

3. Romanian transhumance: from enduring folk mythology to contemporary cultural and biological heritage

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1. Introduction

Two generations of Romanian scholars strived to explain how Carpathian transhumance ensured a sustainable lifestyle of rural pastoral communities and pointed out how mobile pastoralism strengthened what was recently identified as “the inextricable link” between biological and cultural diversity (Maffi, 2007, p. 267). In the light of the newer cross-disciplinary methodology, it is appropriate to consider that Romanian transhumance was studied within the framework of what experts recently called a „biocultural heritage” described by Ove Eriksson in 2018 as the “biological manifestations of culture, reflecting indirect or intentional effects, or domesticated landscapes, resulting from historical human niche construction” (Eriksson, 2018, p. 1). The contemporary situation of mobile pastoralism in Romania is however more often envisaged in the light of a long research tradition that emphasized more the cultural than the biological heritage that Carpathian shepherding generated along the centuries. This chapter looks at how ingrained this cultural view on pastoralism is in Romania based on an extensive review of transhumance literature, and how it may overshadow the efficiency of decision-making on addressing the actual risks that transhumant shepherds are facing today. Considering mobile pastoralism as an old-fashioned lifestyle that was specific to ancient time of the nation would disengage the concrete solutions that transhumance in present-day Romania needs in order to survive.

Romulus Vuia (1964) provided the first and the most important classification of pastoral practices encountered in Romania at the middle of the last century, a classification that was often followed by other ethnographers, geographers, and experts in historical animal science; Vuia identified four different types of animal breeding activities practiced on Romanian lands, according to the flocks' main grazing areas: (1) the local grazing (within or close to the village's hayfields); (2) local mountain summer grazing (on the hayfields and grasslands situated on the nearby mountains) – that is the case of the animal breeders living in the Subcarpathian villages, who spent the summer grazing in the mountains nearby; (3) summer grazing within diverse mountain pastures, while flocks spent the winter within the village grasslands (a type of pastoralism within which an important role was given to the fertilising effect of livestock on the cultivated fields) – characteristic of peasant smallholding farms that involve both cattle and sheep; 4) transhumance (Vuia, 1964, pp. 64-96; Butură, 1978, p. 207). Romanian shepherding was in most cases and areas practiced along with agriculture, and only in the most advanced phases, i.e. in the case of transhumance animal breeding represented the only means of subsistence. This mix of economic activities provided a diverse economic experience to rural people that were thus able to intuitively acknowledge the benefits of shepherding for fertilizing the crops and the proper management of both plant and animal breeding. As it was extensively described, transhumance was the most evolved type of animal breeding practiced by Romanians, available though only to the wealthiest sheep owners from only a few well delineated rural areas in southern Transylvania, northern Oltenia, and northern Walachia; it is considered to have started as early as the 13th – 14th centuries. Many of the Romanian scholars of transhumance point out that Romanian mobile pastoralism could not be assimilated to population mobility, since it was practiced only by shepherds who were moving to the summer and winter pastures away from their villages, and not by their entire family and community. This characteristic allowed Romanian scholars to integrate Romanian transhumance into an “Alpine” type of transhumance, and not

within what was identified as the “Balkan” type. Another “Alpine” characteristic of Romanian transhumance is its development according to the market demands, and not as a choice or due to the lack of forage available at the original domicile of the sheep owners (Butură, 1978, p. 215). The extension of Romanian pastoralism was encouraged by the great demand for wool (used heavily in the old domestic textile industry), cheese (as one of the main products of the local foodways) and meat (requested strongly by the external market – especially by the Middle Eastern one during the time when the Romanian principalities were economically subordinated by the Ottoman Empire).

Romanian transhumance developed at first as a “simple” form of mobile pastoralism, in which summer grazing was done at different highlands situated in the Southern and Eastern Carpathians, and gradually arrived to a “double” type when shepherds also travelled long distances to find enough resources to allow them to spend winter in the lowlands (Romanian Plain, Danube Delta, Black Sea regions, and even Crimea). The decrease of transhumance was organically determined, as in the case of its growth, by the lowering demand of pastoral products, due to the decline of internal textile industry and the demand for traditional wool attire, the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the disappearance of a direct and considerable market for mutton. Another relevant factor for the transhumance’s decline was the diminishing of unrestrained pastures and meadows, due to the extent of cultivated crops and private properties around the traditional winter grazing areas, which determined shepherds to travel at longer distances as an attempt to overcome shortage of forage and fodder.

