

Shepherding and the Dynamics of Intangible Heritage

Anamaria Iuga

National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Romania
ORCID: 0000-0002-9516-2672

Anamaria Iuga is head of the Ethnological Studies Department at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest, Romania. Her field research includes the dynamics of material culture and intangible heritage, along with traditional ecological knowledge.

Correspondence: anaiuga@gmail.com

Carmen Mihalache

National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Romania

Carmen Mihalache is head of the Documentation and Recovery Department at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Bucharest, Romania. Her field research includes the identification, management, conservation, and enhancement of intangible cultural heritage. She has main interests in folklore, oral history, and medical anthropology.

Magdalena Andreescu

National Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Romania

Magdalena Andreescu is head of Recent Heritage Department at the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant. In over 30 years of museum activity, she has done fieldwork on cultural heritage topics, such as intangible heritage, ethnic cultures, and private ethnographic collections.

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ABSTRACT

Animal husbandry is one of the oldest human occupations, and it is well spread over the world. Most importantly, during the centuries of practising this occupation, humans have developed a solid understanding of the environment they were living in, developing in time a specific traditional ecological knowledge. This traditional knowledge is part of an intangible heritage that the communities have and cherish, although it is constantly changing and adapting to new conditions. In the past years, more and more researchers are documenting the change, by looking at the challenges and dynamics of this occupation, its uncertainties, and contemporary risks. The "Introduction" of this special issue of *Martor* overviews the research focusing on the changes that pastoralism is going through. It also presents the articles that are included in the volume.

KEYWORDS

Pastoralism; change; traditional ecological knowledge; intangible heritage.

Animal husbandry is one of the oldest and widest-spread human occupations (see Marshall and Weissbrod 2011), having developed over centuries, in a strong connection with agriculture, exploitation of forests, as well as development of crafts¹ (see Dunăre 1981; Vuia 1980). It was, and still is in some parts of the world, one of the main livelihoods, especially in regions where agriculture played a secondary part because of the infertile soil that would not

allow for sufficiently large crops to sustain the community, e.g., mountainous, steppe, etc.

Shepherding is an important activity, mainly for providing food (such as the dairy products and the meat) and, more important in the past than today, for the (sheep) wool used in the domestic industry for making carpets, blankets, winter clothes, and so on. Lately, wool has been used for home insulation, a technique that has potential especially on a small scale (see Corscadden, Biggs, and Stiles 2014).

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Owning sheep was, and in some regions still is, a sign of wealth. This is still the case for some regions in Romania, but it used to be more common up to the end of the Second World War, when the communist regime came to power. As a social status sign, there are the textiles made out of wool that are used and displayed in the houses of sheep farmers (see Iuga 2011), or the woollen clothes or garments that they wear (see Şpan 2016).

Most importantly, during the centuries of practising this occupation, humans have developed a solid understanding of the environment they were living in, developing in time a specific traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).² That is, “an intimate and detailed knowledge of plants, animals, and natural phenomena, the development and use of appropriate technologies (...), and a holistic knowledge, or ‘world view’” (Bourque, Inglis, and LeBlanc 1993, VI). This knowledge “complements scientific knowledge by providing practical experience in living with ecosystems and responding to ecosystem change” (Berkes et al. 1998, 409). TEK has been transmitted over generations and is the result of direct experience of the shepherds and farmers themselves.


Ethnographers and anthropologists, ever since the end of the nineteenth century,³ have been researching this knowledge and how it is transmitted, in order to understand these communities. This traditional knowledge is part of an intangible heritage that the communities have and cherish. And, although it is strongly rooted in the practices and knowledge that people have, it must be stressed that, in time, as each generation’s interests change, this heritage is in turn dynamic and constantly changing. This dynamic is part of the way traditions function (see Handler and Linnekin 1984; Mihăilescu 2004), considering how every cultural phenomenon adapts to the contemporary needs of each community. Thus, it is important to notice the changes that occur in the pastoral occupations and to comprehend the drivers that made it possible, as well as how these changes enable the continuity of the practice.

