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Migrant Shepherds: Opportunities and Challenges for Mediterranean Pastoralism

Michele Nori

Introduction

- 1 Fernand Braudel's (1985) epic work, which serves as the lodestar for all works on the Mediterranean, supplies two definitions that can represent the tracks of a journey into the pastoral world: the mountain as a land of migration and the Mediterranean as a mosaic of peoples. The aim of this article is to describe the first partial results of TRAMed, a research project that analyses the presence, contribution and importance of the immigrant workforce in the pastoralism of the Euro-Mediterranean countries.
- 2 While societal demand for the products, as well as services of pastoral systems, is growing, this does not seem to translate into an improvement in the living and working conditions of employees in this sector. Instead, current dynamics indicate that the sons of breeders often seek alternatives outside pastoralism, which favours the depopulation of mountain areas and exposes pastures to a problem of generational renewal. This is the context in which there are growing numbers of immigrant shepherds, who reach southern Europe from other pastoral areas in the Mediterranean. Their presence makes it possible to keep the pastures of the Alps, Epirus, Apennines, Pyrenees and so forth alive and productive, and this flow reproduces patterns of a generational renewal associated with an ethnic substitution that has characterised Euro-Mediterranean pastoralism over the past century.
- 3 TRAMed's "Mediterranean Transhumances" research initiative investigates the dynamics of the Mediterranean pastoral world, with a specific concern for the presence and contribution of migrants and the related opportunities, risks and difficulties. The project is funded by the EU's Marie Curie programme and implemented by the European University Institute's Migration Policy Centre.¹

- 4 The research addresses the implications of the presence of immigrant shepherds along the three axes of sustainable development (social, economic and environmental) by means of a comparative approach to different regions in four Euro-Mediterranean countries (Spain, Italy, France and Greece – henceforth referred to as “EUMed”). From a methodological viewpoint, there are numerous challenges to collecting reliable data and information in pastoral settings and little secondary data. Quantifying pastoral farms and flocks is a complicated task, and comparing heterogeneous data across different areas is even more so. Fieldwork logistics also present evident difficulties, as shepherds and flocks are scattered over vast, rough terrains throughout the year.
- 5 Little effective research has been undertaken in pastoral areas. The rural world remains at the margins in migration studies, and the pastoral world is extremely marginal in those that focus on rural development. Information about the presence of immigrants on pastoral lands in EUMed is scant, which makes quantifying and qualifying this phenomenon a challenging task. The TRAMed project seeks to assemble the existing parts of this mosaic through a detailed analysis of secondary materials, the consolidation of existing data and information, as well as through targeted fieldwork. Case study areas for the fieldwork included Triveneto, Abruzzi, Piedmont in Italy, the Catalan Pyrenees in Spain, the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur (PACA) region in France and the regions of Boeotia and Thessaly in Greece. Owing to these factors, TRAMed analyses and considerations represent a possible and necessary compromise for an investigation presenting difficulties at different levels. The comparative analysis of TRAMed data and information needs to be further elaborated, the aim of this article being to present indicative trends and dynamics, with the goal of inspiring a debate and collecting contributions from other colleagues on these themes.

Results

- 6 As a result of important socio-economic and demographic dynamics, agricultural activities in Europe are increasingly carried out by foreigners who are often involved in low-skilled activities. Overall today, more than one-third of the officially employed agricultural workforce in Italy, Spain and Greece is of foreign origin (Caruso and Corrado, 2015).

