

CHAPTER 2

The Conflict of Itinerant Pastoralism in the Piedmont Po Plain (Collina Po Biosphere Reserve, Italy)

Dino Genovese, Ippolito Ostellino,
and Luca Maria Battaglini

Introduction

Piedmont is a region in northwestern Italy and its name in Italian (Piemonte) translates as “land at the foot of a mountain range.” It is right here that the Po Valley—the largest plain in Italy, formed by the sediments of the Po River—begins.

The interconnections between the plain and the western Alps are pronounced, as mountains largely surround the regional borders. Historically, the geography of this landscape has allowed for the extensive breeding of both cattle and sheep (Lazzaroni and Biagini 2008; Battaglini et al. 2001).

The traditional practice of seasonal vertical transhumance—which consists in transferring flocks to mountain pastures during the summer period and bringing them to lower valleys in winter—still exists to this day.

In the high valleys, these cycles are still part of the identity of local communities and they represent a moment of territorial celebration (Battaglini 2007). After the summer, the herds return to the farms (nowadays only by truck), which are mainly located on the plains. Here, in most cases, the animals are housed in the barn and fed hay. The plains are also where most of today’s intensive livestock farms are located: in terms of volume, said livestock represents a significant branch of production; however, it is not visible, as it is permanently kept indoors. Therefore, only the transhumant sheep farmers maintain the predominant grazing and shape the livestock landscape.

Itinerant pastoralism is a form of extensive farming that is based on the continuous movement of flocks in order to make the most of the plant

production of different and complementary ecosystems (Nori and De Marchi 2015). Like any pastoral mobility activity, itinerant pastoralism is dependent on the breeders' personal ability to identify the availability and quality of grazing areas and on their knowledge of the physiology and health of farmed animals. These breeders do not have full availability of the land they use, since they are just owners of the herd. The social capital of the shepherds is based on a series of shared values, rules, and codes; these allow for different types of organization and bargaining that govern disparate interests, the use of available resources, and the management of any potential conflicts that may arise (Nori 2010).

Nevertheless, nomadic pastoralism suffers more and more from the logistical difficulties of extensive stockbreeding and the increasing physical and legal constraints of the territory involved. The itinerant shepherd must therefore be able to perform tasks in abandoned territories such as the mountains but also in highly industrialized and densely populated agricultural plains. "The success of its rambling practice depends on the ability of shepherds to find traditional pastures not only geographically (e.g., between wheat fields, cities, road infrastructure, private fields, protected areas), but socially and politically" (Aime, Allovio, and Viazzo 2001).

In Piedmont, sheep production is modest in percentage. In 2019, the flocks amounted to 120,744 animals (National Livestock Registry 2020), which represents 1.80 percent of the total Italian livestock. However, the presence of these sheep has some peculiarities, as some autochthonous breeds are found only in this region (e.g., the Biellese, Frabosana, Sambucana, Langhe breeds). There are indeed regional projects to secure and improve these local livestock and their products. Among them, there are 72,778 transhumant sheep (60.27 percent of the regional total), mainly used for meat production (Biellese and its mixed breeds, and Sambucana breeds). Most of the cattle subject to vertical transhumance stay on the plain during the rest of the year and do not move to a barn; some remain itinerant and practice a form of grazing called *pascolo vagante*.

The term *pascolo vagante* refers to a seasonal livestock system—mainly sheep grazing—characterized by continuous migration along very long trails. This system of nomadic pastoralism has been described as perpetual tramping and the herders as permanent wanderers (Buratti 1999: 52). Permanent buildings are usually not adopted, with the exception maybe of a caravan or the likes for shepherds and lambs. In northern Italy, this practice is carried out between autumn and spring, along shallow rivers or in regions with low hills. This practice is regulated by Italian law, and shepherds must be equipped with a logbook in order to record times and permits.

In the remaining period of time, the livestock is led to mountainous landscapes near the plain. Only the initial movement onto the plain (one

to two hundred kilometres) is carried out by truck. After this period of time, flocks move autonomously every day along trajectories and stop according to grass availability. Routes are drawn within marginal areas, along rivers or resting fields. Nomadic pastoralism is one of the simplest livestock methods, and rustic and resilient sheep breeds are perfect for this.

Itinerant shepherds and their animals represent a recurring seasonal presence for the residential communities they traverse. Each shepherd and his flock take the same route every year, making changes based on the weather and vegetation conditions. The shepherds have permissions for a personal regional zoning. This is not determined by planning but rather by repeated annual steps. Spaces available for itinerant pastoralism, however, are increasingly reduced due to the development of urban areas (Bernardino and Zullo 2016).