In the past years, more and more re-

searchers are documenting the change, looking at the challenges and dynamics of this occupation, its uncertainties, and contemporary risks (see, for instance, Zerilli and Pitzalis 2015; the articles in the volume coordinated by Letizia Bindi 2022; and the one coordinated by Jan Scoones 2023). A serious concern is the decline of transhumance practices determined, as Caroline Juler (2014) points out, not only by the settling down of the shepherds, but also by the barriers—large roads, railways, the hostility of the landowners, hostility of the hunters and police—that appear on the old long-distance routes limiting the grazing areas. Other impediments to transhumance are considered, as Stephan Festini Cucco (2024) points out, the different infrastructure constructions or elements—industrial constructions, solar panels, military zones, and so on. We can thus say that, as a general trend, transhumance is disappearing. This makes the more relevant the kind of work that Dragoş Lumpan does, photography exhibitions and albums (Lumpan 2011) and also film.⁴ Since 2006, when he started his research, he has been documenting how transhumance is changing in six countries (Romania, Turkey, Greece, Albania, Italy, and Wales).

Another important focus in recent studies, in our opinion, is the analysis of the impact of migration⁵ in regions where animal husbandry communities have been affected by ageing and decline (see Nori 2016; Huband, McCrackend, and Mertens 2010; Membretti and Viazzo 2017). It is an important aspect, as in most of the regions where we have been conducting research, people are complaining about the lack (due to migration) of shepherds to take care of the animals (see also Juler 2014), or the fear that the “animals will not be well-tended” (Huband, McCrackend, and Mertens 2010, 68) by shepherds that are not really committed to their occupation. Michele Nori (2016), for instance, is pointing out not only the role that migrants have in maintaining the territories alive and productive, but also the difficulties they face because of the poor working and living conditions, which will lead,





for centuries. In this context, the latest outbreak of ovine rinderpest (peste des petits ruminants or PPR) that has infected sheep in four regions of Romania (Nica 2024) becomes very relevant. Authorities forced shepherds to avoid grazing the animals for several weeks, in order not to spread the virus. At the same time, great losses were recorded—only in one farm in Timiș County a number of 13,000 sheep and goats had to be sacrificed (Iedu 2024). Another example is the “sheep massacre” in Sardinia that Filippo M. Zerilli and Marco Pitzalis⁸ (2019) are discussing, where a shepherd was led to kill all his sheep, as the milk they produced was not accepted by the local dairies due to heavy bacterial load. These tragic events reinforce the need to approach this type of social or cultural phenomenon from a multispecies perspective. They also constitute an argument for a cross-disciplinary approach, which would see researchers experiment across disciplines and “follow the more-than-human tracks that crisscross the landscape of any field” (Bubandt et al. 2022, 12).

Given all these challenges, researchers are announcing the end of pastoralism. Or, as Tim Ingold explains, “[p]rogress depends on people settling down. And with that, pastoralism, as a way of life, is bound to disappear. If it survives at all, it will be as an object of conservation, as part of a common human heritage, to be preserved—like the ruins of ancient empires—for the instruction of the young and the enchantment of tourists” (2022, X). Indeed, there are already regions where people are learning from scratch how to be a shepherd (see Despret and Meuret 2016), and, according to researchers, this type of heritage making, along with an increased presence of shepherding practices and products in tourism strategies and promotion (Săgeată et al. 2022; see also Baker 2017) are viable strategies to keep pastoral practices alive in the contemporary social, economic and cultural context. This is more and more possible, due to the capitalization of the pastoral economy and animal products by means of the PDO (Protected Designation of Origin)

or TSG (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed) labels applied to cheese or meat (see Totelecan 2014), namely of those gastronomic (and cultural) products that have been selected⁹ as representative for a community, and are thus considered heritage and play an important part in local development projects¹⁰ (see also Zerilli and Pitzalis 2019).

Since 2023, Romania has also become a member (along with other nine European states) of the “Transhumance. The seasonal driving of livestock”¹¹ UNESCO intangible heritage. This shows the centrality of shepherding in Romanian culture¹² (see also Juler 2014; Săgeată et al. 2022), with shepherds, as a social group, resorting to strong cultural symbols to support their cause.¹³ The period preceding the inscription of transhumance on the UNESCO list of intangible heritage has also seen a proliferation of research books on the topic of pastoralism (see, for instance, David 2020; David and Semuc 2022).