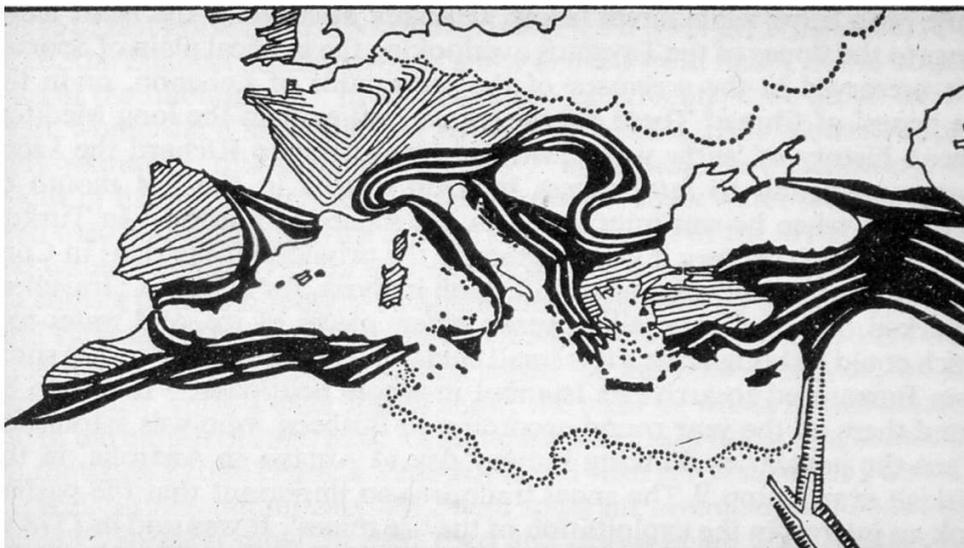
Table 1 – Recent demographic trends in the Euro-Mediterranean countryside

Spain	France	Italy	Greece	
9.8	4.8	7.9	20.8	% rural/active pop. in 2008
56.4	41.9	62.2	57.2	% older than 55 in 2008
19.1	n/a	19.4	17	% immigrants in labour force in 2008
24	n/a	37	> 50	% immigrants in labour force in 2013

Source: Eurostat, 2008; Caruso and Corrado, 2015

- 7 There are also very specialised sectors where immigrant communities play a relevant role. This is the case in livestock farming, where the presence of the foreign workforce is increasing in both quantitative and qualitative terms. With their commitment and know-how, these immigrant workers allow EUMed livestock productions to remain at a level of global excellence. In Italy, for example, immigrants make a strategic contribution to the value chains of Parmesan, Fontina and Pecorino cheeses. Although such contributions have been appreciated to an extent for intensive livestock production (Lum, 2011; INEA, 2009), extensive livestock farming has not attracted much academic attention, despite its relevance throughout the region.
- 8 Pastoralism is indeed an extensive livestock system – a traditional practice for all countries bordering the Mediterranean, where a great deal of animal feeding consists of grazing. Such systems make it possible to exploit and manage the natural resources of marginal territories with agro-ecological characteristics that make agricultural intensification difficult. In the Mediterranean context, these include mountain areas or semi-arid lands that account for about one-third of the region's territories. Pastoral flocks represent a significant proportion of livestock production in the Mediterranean, especially when it comes to small ruminants, which is the domain of concern for TRAMed. The key to sustainability for pastoralism is mobility, which makes it possible to adapt flocks' productive and reproductive performances to the rhythm of the seasons and the availability of pasture. In the Mediterranean, the breeding of sheep and goats is often associated with the practice of transhumance, the seasonal mobility of flocks – mountain pastures during the summer and coastal areas or valley bottoms in winter times. This system assists in making the best use of the agro-ecological diversity, as well as of the marked seasonality in the region, in complementarity with sedentary agricultural activities. In the EUMed context, however, there are only a few flocks still practising transhumance today (around 5% in Greece, according to Lagka, Ragkos et al., 2012).

Picture 1 – Traditional areas of pastoralism in the Mediterranean



Source: Braudel, 1985

- 9 In the effort to quantify the extent and the magnitude of sheep and goat farming in the EUMed context, the rounded figures found in the official literature on the sheep flock in

southern France, Italy, Greece and Spain are presented below. Despite the lack of precise references, it can be assumed that at least two-thirds of the EUMed small ruminant flocks take advantage of open grazing during a significant period of the year (Nori and Marchi, 2015).