Romanian transhumance was especially studied at the beginning of the last century by human geographers and rural sociologists; they undertook local and regional studies on domestic forms of local pastoralism, such as Tiberiu Morariu, *Viața pastorală în Munții Rodnei* (“Pastoral life in the Rodnei Mountains”) (1937), Laurian Someșan, *Viața pastorală în Munții Călimani* (“Pastoral life in the Calimani Mountains”) (1934), Sabin Opreanu, *Contribuțiuni la transhumanța din Carpații Orientali*

(“Contributions to transhumance in the Eastern Carpathians”) (1930), etc. Gradually, transhumance scholarship engaged in more interdisciplinary pursuits, determining scholars to acquire themselves the mandatory tools and knowledge from different fields that provided the means to holistically study the topic, instead of relying on multidisciplinary teams. This lack of works of synthesis was considered by some historians of the topic as a shortcoming, one that determined a gap between different points of view and fieldwork results (Toşa, 2007, p. 177).

One of the best examples of such individual extensive interdisciplinary research is Tiberiu Morariu’s study on mobile pastoralism in the Rodnei Mountains (1937). Morariu analysed the pastoral phenomenon from all the connected perspectives: historical, geographical, ethnographical, economic, biological (1937, 3). In the preface, Morariu points out that the study of pastoralism is a growing field in Romania, but most of the authors who study it choose just one specific, restricted point of view; on the opposite, his research intended to offer a holistic treatment of the subject. His book starts from the geographical and geological features of the region, a description of the climate, a broad explanation of diverse pastures and hayfields, their degree of fertility, their botanical composition and so on. He also provides a critical insight on the unwise decisions taken by shepherds who do not manage to organize grazing in a sustainable way. He further described pastoralism according to historical sources, and extensively describes the sheepfold buildings, the pastoral products and by-products, the associated customs and traditions, the pastoral calendar, the shepherds’ attire, the shepherds’ meals, the main sheep roads and itineraries. After carefully reviewing the pasturing conditions, he highlights the economic value of the mountain pastures should be increased by more sustainable grazing and calls for a more systematic grazing mechanism (Morariu, 1937, p. 47). He believes that the most valuable for grazing are the subalpine pastures (situated at around 1250-1700 m), given the fact that the higher ones are affected by the wind which does not allow plants do fully develop (Morariu, 1937, p. 51). The good result of the recommended systematic grazing involves the dividing

of the mountain pastures by sheep owners, who had to pay every year a certain fee to the local administration (Morariu, 1937, 53). Shepherds and sheep owners grazed their livestock according to a system that allowed grass regeneration, used also efficiently for haymaking because hay was an essential resource during winter. A more intelligent and organized use of resources, Morariu thinks, will offer a sustainable future to the local communities of animal breeders. He additionally brings forward an argument that is applicable to the current problems which Romanian pastoralism is facing: "Shepherding in this area is of utmost importance not only through its old and original features of the pastoral life, that of encouraging a lasting connection between the three Romanian provinces (...) – but also due to its economic importance" (Morariu, 1937, p. 206).

In an article published a few years later, Morariu continues his strong support for a more systematic and controlled use of pastoral resources by comparing Romanian Carpathian mobile pastoralism with pastoral practices in the French Alps (Morariu, 1942). The comparison is due to his own fieldwork and observation of French mobile pastoralism. While he emphasizes the similarities and differences between the two systems and the geo-ecological advantages of both for animal grazing, he is impressed by the productivity obtained by the French who put in place a much more organized system. It is interesting that, even though he underscores the many tasks that the Romanian state has to undertake for the future to ensure a more economically viable pastoral system (such as improving the local breeds, building better shelters for shepherds, creating a centralized system for cheese making, etc.), he is however aware of the necessity to preserve along with the more rational type of pastoralism its ancient local characteristics that are such an important national heritage: "As for the Carpathian pastoralism, even though there are regions where it is based on the same principals as the French one, it does appear more far behind than that one and it preserves old features that played a significant role in the life of the Romanians, features that are so important for the ethnographer, the historian, the folklorist. However, we should not forget that this type of ancient pastoral system does not work when we try to