In this context, and given that the researchers from the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant had been conducting fieldwork on pastoralism ever since 2011, a cultural project was launched in 2023 to present to the public the results of this research and to engage a wider audience in various activities. This volume of *MARTOR Journal*, on the topic of the “Dynamics of the Intangible Heritage. Shepherding,” which brings together a number of eighteen texts focusing on the contemporary changes of this occupation and its cultural manifestations, is another result of the same context. The novelty of this thematic issue is that it looks at the dynamic nature of shepherding, covering many of the contemporary trends in pastoralism research.

There were in fact several previous *MARTOR Journal* issues that dealt with topics concerning agriculture (see *Martor* Issue No. 19/2014; Dorondel and Șerban 2014) or grassland management (see *Martor* Issue No. 21/2016; Iuga, Iancu, and Stroe 2016), showing a continuity in the journal thematic approach. This is also proof of the museum researchers’ vivid interest (or that of the guest editors) in

multidisciplinary research that encompasses both the cultural and the natural heritage.

The first section of the volume, “Discontinuities Continuities,” presents four case studies of the way change interferes with local traditions and old practices. Marin Constantin’s text is looking at the complex implications of kinship relations in the apprenticeship of the daughters and sons of shepherds, drawing on research conducted in three communities in Mărginimea Sibiului (Romania). The framework in which the apprenticeship takes place is the “brotherhood of shepherds,” whose main function is to meet the local needs of managing the sheep ownership regime. It is an organisation based on consanguinity, which constitutes a traditional model of social structure that includes cooperation and mutual assistance in pastoral activities. These characteristics give it in fact the profile of a true institution, the author claims.

Mariana Hurjui-Său discusses an intangible heritage element of the pastoral universe that is at risk of being lost: the shepherds’ music in Romania, with its specific instruments. Hers is an in-depth analysis of the interferences between the local musical creations in Vrancea region—that appeared in the pastoral environment and then spread in the communities—and the social reality, together with the economic and cultural changes that occurred in the last century. The researcher highlights the way ancient instrumental practices and the local pastoral repertoire have been transmitted to young people. The author is also looking into the various economic and social drivers that were active after the 1990s, but also the gap between various generations. All these changes had as an effect the loss of some pastoral songs in their original form, only a few survived in new forms, adapted to the contemporary tastes.

The article by Tommy Lennartsson and Anna Westin focuses on the way grazing management has changed over time. It presents research that was conducted for an extended period of time, 25 years, from 1987 to 2012, during which the two researchers monitored

28 Swedish grasslands with a high natural value. A turning point represents the end of the 1990s, when the subsidies for grasslands determine the intensification of grazing practices. By looking at one indicator, a small flower, *Gentianella campestris*, the authors connect intensive grazing with the loss of a series of grassland plant species.

In their research, Răzvan Papisima and Alexandru Iorga start from an element that is quite common nowadays, the animal’s ear tag. The tag is mandatory for livestock breeders, according to EU legislation. In their search for the meanings of this small technological device, which go beyond the scope of primary identification of animals reared on farms and in households, the two researchers resorted to a complex approach, combining anthropology with sociology of science and technology. The same ear tag finds itself entangled in various approaches. Its assessment and reality are deciphered by the authors by looking at practices that create, discover and give value, which, in turn, shapes the reality.

The second section of the volume, “Fragile Cohabitations,” groups another four case studies on how traditional practices of shepherding interfere with the contemporary urban environment. Sebastiano Mannia addresses the many facets of the transhumance in Sardinia. Pastoral practices have been valued in the past decades as a key ingredient in providing a balanced relationship between man and nature and a sustainable use of resources. However, the situation in the communities is different. Taking into account the broader framework of Italian shepherding, while focusing on Sardinia, the researcher analyses the gap between the ancient pastoral practices (partly abandoned or marginal in the social and economic landscape of contemporary Italy) and UNESCO’s recognition of transhumance as intangible cultural heritage. In this context, the researcher explores how “transhumance without sheep and shepherds” is marketed.