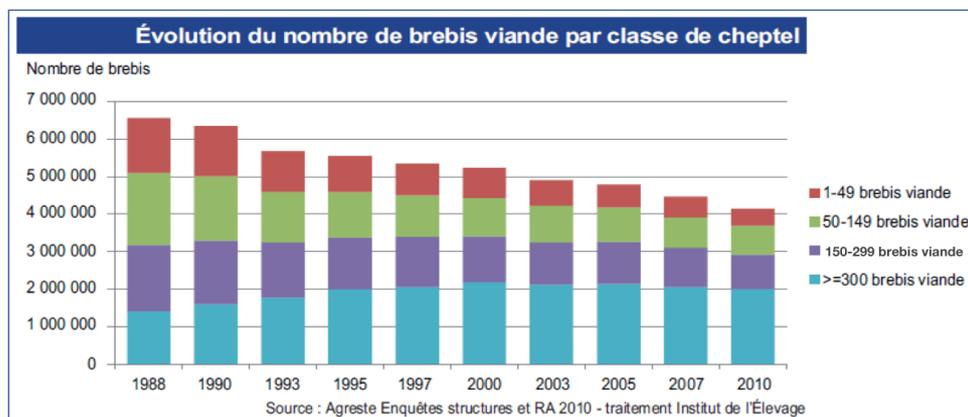
Table 2 – The sheep sector in EUMed countries (rounded data for 2010)

Country	Sheep farms	Sheep flock	% meat production	% milk production
Italy	50,000	7.5 million	35%	65%
Spain	110,000	22 million	82%	18%
France (total)	35,000	6 million	70%	30%
Fr. Mediterranean	8,000	1.5 million		
Greece	200,000	9.5 million	15%	85%
Total EUMed	About 368,000	40.5 million		

SOURCES: ISTAT, 2010; IDELE, 2013; MAGRAMA, 2013; CIHEAM, 2011; THALES, 2014; LAORE, 2013; FAO DATABASE

- 10 The composition of flocks and the levels of specialisation and performance vary considerably from one region to another. Although sector data are not always harmonised and consistent (Laore, 2013), medium-term trends indicate a decline in numbers with a marked overall reduction of about 30% of the EUMed flock in the past two decades; those that still remain have enlarged their size as a way to adjust cost-benefit ratios (refer to Picture 2 below). The classic refrain everywhere is that “20 years ago, with a flock half the size of the present one, we had a decent life, and we could even make savings and investments. Now, with a double-sized flock, it is difficult to make ends meet by the end of the year”².

Picture 2 - Evolution of the number and size of flocks in the sheep meat industry in France over about two decades (1988-2010), including extensive and intensive farms



NOTE: THE FIGURES ASSOCIATED TO DIFFERENT COLOURS REFER TO DIFFERENT FLOCK SIZE (IN SHEEP HEADS): A) RED (UPPER) 1-49; 2) GREEN 50-149; 3) BLUE 150-299; 4) LIGHT BLUE (LOWER) ≥ 300.

SOURCE: IDELE, 2013:50

- 11 The primary reasons for such sector restructuring are to be found in agricultural and trade policies that have contributed to transforming not only the agricultural economy but also rural society as a whole in all the countries of the Mediterranean region, with little regard for socio-cultural and ecological variables. As elsewhere, the polarisation of agricultural development has widened the gap between the intensification of agricultural production in the plains and coastal zones and a gradual abandonment of marginal areas (Gertel and Breuer, 2010). For pastoralism, a practice forged to produce in marginal ecosystems, it is obviously difficult to be competitive inside parameters defined solely by productivity performance.