ensure a higher economic value” (Morariu, 1942, p. 393). During communism, and its “socialist means of production” that are more “rationally” organized, Morariu continues his field investigations in the transhumant landscapes. He figures out that transhumance is still practiced in areas renowned for mobile pastoralism, even though some of the economic factors that encouraged large distance transhumance in the last centuries were clearly weakened. Morariu even points out that continuing the old patterns of flock migration beyond its economic necessity and when financial gain does not encourage practitioners is also due to a new factor, i.e. to “tradition” (Morariu, 1963, p. 42).

2. The popularity of Romanian transhumance as cultural heritage

Though authoring a very pragmatic assessment of pastoralism, Morariu was nevertheless aware of how much this specific topic had been approached by scholars of cultural heritage, and of its significance for the Romanian ethnic imaginary. Morariu’s works on mobile pastoralism sets up a line of research that became quite popular in the following decades and that would logically model what is more recently considered as the study of “biocultural heritage”. The study of domestication of Carpathian landscapes through shepherding involving plant and animal traditional knowledge and habitat conservation served to find management solutions to help the subsistence of this occupation as well as demonstrating the cultural unity of Romanian people. Romantic emphasis on how Romanian shepherds managed to successfully tame and inhabit unfriendly parts of undomesticated nature such as the high peaks of the Carpathians was populating folklore studies and ethnographic and geographic accounts. E. de Martonne was one the first to build up on this cultural undertone in his geographical description of Romanian pastoralism (Martonne, 1912, p. 121). Traian Herseni an important interwar rural sociologist, pointed out that Romanian pastoralism should be studied not as an occupation among others that is specific to Romanian rural communities, but as an intricate

lifestyle (Herseni, 1941, p. 16), and the geographer Ion Conea stressed that Romanian southern Carpathians are “the most inhabitable and hospitable mountains” (Conea, 1984, p. 44). A contemporary ethnographer, Ion Ghinoiu considered the Carpathians as “very favorable to humanizing” (Ghinoiu, 1968, p. 47).

The strong emphasis on how ancient mobile pastoralism in the Carpathians as an important occupation of Romanians was motivated by the role it played as an argument in the ethnic rhetoric and the construction of a national intangible cultural heritage. This is the key to understanding the emphasis on the cultural role of mobile pastoralism in almost all different types of research on pastoralism. Ioan Augustin Goia underscores this interpretation in the introductory remarks of his own research on the topic: “The preference given to the topic of transhumance by Romanian authors with different research interests was partially determined by an affective factor of romantic origin present in our intellectual circles during the last two centuries. The idealized image of the ‘free shepherds’ in constant contact with the rough nature or, on the contrary, of a heavenly nature, supported in various ways a rich specialized literature.” (Goia, 2012, p. 9).

Heritage experts’ interest in pastoralism emerged in the Romanian culture in connection with the discovery of folk poetry that often epitomized the shepherd’s lifestyle. The transhumance routes are poetically described even by geographers, who see the Carpathian Mountains as the central arch or citadel of the country: “It is like spokes of a wheel that the roads of Romanian transhumance branch out from the central citadel of mountains towards all the horizons” (Conea, 1940, p. 17). The cultural service paid by transhumance to ensure the ethnic unity of the Romanian people is a much-cherished idea of the national mythology, transhumance serving as an engine of ethnic unity: “By wandering with the flocks, each shepherd could have a vivid and comparative perception over people of his own and other ethnic groups; he could also internalise an image of his homeland differentiated from other lands. Thus (...) transhumance also fulfilled an ethnic function” (Geană, 2006, p. 106). Even foreign experts

who became familiar with Romanian mobile pastoralism realized “how deeply ingrained pastoralism is in Romanian culture” (Juler, 2014, p. 1). Authors who assessed the potential of the Carpathian rural areas for small scale tourism did not forget to mention the cultural value of the Carpathians according to domestic processes of heritagization: “Great value also attaches to the cultural landscape of the Carpathian Mountains (Apolzan, 1987, p. 14) with dispersed communities whose ethos is perhaps best reflected in the notion of ‘sheep space’ and the unspoken traditions of strong pastoral communities” (Turnock, 1999, p. 193).