The research conducted by Cornelia Florea is linked to a successful tourism initiative



that started two years ago in Romania: Via Transilvanica. This initiative offers to hiking enthusiasts experiences in areas usually not included in tourist trails, from significant cultural sights to contact with the communities, including interaction with summer sheep farms and the people that temporarily inhabit those places. The researcher identifies and documents the mechanisms that generated contradictory behaviours in the hikers (usually urban people) and the sheep owners.

The outcome of years of research, the article authored by Elisabeth Tauber focuses on the changes that occur in the landscapes of South Tyrol mountains. The author addresses the issues of the essential role that livestock breeders and their herds play in these transformations. The structural changes in agricultural work, mass tourism, or EU environment regulations are a few of the causes mentioned by the researcher for the smaller number of cattle and the dwindling numbers of farmers who still mow the steep slopes of the Italian Alps. This new economic reality, together with the climate changes have drastic effects on the mountain landscape, as the anthropologist shows. Some of the effects are the reforestation phenomenon and the return of predatory animals, but also a significant decrease in biodiversity. Following Bubandt's (2022) suggestion, Elisabeth Tauber approaches the landscape as "a total social fact," capable of revealing the major changes that occurred in grazing practices over the past 50 years.

The last text in the section, by Roxana Triboi, presents one of the lesser-known aspects of sheep husbandry: shepherding in urban environments and abandoned land once used in agriculture, industry, or as residential areas. The article presents the ecological and social benefits of this type of activity, which include both the revitalisation of land through sustainable grazing practices and the increase of biodiversity in urban areas. The researcher draws attention to the challenges posed by this adaptation of traditional practices in the contemporary world, among them the need to adopt strategies that ensure the health and

public safety of the population in the vicinity of the grazed land.

The next section of the journal, "Transformations of Pastoral Identities," groups three texts that present new cultural identities associated with shepherding. The three case studies come from Romania, Italy and Hungary. Ana Pascu discusses in her article the metamorphosis of pastoralism in Valea Jiului area (Romania), a strongly industrialised region (coal mine industry) during communism and profoundly affected by the de-industrialisation after 1989. From the main and traditional occupation of the region, shepherding has become, during the last century, one of the least profitable activities. After the fall of communism, the communities, in the context of the shutting down of the mines, struggled with the changes that came with the market economy. Still, the inhabitants of the region adapted to these changes, and one best practice is the improvement of one of the local sheep breeds (*turcana* or *breaza* from Petroșani), with the purpose of having it recognized as a superior and distinctive sheep breed.

The Young Shepherds School, an innovative educational project launched in 2021 in Italy, is presented in the next text by Andrea Membretti. The researcher presents the reasons for this approach, the public-private partnership that made it possible, as well as the methodological input of this school, based on "experiential learning." Through direct participation in the activities specific to this occupation, the young shepherd apprentices managed to achieve significant technical skills in terms of animal raising and making animal products. These complemented the online classes that gave them another type of knowledge, such as digital and marketing skills, necessary to develop small businesses related to shepherding.

The last article of this section by multiple authors, members of the Association of Women Herders in Hungary, Ibolya Sáfiánné, Márta Sófalviné Tamás, Zsófia Osvald, Margit Dobó, Erzsébet Szalai, Eszter Fodor, Margareta



Lelea, and the biologist and ecologist Zsolt Molnár, focuses on the role of women in shepherding in Central Europe. The article describes and analyses the typical activities of women and girls in herder families and their role as keepers of valuable knowledge on the raising of animals nowadays. The paper is a rare approach in the research dedicated to herding and shepherding, especially because it makes the voices of the women practising this occupation heard.