Box 1 - The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) vis-à-vis pastoralism

The recent reforms of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) have shifted the focus of public support and rural welfare towards a multifunctional vision of agriculture; in such a context, pastoralists are increasingly asked to play their part in managing natural resources in marginal settings and maintaining landscapes and to contribute to stabilising the population and enhancing socio-economic development in difficult areas (Nori and Gemini, 2010; Beaufoy and Ruiz-Mirazo, 2013). At present, CAP support and subsidies play a significant role in the budgets of pastoral farms. Nonetheless, it is not unusual to hear that “*a farmer today spends more time in the office than in the field*”,³ or to read that “*we are considered mountain gardeners rather than producers of meat and milk*”.⁴ These financial contributions represent a critical resource for this sector. Overall, CAP funding accounts for about 40% of the European Union budget and represents around 40% of the income for pastoral farmers (average value for TRAMed case studies). Without this support, sheep and goats would have already disappeared in many places, with significant consequences for the livelihoods and the landscapes of marginal rural areas. The role of this public policy is essential to keep these territories populated and productive (Pastomed, 2007), although this does not seem to be enough to guarantee the permanence and the reproduction of these systems, as the decrease in operators seems to attest.

- 12 The restructuring of the sector has profoundly changed the size of the enterprises and the nature of the work, marking the separation between the managerial and the field levels. Despite the extensive characterisation of pastoralism, the work of the shepherd is intense and encompasses both physical labour and technical and managerial skills, ranging from climatology and botany to animal physiology and health, ethnology of predators, etc. (refer to Meuret, 2010), while spending much of the year in harsh settings with limited access to public services, scarce connectivity and few opportunities for leisure and alternative activities. Through this restructuring, the working and living conditions of shepherds have hardly improved in the face of a significant increase in their tasks and responsibilities. The prices of small ruminants’ milk and meat have fluctuated, while production costs have increased constantly (ISMEA, 2010).
- 13 Thus, this restructuring has contributed to creating unattractive conditions for the new generations that have often decided not to follow in their fathers’ footsteps, and to avoid engaging in a profession with uncertain prospects. Through this lens, it is possible to understand the crisis of pastoral “vocation” and the relative problems of generational renewal that is affecting this sector. This challenge was already identified as a priority by the Pastomed programme, which in 2007 reported “*the very high rate of over-55 compared*

with those under 35 years of age (...) and in many areas, the presence of elderly people 10 times more than young ones!" (Pastomed, 2007:18). Similar findings about the difficulties related to youth engagement can also be found in the reports of several projects (Domestic, Thales, ReThink), academic works (Kasimis, 2010; Nadal et al., 2010, Meuret, 2010, Mannia, 2010, Pellicer, 2014) and thematic discussion groups.⁵ More generally, this trend seems to follow Braudel's conception of mountain regions as being historical, almost structural, zones of emigration, "a factory of men for the use of others", even more so through the meaning proposed by Albera where mountain migrants export not only their arms but also their skills and know-how (Albera and Corti, 2000:1).

Box 2 - The case of France

France is a notable exception in the Mediterranean context in terms of being an enabling environment for extensive livestock farming: The labour conditions, rights and wage levels are significantly higher here than in other countries in the region. It is the outcome of years of political struggle, as well as social and economic investments. In France, an important process of generational renewal took place in the 1970s with the arrival of urban citizens who sought in shepherding an alternative lifestyle. By contrast, political and local authorities saw in this phenomenon an opportunity to revitalise territories that risked abandonment. In 1972, a pastoral law was approved (Decree 72-12), which sought to facilitate access to land, provide incentives to organise pastoral operators, and create the conditions for public investments – and thus contribute to developing an appropriate framework to improve shepherds' working and living conditions alike (Charbonnier, 2012). Today in France, a prospective shepherd can find training opportunities in one of five specialised schools in the country, and his/her wage might be two or three times that of the same worker in Italy, Spain or Greece.

- 14 In order to deal with the scarce availability of human resources, the supply of immigrant workers has been strategic in many cases. No matter the entrepreneurial trajectory pursued to adapt to the sector restructuring, immigrant shepherds have provided quite a skilled labour force at a relatively low cost. Without foreign workers, many pastoral farms today would face great difficulty in pursuing their activities; this resource represents a critical asset for young European entrepreneurs who take up this activity (INEA, 2009; Nori and Marchi, 2015). The typical profile of the immigrant who works as a salaried shepherd is a man between 25 and 40, a native of a country from the Mediterranean region (predominantly Romania, Morocco, FYROM and Albania) and often with previous, direct experience in animal breeding, albeit at different scales. Immigrant shepherds are appreciated for their endurance, flexibility and adaptability; some breeders have raised concerns over technical gaps in certain aspects related to the adequate management of forestry resources, wildlife presence and relationships with farming as well as with protected areas. Table 3 summarises the information available on the presence and contributions of immigrants in EUMed countries. This information is clearly indicative because it is the result of necessary generalisation and simplification.