Shepherding was clearly glorified in the Romanian folk poetry and song, and especially by the national epic ballad of the Romanians, collected in the middle of the 19th century from a rich pastoral area in the Eastern Carpathians. *Miorița* is a very eloquent poem describing the story of three shepherds going with their sheep in the mountains, when two of them plan to kill the third, because he was wealthier and more handsome. The faithful ewe of the third shepherd warns its master of the plan and asks him to counteract it, but the about to be killed does not want to react, peacefully accepting his death. He reveals his last wishes to *Miorița*, his ewe, and describes his death and burial as a hypothetical or metaphorical wedding of cosmic dimension in which his relationship with the beautiful Carpathian nature plays an important part. The aesthetic quality of *Miorița* determined literary experts to consider it the best inspiration for domestic poetry, and its message was strongly manipulated by different cultural policies that followed its discovery in the 1850s.

The most acclaimed Romanian historian, Nicolae Iorga, compares the pastoral ballad with Bishop Thomas Percy’s collection of ballads (published in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, in 1765) as a strategy of uplifting the domestic folkloric production to a great European tradition of the same kind (Iorga, 1919, pp. 13-14). Iorga’s comment was not only intended as a comparison of folkloric or literary relevance, but as a historical one, given the fact Percy’s goal was not limited to promoting English folklore, but rather to political imperatives: “Percy’s adoption of the neglected popular tradition of songs and ballads therefore amplified

their significance. No longer merely ephemeral rustic ditties, they were historical artifacts, a national literary heritage. (...) Percy's own ballad project was quite comparable: to assemble and edit ballads that would predominantly serve as popular 'Lectures on English History' and manners." (Groom, 2006, p. 183). Deployed by Percy to exemplify an emerging English identity, the old ballads created a picturesque vision of the English past, as it was exactly the case with the Romanian pastoral ballad. Iorga also targets the comparison of the entrepreneurial Carpathian shepherds with the more famous Scottish Highlanders.

According to domestic folklorists, the Romanian ballad's message contained a presentation of the shepherding as a traditional main occupation of Romanians that helped connecting the three Romanian lands and assuring the homogenous structure of the Romanian language; it also inspired a poetical representation of the national landscape, called by an important domestic philosopher, Lucian Blaga, a "mioritic space" (Blaga 1944/1985). Tradition and nature working to stress the symbolic geography of the country were also concrete mnemonic devices for legitimatizing the ethnic quality of history and territory. Pointing out in the same direction was G. Călinescu's influential presentation of *Miorița* among the four national myths: "In this ballad we find the greatest symbol of the Romanian people's pastoral existence and its unity in the middle the country's territory which is that of the Carpathian arch" (Călinescu, 1982, p. 59). Other Romanian intellectuals concluded that, due to the role played by transhumance in the Romanian culture, Romanians managed to acquire a "pastoral language" and a "pastoral soul" (Noica, 1996, pp. 144-145). Adrian Fochi, a folklorist who authored a comprehensive treatise on all discovered versions of the *Miorița* balad, considers that the ballad's plot is a "transhumance fact" (Fochi, 1964, p. 544), while admitting this was only a personal opinion not yet supported by documents. A few years later, another important Romanian ethnographer, Ion Mușlea, believed to have found a document to sustain Fochi's opinion, i.e. a historical account of a conflict between Wallachian shepherds happening in the 15th century on the territory of today's Montenegro (Mușlea, 1972, pp. 29-31).

Even after *Miorița*'s other meanings were gradually disappearing from the public discourse for lack of adequacy with contemporary realities, the emphasis on primitive and traditional culture in a natural background are still perceived as valuable resources for promoting Romania abroad. Sorin Alexandrescu noticed that this "insistence on tradition masks sometimes the fact that the values are in an advanced process of dissolution or did already become obsolete" (Alexandrescu, 2002, p. 145). This is indeed a good description for the situation created by a sudden project of reutilizing the *Miorița* myth as self-identity marker in 2017 by the Romanian Minister of Agriculture, Petre Daea.