The fourth section of the volume, “Pastoralism on Display,” includes three texts on the project *Păstorit 2.1. Oaia Hai-hui* [Shepherding 2.1. The Travelling Sheep] that the National Museum of the Romanian Peasant in Bucharest ran in 2023, financed by the Administration of National Cultural Fund. During the project, several events were organised in order to raise awareness on the changes that the shepherding sector is facing nowadays: an exhibition, museum education activities, several conferences and presentations, a round-table, artisans and shepherding products fair, ethnographic films projections, podcasts, and publications. The first text, by Iuliana Dumitru, presents the project activities from the project manager’s perspective, highlighting the complexity, the difficulty, the stake of the project, and the impact on the participants, be they researchers or direct beneficiaries. The second text, by Raluca-Magda Oprea-Minoiu, presents the museum education activities that took place during the exhibition, describing her participation in the multidisciplinary team of the project. The challenge she had to face was making the content of the exhibition accessible to children but also to blind persons. The author describes the difficulties identified during the workshops, but also the creative solutions that were found to present the shepherding realm in a novel way, emphasising the sensorial experiences. Third in the section is a text by George Căţean, one of the project’s partners. In it he stresses the urgent need for a durable transformation of Romanian shepherding by means of modernisation, recognition of authenticity of this vital economic sec-

tor, and the capitalisation of natural and cultural resources. His pragmatic approach is based on years of experience as farmer and animal breeder, with deep roots in the traditional pastoral practices, but also as a pioneer in the reestablishment and modernisation of local shepherding.

The last section of the volume, “Fieldnotes,” presents three case studies that talk about different aspects concerning the life of shepherds. Laura Jiga Iliescu’s contribution provides the researchers with an interest in shepherding a unique corpus of recordings that have as their main theme the encounters between shepherds and wild animals. The interviews recorded are part of the author’s research conducted between 2011–2018 on the alpine pastures of the Meridional Carpathians. The shepherds who were interviewed reveal a specific vision of their occupation and this particular liminal experience, the encounter with big predators (bears, wolves). The interviews are relevant for the traditional mindset that places people in an active position defined by a mutual, although tensioned, relation with feral nature.

The second contribution within this section is the text by Silviu Ilea, focusing on the traditional costume of shepherds from the Oriental Carpathians. More precisely, the “waterproofed shirt,” a regional occupational brand, typical of the Bistriţa, Maramureş and Bucovina mountain areas. The author draws on both the archival and bibliographic information that he could find and the recent information from his current research, connecting public photographic archives with photos found in present-day households, but also looking at this particular shirt that can be found in different museums in Romania.

The last text in the section is by Mihaela Grigorean, and it presents the story of Simon Paul of Cămârzana’s house (from Oaş region, Romania), an entrepreneur from northwestern Romania who asked the author for help in saving at least one house from each village in the Oaş region, which he then wanted to include in a touristic trail. One of the houses



used to be the home of a shepherd family. The research included an oral history approach in finding the story of the family, also looking at photos kept in the family. In addition, it included research in old archives focusing on images as well as other records based on which they could to remake the interior of the house (with all the instruments and tools), but also of the sheepfold annexes.

The volume concludes with reviews of three books (Bindi 2022; Jiga Iliescu 2020; and David and Semuc 2022) that were published in the past four years, with the main topic past and present pastoral practices.

In the end of the presentation of the volume, we need to mention the illustrations of the cover and the pages that introduce the different chapters. The beautiful black and white photos come from the Departmental Museum in Satu Mare and their valuable archive with photos taken by the photographer Ioniță G. Andron (1917–1989). He began to photograph in 1934, with a Voigtländer Bessa camera,¹⁴ documenting not only the life of friends and family, but also the life of the peasants in the Oaş region, mainly pastoral customs and practices. The photos presented in our special issue cover a period of time from the 1950s to the 1970s.

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As a concluding remark, pastoralism continues to reproduce itself as it does, adapting to all types of external and internal drivers, mainly because the communities decide not to abandon this lifestyle for both their own economic or cultural benefit and that of the animals, maintaining their holistic approach to this occupation, which encompasses the human and the non-human. As Caroline Juler puts it, “Romanian sheep farmers are still practising long-distance transhumance because they believe that it is beneficial to their animals, the environment and their produce. They also do it because they love it” (2014, 16). As researchers in ethnology and anthropology, we should look into and consider these important points of view in order to decipher the dynamics

of this ancient occupation. It is in a positive tone way we would like to end, stressing that as long as animal husbandry will be important for the communities, the cultural and natural heritage that evolves in close connection with it will keep on being relevant.