Table 3 – The presence of immigrants in Euro-Mediterranean pastoralism

Region	Main production	% of foreigners on total salaried shepherds	Country of origin for most of them	Average salary (in €)	Source
Italy					
Abruzzi	Milk	90%	FYROM, Romania, Albania	800	Coldiretti, 2013
Triveneto	Meat	70%	Romania	800	TRAMed
Piedmont	Meat and milk	70%	Romania, Moldavia	800	TRAMed; INEA, 2009
Val d'Aosta	Dairy cattle	70%	Romania, Morocco	2,000	INEA, 2009; Coldiretti, 2013
Sardinia	Milk	35%	Romania, Morocco	500–600	Mannia, 2010; TRAMed
Calabrie	Milk	35%	Kurdistan, Pakistan, India	500–600	INEA, 2009
Greece					
Thessaly	Milk	50%	Albania, Bulgaria, Romanian Vlachs	400–600	Thales, Domestic
Peloponnese	Milk	40%	Albania, Bulgaria, India, Pakistan	400–600	Thales, Domestic
Crete	Milk	35%	Albania, Bulgaria, India, Pakistan	400–600	Thales, TRAMed
France					
Provence	Meat	Mostly during winter for large flocks	Romania Morocco, Tunisia	1,400	TRAMed; Fossati, 2013
		65% Mostly on summer pastures	Other regions of France or northern Europe	1,500–2,500	TRAMed; Meuret, 2010
Pyrenees	Milk	Few salaried shepherds	Quite a limited phenomenon		Meuret, 2010

Maritime Alps	Meat	20%	Romania		TRAMed
Corsica	Milk and meat		Morocco		Terrazzoni, 2010
Spain					
Valencia Community		70%	Morocco	600	AVA, 2009
Catalan Pyrenees	Meat	55%	Romania, sub-Saharan Africa	600–700	Nadal et al., 2010
Aragon Pyrenees	Meat	60%	Morocco, Romania, Bulgaria, Ukraine		TRAMed
Andalusia			Romania, sub-Saharan Africa		TRAMed
Castillas	C. Léon meat C. Mancha milk	35%	Morocco, Romania, Bulgaria, Portugal		TRAMed; Plataforma
Basque country	Milk		Romania	1,000	TRAMed
Galicia			Portugal		TRAMed
Extremadura			Portugal		TRAMed

- 15 However, the important contribution of foreign communities to generational renewal is not new to Mediterranean pastoralism, which has already witnessed the Sardinians colonising abandoned pasturelands in central Italy, southern Spanish herders moving to graze the Pyrenees, northern Italian shepherds moving to Provence and Switzerland, the moves of the Vlachs and Arvanites flock and shepherds throughout Greece, and Kurdish shepherds in several regions of Turkey (Lebaudy, 2010; Meloni, 2011). These communities have contributed substantially to keeping the pasturelands of destination countries populated, alive and productive. In this regional logic, it is not surprising that immigrants who work as shepherds come from other parts of the same Mediterranean ecosystem, as mobility and migration are factors embedded in and characterising pastoral systems. Together with historical and geographical patterns, language and ease of communication are important elements in migrants' decision making, even on rangelands. This is the rationale underpinning shepherds' flow from Piedmont to France (regions of Occitan language), Moroccans in France, Romanians (mostly) in Italy and Spain, and Vlachs in Greece.