Pastoralism as a cultural heritage item was appropriately employed in country or regional branding in other countries also. For example, in the Polish Carpathians, a region where also transhumance was a significant traditional practice, since the mid-20th century mobile pastoralism diminished and almost disappeared due to drastic economic changes. In 1982, thanks to a civil society project, sheep grazing was revitalized in the Tatra Mountains and pursued mainly as „cultural grazing” (Nowicka, 2015, p. 155). Not surprisingly, the aesthetic quality of the mountain landscape inspired relevant legislation meant to protect natural habitat and ecological balance; in Italy, beauty of nature proved to be a more convincing outline for protective legislation than the rationale offered by natural sciences: “At first, nature was merely regarded as deserving protection for ‘natural beauty’ or because it was inherently linked with sites of historical, artistic or literary heritage” (Ceruti, 2007, p. 55). The Danish Island Fyn is associated with a fairy tale land thanks to the fact it is the birthplace of Hans Christian Andersen who invoked in his stories the rough country people in these lands, and was inspired by the picturesque countryside of his childhood. Branding Fyn in the eyes of both local and foreign tourists as a place of legend encouraged the strengthening of the classical idea of the pastoral, rural and agrarian life, the community of shepherds, the aesthetic nature and the metaphysical superiority of simple, primitive pastoral societies, thus becoming the perfect birthplace

of the Danish nation: "The pastoral sentiment is the national sentiment." (Knudsen, Greer 2011, p. 95).

In conclusion, Romanian enduring discourse on the pastoral mythology is only one example of a broader European branding rhetoric using European bio-cultural heritage as a pertinent argument. Together with the actual phenomenon of mobile pastoralism, it was the cultural view and the ethnological scholarship that helped preserve the stereotypical image of the wandering shepherd in the Romanian cultural discourse as „a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1995, p. 370).

3. The threats faced by Romanian transhumance as biological heritage

As early as the interwar period, Romanian scholars of transhumance noted the gradual disappearance of this extended form of archaic mobile pastoralism, though it still preserved its main features (Herseni, 1941, p. 202); the preservation of the ancient characteristics is still noticed by contemporary scholars of transhumance against all facts that started to diminish it (Mathe Kiss, 2016, p. 33). The degradation of the pastoral life world and its natural and cultural features is due to the increasing urbanization of the rural areas, a phenomenon that started during communism, and continues to grow (David, 2015, p. 158).

Joint cultural, ecological, and economic values of transhumance are to be considered when proposing safeguarding measures intended to involve this type of mobile pastoralism in local development strategies, given the multiple threats that this traditional occupation faces in contemporary Romania: "The modernization of society in the 20th century, industrialization and urbanization, along with the establishment of a restrictive political regime and central-based economy had considerably reduced the phenomenon of transhumance, which became increasingly rare. The decline was exacerbated after 1900, when land owned by the state was given back to their former owners, and private property was

instituted, thus hindering shepherds from travelling over long distances” (Velcea et al., 2016, p. 96). Ethnographers writing about transhumance during the communist times were tending to acknowledge the disappearance of transhumance as a normal and necessary consequence of the agricultural modernization of the country functioning under a new progressist regime: “Groups of transhumant shepherds practiced this occupation until recently when, because of the intensive agriculture in our country, this animal husbandry system lost its *raison d’être*” (Vlăduțiu, 1973, p. 268).

As it was convincingly proven by transhumance and pastoralism global experts, traditional mobile pastoralism is performed thanks to a “traditional ecological knowledge” or “local ecological knowledge” (TEK) and represents a relevant example of “High nature value farming”, a concept developed in the 1990s that recognizes the importance of small-scale low intensity farming in the conservation of European biodiversity and the maintenance of cultural landscapes (Beaufoy et al., 2012). As described by Fikret Berkes, TEK is “multi-generational, culturally transmitted knowledge and ways of doing things” (Berkes, 2008, pp. 7–8). Romanian transhumance is part of the general traditional local pastoralism functioning as a low-intensity form of livestock production. Mowing and grazing in specific times of the year was proven by experts in biodiversity to maintain the ecological configuration of this landscape and the semi-natural grasslands populated by unsown native plant species that rely on human activities. The importance of Romania’s semi-natural grasslands was highlighted by ecologists, conservationists and is presented in rural development policy documents (Huband et al., 2010, p. 57). The continuation of high distance mobile pastoralism is however dependent upon specific economic, social, and political factors, that should be appropriately addressed by decision-making. During communism, the mainstream ethnographic discourse based on the ideology of a “scientific revolution” was accepting the displacement of traditional farming and peasant agriculture that was considered “inefficient”. Romanian centralized farming was based on implementing

