8.3.1. Agro-sylvo-pastoralism in Albania: From past to present

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Agro-sylvo-pastoralism in the Balkan countries, and especially in Albania, is a crucial issue for regional rural development, agricultural policy and biodiversity conservation. These Mediterranean countries once possessed large pastoral resources and low productivity forests. Sustainable use of these resources and the maintenance of traditional agrarian systems are under pressure due to shifts toward more intensive modes of production and rural depopulation, inducing a trend toward the abandonment of land and pastoral practices, afforestation and a loss of agro-biodiversity. In Albania, pastoral systems are disappearing after a period of profound change linked to agricultural modernisation under the communist regime. Nevertheless, a variety of fragmentary agro-sylvo-pastoral systems survive. Our paper makes an evaluation of the literature on pastoralism in Albania as part of a larger project seeking to identify and develop agro-biodiversity products in Albania. An understanding of landscape variations in association with social and political history (including land-use policies) enables a broader view of contemporary Albania’s agro-sylvo-pastoral activities. Our goal is to use historical sources to identify the remaining attributes, tangible and intangible, of earlier agro-sylvo-pastoral systems now embedded in new contexts. Recognition of the cultural origins of agro-biodiversity, based on historical studies, may encourage the use of alternative approaches to biodiversity conservation, including the post-modern reinvention of traditional land management activities linked to specific products.

8.3.2. Meadows and pastures in the Italian Alps: New opportunities for traditional agricultural systems

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Agricultural changes in Italy during the 20th century have been studied from a variety of research perspectives, including those of cultural, economic, social and environmental history. Still, these studies rarely consider the “reenactment” phenomenon currently at work within Italian agricultural production. This paper seeks to analyze the continuous and discontinuous features of livestock management systems and transhumance in the Italian Alps. Summer Alpine pasture is one of the most peculiar and ancient forms of transhumance, and is still practised throughout the Alpine space, particularly for cows. At the same time, dairy farm management in this region has seen remarkable changes in recent decades, including a shift toward artisanal cheese production in which producers seek to provide high-quality products in combination with the tourist attractions of the mountains. The growing interest among young people in Alpina dairying is both a cause and a consequence of these changes: today, shepherding is for many people a choice in the face of economic crisis, instead of a constraint, as it was in the past. Contemporary transformations have been studied not so much by historians as from other perspectives, including anthropology and documentary filmmaking. The outcome is a “constructed” image of the Alps and of the shepherd’s work, with roots in ancient practices, one of the reasons claimed for the choices of young shepherds. These transformations find references and influences both in the establishment of ethnographic museums in the Alps and in contemporary consumers’ movements such as Slow Food.

8.3.3. “Rude, rough and lawless”: Reinterpreting the field woman’s story through scholarly research and performance art

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In November 2012 we were approached by an Education Officer at the East of England Showground looking for contributors to an educational program titled “Grow your own Potatoes”. The program will offer Peterborough primary school children the opportunity to find out where the potatoes they eat come from, how they are grown and harvested, and how they are processed in local factories. We proposed a live performance exploring women’s roles in the growing and harvesting of potato crops, based on historical information? What role does agricultural history reenactment play in the maintenance of national and regional identities rooted in rural images, activities and landscapes?
research carried out by Abigail Hunt for her doctoral thesis. The thesis argued that women working in agricultural gangs during the 19th and 20th centuries, including those working the Lincolnshire potato crops, were a “hidden workforce”, necessary to the agricultural economy but largely ignored due to disapproval of physical labor in mixed-sex groups. As a result, female gang workers’ stories went largely unrecorded and certain assumptions about their behavior and character became an accepted historical narrative. The research sought to address this issue through the use of non-traditional approaches to historical research. The performance challenges traditional ideas about female agricultural gang workers, seeking to communicate this new historical narrative to primary school children. Our paper will reflect on this experience, including: 1) background on the historical research; 2) reflections on the creative process of turning historical writing into an engaging performance; 3) an examination of the impact of the performance on the audience’s perception of the past.

8.3.4. Landscape and Youth: An oral history project on local knowledge and landscape

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“Landscape and Youth” focuses on the relationship between local knowledge and landscape with regard to the cultivation and manufacturing of flax in the Lesachtal, Austria. Very little traditional knowledge about flax has been documented in written form in this area, although flax was an important element of subsistence farming here up until the 1960s. Remnants of this form of land use are still visible today, such as the Brechlitube and the oil mill in Maria Luggau. Oral history interviews offer a way to restate these landscape elements within the local cultural history of the Lesachtal. This paper describes a project in which students from the Neue Mitteilshalt Lesachtal and the HSH Hermagor were instructed in oral history techniques, and then interviewed older local inhabitants about the traditional cultivation and processing of flax and its significance in daily rural life. The interviews were used to reconstruct the spatio-temporal dynamics of land use and its socio-economic context. The students also used the interviews to create self-guided audio tours for the region, which provide an acoustic archive of hands-on agricultural know-how with regard to flax, support further socio-scientific investigation of the landscape and have practical value for locals and tourists. A documentary film has also been produced. Flax is now cultivated at the local monastery garden and crafting techniques have been revitalised for demonstration at the Brechlitube. The resulting interactions between humans and landscape will be analysed with regard to cultural and group-specific meaning in the context of place-identity.