Table 4 – Migratory flows of shepherds through the Mediterranean in the 20th century

Region	End of the 1800	1950s	1980s	1990s	2000s
Provence	Italy and Spain	Morocco and Tunisia			Romania
Sardinia		<i>Emigration from Sardinia to continental Italy</i>	Morocco and Tunisia	Albania, FYROM	Romania
Catalan Pyrenees	Neighbouring valleys: Vall de Boí, Vall Fosca	Andalusia		Morocco	Romania sub-Saharan Africa
Turkey		Kurdistan		Afghanistan	

- 16 The limited formalisation of contractual relationships and the very scanty prospects for socio-economic upgrade are the complementary, intertwined elements that characterise the condition of immigrants in this sector – as much as in most of the Euro-Mediterranean agriculture sector (Pittau and Ricci, 2015). These factors carry relevant implications for the sector’s development and sustainability because they add to a situation in which migrants are already affected by difficulties in accessing land and credit and are faced with important cultural and administrative issues. In this context, workers often remain a few months/years in this sector, switching between different farms in search of more comfortable living and working conditions, but they tend not to stabilise in the sector.
- 17 The transition from manual labour to entrepreneurship and livestock ownership in this sector shows very low rates for migrants, which undermines the incoming population’s ability to contribute to the future and sustainability of pastoralism. This rationale underpins the recent dynamics of ethnic replacement that characterise the foreign workforce in certain regions as a result of changes in the political and administrative framework. In the case of Provence, in southern France, it is interesting to note the gradual change in the origins of foreign shepherds. In fact, it is widely acknowledged that foreigners have long been employed in local flocks, though from different areas: from Italians and Spaniards at the beginning of the century, to Maghrebis from Tunisia and Morocco after the war, to the recent inflow of Romanians.

Discussion

- 18 Modern pastoralism faces various degrees of unpredictability and risks that relate not only to ecological and climatic factors but also (more and more) to those originating in the political, commercial and administrative spheres. Paradoxically, modern society is increasingly appreciating the products and services of pastoralism (quality proteins, organic production, biodiversity, ecosystem services, landscape and culture, etc.), but flocks and shepherds are decreasing all over the countryside. Nevertheless, this practice remains a very important asset to tackle climate change, as well as desertification patterns affecting marginal territories in the Mediterranean (Nori and Davies, 2007).

- 19 In order to guarantee the sustainability and development of this sector, it is nevertheless necessary to ensure decent living and working conditions for extensive breeders and shepherds alike and to provide a perspective of upgrading in both social and economic terms (Eychenne, 2011). In this respect, it is necessary to get a more effective policy framework in support of the pastoral economy – from CAP support schemes to those regulating pastoral products value chains to the efforts aimed at recognising and appreciating this profession (*patrimonialisation*). While the call for a growing, fairer institutional and market incorporation may seem contradictory for a practice typically conceived of as anarchic and self-sufficient, pastoralism has in fact evolved through history thanks to important exchanges and interactions with the rest of society. According to Nadal et al., (2010) pastoralism was one of the key sectors that prompted the integration of mountainous areas into the capitalist market during the 19th and 20th centuries.
- 20 The large presence of foreigners in pastoralism – and in forestry⁶ – is a clear indicator of the importance of the immigrant workforce in the sectors that are vital to keeping mountain territories alive and productive, as well as managing natural resources and protecting the population against hydrogeological risks (such as fires, floods, landslides, etc.). In these situations, immigrants not only participate in productive agro-silvo-pastoral activities but also represent an overall strategic resource for the sustainability of mountain societies, providing a critical contribution to repopulate remote villages and most marginal communities (INEA, 2009; Kasimis, 2010; Osti and Ventura, 2012; Corrado, 2012). Despite socio-cultural divergences in certain cases, the impact of immigration in these areas is rather positive, as competition in the local labour and land markets is limited because shepherding is not an attractive profession to local workers, and flocks make productive use of land that would otherwise be abandoned.
- 21 The migration phenomenon is not new to the pastoral world, since mobility represents a pillar of this practice, and generational renewal through ethnic substitutions has already characterised pastoralism in other areas and periods (refer to Table 4). This perspective makes it possible to consider Mediterranean pastoralism as a regional system, where mobility affects flocks, as well as shepherds and their families, at different levels and in different places. This recalls Braudel's definition of the Mediterranean as a mosaic of all *the existing* colours that merge and mix through territories and eventually combine to form a dynamic image, where sheep and goats come to represent a typical element of the landscape. In order to capitalise on these migratory flows, there should be consistent efforts to improve the viability of pastoralism and the attractiveness of mountain areas and to facilitate the integration of foreign workers accordingly. This in-migratory phenomenon represents an invaluable opportunity to deal with rural depopulation trends, generational renewal flaws and the overall socio-economic desertification that affects much of the rural areas in EUMed, while also representing a good opportunity to contribute to managing migratory flows.
- 22 In such a context, it would therefore make sense to better articulate and coordinate migration policies with those relating to the agricultural and labour markets. The recognition and appreciation of the technical capacities of these workers represent the first necessary steps to integrate such a policy framework in order to provide adequate investments in enhancing training and entrepreneurial skills to adapt immigrant shepherds' capacities to the challenges of the local sector. In this respect, the presence of foreign shepherds could be encouraged in pastoral schools in France (5) and Spain (5),