modern high-input grassland management designed to improve the amount of resources obtained, with no concern for how this technology will affect the conservation of pastures and hayfields. No interest was thus given to the loss, in the process, of all the traditional agricultural knowledge. Being under pressure exercised from the new official economic paradigm, ethnographers became only passive witnesses of the effects of these measures: “Traditional sheep breeds became very scarce, and the traditional methods remained only topics to be theoretically studied by experts” (Butură, 1978, p. 206).

Reviewers of the last century’s Romanian biocultural research on pastoralism recently showed the lack of studies on rural pastoral sustainability: “While the number of ethnographic and ethnological studies on the material culture of the peasant population in Romania increased in the 20th century, these studies provide limited information regarding traditional grassland management (hay meadows and pastures).” (Janišová et al., 2021, p. 21). Not surprisingly, the same phenomenon was noticed by Letizia Bindi in the field of Italian transhumance: “Herders who still practiced transhumance in Molise are decreasing dramatically in the last decades as well as research and studies on transhumance grew up.” (Bindi, 2019, p. 114).

After communism, during the 1990s, transhumance as an archaic form of sheep husbandry continued to decline as a consequence of other social, educational, economic factors, and since Romania joined the European Union, the rules of classical and traditional transhumance also changed, being replaced by European norms designed to improve animal welfare. Given that transhumant sheep husbandry is organically integrated within the larger concept of sustainable economy, based on the balance of resources, encouraging this occupation needs to become part of agricultural and environmental protection management on a national and European level. The preservation of pastoral tradition, including pasturing and movement of flocks, should represent a priority for stakeholders, given its great contribution to the maintaining of a peasant household of pastoral and agricultural identity, as well as the protection of alpine

pastures' biodiversity. In recent years, living conditions have become more difficult in mountain areas, traditional occupations are abandoned, demography is decreasing, the number of shepherds is diminishing, agricultural lands are fragmented, the wool market is disappearing, and strict sanitary and veterinary regulations are imposed regarding the processing of milk, cheese-making, and the welfare of transhumant animals. All these factors though endanger the pastoral tradition, and this process has major consequences, including the irreversible loss of the cultural identity of some communities and the disruption of the passing down of skills and practices to the young generation. For a long time, Romanian peasants were the only stakeholders of the land on which they lived and worked. Lately this realm is rapidly changing. The pastoral landscape suffers modifications, and in some cases a radical transformation takes place and endangers the biodiversity and cultural heritage of the traditional pastoral micro-zones.

The last century's research discourse on Romanian pastoralism directed mainly towards the importance of transhumance as cultural asset is proving inefficient for ensuring the viability of the communities of transhumant shepherds. One important action in the acknowledgment of the pastoral knowledge benefits for nature conservation is collecting the diverse ethnobotanical data that shepherds acquire. Ethnobiology is a field that assesses that the knowledge of traditional people on plants and animals are not a mere cultural construction, as it happens with other institutions of traditional societies (customs, music, rituals), but results of discerning the rules and functioning of the ecosystem within which they live: "When human beings function as ethnobiologists, however, they do not construct order, they discern it. One is not able to look out on the landscape of organic beings and organize them into cultural categories that are, at base, inconsistent with biological reality" (Berlin, 1992, pp. 8-9). The Romanian shepherds' ethnobotanical knowledge is expressed by the folk names of plants that they encounter often in the Romanian mountain flora, such as "lamb's tongue" (*Borrago officinalis*), "shepherd's bag" (*Capsella bursa-pastoris*), "shepherds' spinach" (*Chenopodium bonus-*

henricus), “shepherd’s mace” (*Echinops sphaerocephalus*), “little wool” (*Linaria vulgaris*), “donkey’s thistle” (*Onopordum acanthium*), “butter grass” (*Tamus communis*), “little butter” (*Ficaria verna*), “sheep’s tongue” (*Plantago lanceolata*), “lamb’s tail” (*Verbascum phoeniceum*), “sheepfold’s stevia” (*Rumex alpinus*), etc.

