, such as:

- [Project Carpathian Sheep Transhumance 2013](#), which aimed at recreating the historical transhumance of the Vlach shepherds, of aprox.1400 km through Romania - Ukraine - Poland - Slovakia - Czech Republic, intrinsically linked with settlement of and development of common pastoral culture in the Carpathians.
- [Project The Carpathians connect - Traditional shepherding](#), implemented by GRID Warsaw in 2018 - December 31, 2021 and focused on Carpathian good practices of active nature protection through traditional pastoralism practices.
- Activities originally planned, however not realized, under the **“Carpathian Route”** project, including 1) a **Study visit and workshop in Romania**, focused on revitalisation of pastoral traditions and practices of the Carpathian shepherds, through exchange of knowledge and experiences on pastoral practices and traditions in the Carpathians and 2) **Publication of a “Compendium of good pastoral practices”**, compiling good practices and lessons related to traditional pastoral economy, pastoral traditions and culture, and traditional pastoral local products.

The needs of the Carpathian region in this respect should be examined and considered, including the potential to raise awareness about pastoralism in the Carpathians and highlight the region during 2026, while also making use of the resources available:

- **Identifying resources to conduct a regional assessment and report** on the status, conditions and trends, as well as needs of pastoralism in the Carpathians with the respectful and meaningful participation of **key knowledge holders** (e.g. traditional herders, livestock owners, food producers) and other relevant partners (e.g.

⁴ Cudlin, P; Zawiejska, J; Mitrofanenko, T; Mazsa, K; Melnykovych, M, S4C Research Agenda 2022–2030, 77; S4C Science for the Carpathians; Global Change Research Institute CAS, Brno, Czech Republic

⁵ <https://vimeo.com/525927432>, min 9

conservationists, rural developers) throughout the project from **co-design till co-publication**. Such a regional assessment will be an important contribution to the lack of data and understanding of pastoralism at the global level, identified in 2019³. Moreover, an assessment can help meaningfully integrate pastoralism, and its impact on ecosystem health and livelihood resilience in the Carpathian region, into frameworks at the national, regional and international level, such as Biodiversity strategy and climate adaptation, as well as to understand how it is affected by the triple planetary crisis on biodiversity, climate change, pollution, the recent COVID-19 pandemic⁶ and the war in Ukraine.

- Close collaboration with the Science for the Carpathians network, to engage Carpathian scientists in transdisciplinary research processes on this topic
- A recent global review of dynamics of pastoral traditional ecological knowledge provides recommendations for some of the questions the assessment could cover, linking pastoral knowledge with sustainable landscape management and nature conservation.⁷ Another global review shows that though pastoral systems are diverse and adapted to the local socio-ecological environment, they follow some globally universal principles regarding the knowledge and practices how to make food from grass; these globally similar principles in pastoralism can help develop regional and global, but locally still appropriate policies.⁸
- Identifying and implementing other activities focused on Pastoralism, **linking work of Carpathian Convention WGs** on SARD, Cultural Heritage and Traditional Knowledge, Sustainable Tourism, Spatial Development, Biodiversity, and Climate Change
 - Specifically, activities organized by the WG on Cultural Heritage and Traditional Knowledge, can focus on Pastoralism. For example, **organization of an Seminar/Webinar**, perhaps back to back with a WG working meeting, **highlighting links between Pastoralism, cultural heritage, Traditional Ecological Knowledge** in the Carpathians, including intergenerational and gender aspects.
 - Moreover, WG on Cultural Heritage can consider the potential for Carpathian pastoralism to be recognised at the international level, as part of the **UNESCO World Intangible Cultural Heritage, FAO GIAHS, and take steps in this direction**
- Focusing Carpathian Day / Carpathian Week activities of the Carpathian ESD Expert Network on Pastoralism, and implementing other activities to promote this important traditional and sustainable practice.

⁶ Cosmin Marius Ivascu. 2020. Word of mouth and internet advertising: Pastoralists in Romania dealing with the COVID-19 crisis. <https://pastres.org/2020/10/16/word-of-mouth-and-internet-advertising-pastoralists-in-romania-dealing-with-the-covid-19-crisis/>

⁷ Sharifian, A., Á. Fernández-Llamazares, H. T. Wario, Z. Molnár, and M. Cabeza. 2022. Dynamics of pastoral traditional ecological knowledge: a global state-of-the-art review. *Ecology and Society* 27(1):14. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-12918-270114>

⁸ Sharifian, A., Gantuya, B., Wario, H.T., Kotowski, M.A., Barani, H., Manzano, P., Krätli, S., Babai, D., Biró, M. Sáfian, L. Erdenetsogt, J., Qabel, Q.M., Molnár, Zs. (2023): Global principles in local traditional knowledge: a review of forage plant-livestock-herder interactions. *Journal of Environmental Management*, 328: 116966. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2022.116966>