Last but not least, pastoralism is a turning point in the dynamics of life that we generically call “traditional,” as opposed to the industrial one. The impossibility of intensive industrialised breeding of sheep, as they can only live on large, unfenced spaces, forces the current breeding farms to adapt the living conditions (of intensive exploitation) practised by humans to those required by the animal. Pastoralism thus opens an unprecedented discussion about the sociological and cultural issues of non-industrial breeding of animals in relation to the intensive industrial one.



NOTES

1. For example, on Romanian territory, the life in shepherds' communities in southern Transylvania changed too, starting with the flourishing of the felting industry in Saxon cities, as mentioned in documents from the fourteenth century (see Huband, McCracken, and Mertens 2010). Near Sibiu (the subregion Mărginimea Sibiului), or near Braşov (e.g., the village of Săcele), that was the time when long-distance transhumance became a way of living for sheep owners. They would not keep their animals in winter in the village area, feeding them hay, as it was usually done in other regions, but travel with them long distances, reaching lowland regions, river sides, or even pastures close to the Black Sea.
2. Traditional Ecological Knowledge is “a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment” (Berkes, Colding, and Folke 2000, 1252).
3. See, for instance, Herskovits (1926); Evans-Pritchard (1940); or Campbell (1964), Vuia (1980), etc.
4. *The Last Transhumance*, 2023, 90 min, director: Dragoş Lumpan (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5937206/>), accessed on 20 August 2024.

5. Transhumance has also been influenced by the migration of the people and their settling down in other regions (or countries), establishing settlements. For example, in the Romanian case, starting with the seventeenth century, shepherd communities from southern parts Transylvania (part of the Austro-Hungarian empire) migrated to the southern slopes of the Carpathians (see Vuia 1980), but also to the north, settling, still in the seventeenth century, in the Beskids Carpathians or the Tatra Mountains (Vuia 1980; Şişeştean 2012). Since the late nineteenth century, they have been settling in the Delta Danube or Dobrogea region (Vuia 1980), or even the Crimean Peninsula, as well as southern Bessarabia (Fulga and Marin 2022).
6. Grasslands are to be considered cultural landscapes, due to the continuously interference of human activity, such as manure spreading, periodical cleaning of shrubs, mowing, but also grazing (see Emanuelsson 2009).
7. In his endeavour to change the ontological approach in anthropology, questioning the dualist separation of man and nature, Descola explains that there are six types of relationships "which appear to play a preponderant role in the connection that humans establish between one another and also with non-human elements in their environment" (2012, 448). These relational modes are: (a) the potential reversible relations (between terms that are similar): exchange, predation, gift; and (b) the univocal relations (connections between non-equivalent terms): production, protection, transmission (see pages 448–9).
8. The Sardinian shepherd's desperate gesture was analysed by the two researchers (Zerilli and Pitzalis 2019) as a statement against the system of regulations and global market dynamic.
9. The definition that Faro Convention (2005, art. 2) offers for cultural heritage is mentioning the word "identify", meaning that heritage is what has been selected by specialists or communities. In line with this, Vintilă Mihăilescu wrote that the "heritage is not given, it simply *is* not, but it *becomes*" heritage (2012, 9), by being chosen from the past, but envisioned to be a resource for a better future.
10. As Corina Iosif and Bogdan Iancu point out, there are "three areas that today occupy an important place in regional development projects: food, local culinary specialties, and tourism" (2017, 35).
11. <https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/transhumance-the-seasonal-droving-of-livestock-01964>, accessed on 20 August 2024.
12. See also, Iosif (2008; 2015), where the author explains that cultural heritage was often used as an instrument to legitimise cultural-ideological actions meant to raise a group or community's awareness of their cultural identity.
13. See, for example, the 2015 protest of shepherds against the Romanian Government regulations to limit the number of dogs on a summer farm in the mountains (O'Brien and Creţan 2017).
14. See https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ioniță_G_Andron, accessed on 20 August 2024.



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