4. Conclusions

The main risks that Romanian transhumance phenomenon faces are addressed in the document by which transhumance as an intangible cultural heritage element was inscribed in the Romanian national inventory of this type of heritage. Besides other commercial and economic threats, there is one risk that especially needs to be urgently solved, i.e., the availability for transhumant shepherds of their old trails. Situated between mountains and lowlands, often accompanied by “stone crosses raised at crossroads to guide the shepherds through the huge plains and to estimate the distance travelled” (David, 2019, p. 12), the transhumance paths are a significant heritage connecting local pastoralism with the natural landscape. Being freely used for centuries, only in the last decades landowners are asking transhumant shepherds to pay a specific fee to pass by their lands (Irimie, Popa 1985, p. 203), and recently the road and railway police interdicts shepherds and flocks to cross the big roads and tracks, which determined shepherds to openly ask in 2008 the Ministry of Agriculture to ensure specific approved roads for their itineraries taking into account the traditional transhumance routes (Işfănoni, 2010, p. 466). The request was not yet solved, and this practical problem was noticed within fieldwork research reports (Huband et al., 2010), that showed the struggles transhumant shepherds encounter trying to find routes between the summer and the winter pastures, and to be able to use their historical “sheep roads” (Huband et al., 2010, p. 63). In other countries, the transhumant livestock routes are, on the opposite with the Romanian case, quite central to the heritagization process, as it was documented in Spain

(with the broad network of “cañadas”) (Ruiz, Ruiz, 1986) and Italy (the “tratturi”) (Avram, 2009; Bindi, 2019).

The joint project of the Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Ministry of Environment, Waters and Forests for inscribing transhumance in the national inventory of intangible cultural heritage, a goal achieved in 2020, also implied the drafting of appropriate legislation designed to solve, among other problems, the design and approval of transhumance routes; the future Pastoralism Law, proposed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, appropriately supports the practice of pastoralism, the protection and development of this occupation that supposes the mobility of flocks through emphasizing its social, economic, environmental and cultural features, the rational and sustainable use of pastoral resources and the finding of solutions for the legal issues that may appear regarding the itineraries of transhumant flocks. Through the Pastoralism Law, the Romanian state is supposed to establish the rules of practicing pastoral activities, the means of organising the trajectory of transhumance and mobile pastoralism, the national database with pastoral itineraries, the representative localities and regions for transhumance that are crossed by the flocks every season, and the strategies necessary to partially or completely restore the historical transhumance pathways, etc. (Baskerville 2020).

By dominantly exhibiting the cultural importance that transhumance played in the history of Romanians, this type of pastoralism risks being lost as an actual sustainable economic activity. The current needs of communities of mountain shepherds which were not yet affected by musealisation or over-commercialization projects do not find resolution only by rejoicing the ethnic philosophy of the “sheep space”. A similar situation and the same stress on creating efficient strategies for sustainable local development of pastoral communities were pointed out in the case of France: “Loin de toute apologie nostalgique du métier de berger, cette mise en patrimoine du pastoralisme a joué un rôle décisif dans la valorisation de ses productions et dans la dynamisation durable d’une zone de montagne qui reste toutefois fragile.” (Lebaudy, 2009, p. 56).

The general perspective of the Romanian public opinion over transhumance and the national pastoral heritage, the dynamic of approving and contesting this cultural heritage as a country brand need to be directed more to its biological and economic role. As a traditional way of life of certain rural communities in Romania, transhumance would best fit a lifestyle that appropriately stands between past and present and needs “to retain culturally significant elements of a traditional way of life, combining the old and the new in ways that maintain and enhance their identity while allowing their society and economy to evolve.” (Berkes, 2008, p. 258). It is time for Romanian transhumance to be focused more on the direction advertised by Regina Bendix for the field of heritage, i.e. as a provider of proper commercial value: “If one acknowledges that heritage is not created by tradition but rather by consumption, then it will also become obvious that its underlying resource, culture, requires steady investment.” (Bendix, 2012, p. 15). In the case of Romanian ethnic identity discourse, there is a strong need to turn from seeing transhumance as a picture from the past or an altar of historical unity, and value it through its value added to consumption, and as a strategy to preserve the necessary ecological balance of the Carpathian ecosystem.

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