through an approach of active citizenship, where everybody gets appreciated for what he/she contributes to the surrounding society. Similar training efforts are also being discussed in Italy and in Greece. But it will be necessary to work towards improving the social status and economic conditions of these workers by enhancing transparent and fair contractual relationships, while reducing precariousness and improving living and working conditions. Thus, sustainable pastoralism will not only be the result of a system of aid and subsidies but also require a broader political framework, including a review of agriculture, professional and migration policies, together with ad hoc initiatives and investments. From a co-development perspective, it would also be interesting to assess the implications of these migratory flows in the pastoral workforce's regions of origin, so as to contribute to an understanding of the impact of these dynamics in a regional perspective by paying attention to the reshaping of pastoral societies in Romania, Morocco, Macedonia, Bulgaria and other countries from which, according to a colleague, "les bons bergers ils sont tous partis chez vous".⁷

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NOTES

1. TRAMed – *Transhumances in the Mediterranean*, EU Marie Curie contract ES706/2014 www.eui.eu/DepartmentsAndCentres/RobertSchumanCentre/People/Fellows/2016/NoriMichele.aspx
2. TRAMed interviews: J.Larraz, Fustiñana (Navarra) april 2015; F.lli Costa, Grotte di Castro (Lazio) june 2015.
3. TRAMed interview with Roberto Funghi, Florence (It) February 2016
4. Brisebarre, 2007; Nadal et al., 2010.
5. Refer to <http://www.ruralpini.it>; www.ganaderiaextensiva.org
6. Particularly, workers from Eastern Europe or the Balkans, who in parts of Italy account for about 40% of the forestry workforce, according to the INEA (2009).
7. Personal communication with the author, Rabat, 2008. 'The good shepherds have left to join you !'.

ABSTRACTS

The first results of the TRAMed research report on how pastoralism – an activity seemingly destined for oblivion, a memory of a recent past – shows interesting signs of resilience and important adaptive capacities. In several south European countries, foreign workers (shepherds who have emigrated from other Mediterranean countries) play an important role in this process because they provide skilled labour at a relatively low cost. Such migratory flows enable the pursuit, evolution and diversification of an activity increasingly acknowledged as essential to the preservation of the region's natural and cultural heritage; and yet, it is one that Europeans are practising less and less.

Engaging this workforce in the process of adapting and innovating the sector by integrating and empowering them provides the opportunity to help train the shepherds and the breeders of tomorrow. Without them, the Mediterranean is likely to lose some of its most valuable and increasingly rare guardians, as well as the sophisticated knowledge that is critical to managing such rich but fragile territories in the face of the major socio-political and ecological changes affecting the region.

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Keywords: pastoralism, Mediterranean, migrations, generational renewal, small ruminants

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