The main logistical requirement is animal feeding. This type of cattle almost exclusively grazes on spontaneous green forage. The sheep feed on grass and crop residues allowed by farmers. Integrations need to be provided, especially in the case of snowfall, which makes pastures inaccessible. Routes along the rivers make it easy for the animals to drink along their journey. Any veterinary control and animal care operations such as shearing are carried out in the place where the flocks roam. These operators support nomadic breeders, working with the flocks in their resting areas (Fortina et al. 2001).

In Piedmont, itinerant pastoralism has declined during the last few decades. For instance, just in the high plain of the *baraggia* located in the Biella region, Buratti (Buratti 1999: 53) estimates a 90 percent reduction of transhumant flocks over the last twenty-five years of the last century. There are currently sixty-five itinerant shepherds active in Piedmont and they have flocks of four hundred to three thousand heads (Mattalia et al. 2018: 749).

From a historical point of view, these shepherds are the keepers of a centuries-old tradition of the sheep-breeding landscape between the Alps and the Po plain; similar forms are found in the northeast of Italy under the name *pensionatico* (Fioravanzo 2015), or in Provence, in the south of France, where the wandering shepherd is called an *herbassier* (Dupré, Lasseur, and Sicard 2018: 223–24). This is not always a poor practice that opportunistically fits into other agricultural economies. Sometimes, it is a planned activity which optimizes the promiscuous use of territorial resources by means of different governances, such as religious orders' and abbeys' (Rao 2014; Archetti 2011; Andenna 2005: 137–38).

With population growth in Europe since the seventeenth century, the thickening and intensification of the agricultural system has progressively limited and confined seasonal and transhumant grazing practices in the

productive plains, and also threatened their very existence (Sereni 1961). Today, in the Piedmont Po Plain, itinerant pastoralism has the characteristics of an interstitial practice (Mattalia et al. 2018), which clashes mainly with the farmers of the trampled lands and the territorial authorities that deal with nature conservation policies along the rivers (Verona 2006).

It is undeniable that the conduct of the itinerant shepherd is not always appropriate and numerous cases against them can be found in historical documents. A historical document by Bajo (Bajo 1858: 41) about itinerant pastures in the Venetian Plain states that sheep are left to graze throughout the winter unsupervised and untrained; landowners complain, but no one really knows whether the animals have the right to graze. Shepherds take advantage of this, and others suffer the damage without knowing its source; the municipal authority indolently allows the abuse of *ad libitum* pasture practices, without the usual tribute.

The apathetic stance cited by Bajo, that is, imposing constraints and regulatory restrictions or sanctions instead of promoting a strategic vision, is often a consequence of institutional misconduct and is the result of institutions sadly refusing to play a role in the management of resources (Messina 2016: 116).

This nomadic activity is distrusted as the grass resources are not a shepherd's possession (Aime 1997; Aime et al. 2001). However, flocks seasonally graze on these fields after local harvest, or within abandoned areas.



Figure 2.1. Itinerant flock in a corn field after cultivation. Collina Po Biosphere Reserve, 2019. © Dino Genovese

In the Italian agricultural landscape, itinerant pastoralism is therefore presented as a seasonal practice, both superimposed and complementary to the standard agricultural use of the territory. Nevertheless, this promiscuous use of land is often perceived as a form of intrusive use and it is in conflict with the local governance of the agrarian landscape.

Itinerant shepherds aim to ensure their flocks are fed and maintained. Indeed, animals fertilizing does improve a grassland's quality, thus having a positive impact on environmental, landscape, and ecological functions. The acceptance of itinerant flocks is historically documented in the lowland farmhouses of Piedmont in exchange for sheep manure for the fields and vineyards (Aime et al. 2001) or expensive forms of compensation such as the payment of rent, either through money or produce such as milk, cheese, animals, meat, wool, and leather (Archetti 2011). Even today, itinerant pastoralism offers many ecosystem services both in economic and anthropologic terms, such as the utilization of marginal and often fragile areas (DG Agricoltura 2013: 14) and in sociocultural terms, by representing an opportunity for the nonrural population of learning about the pastoral practice and culture (Oteros-Rozas et al. 2014: 1280). Therefore, itinerant pastoralism in winter can be viewed as a good practice of environmental sustainability, as a cultural proposal to the citizenry (e.g., folklore, tourism, history, recreation), and as a possible local production. Nevertheless, the shepherds do not seem to take advantage of these social and economic opportunities.

In some cases, the public administration—oblivious of the value that others recognize in nomadic grazing and herding in general—tends to favor simplistic solutions: instead of intensifying the control of herders and flocks and acting as a facilitator of this territorial dynamic between farmers and shepherds, it prefers to adopt a generic stance and to ban grazing, which often makes it difficult even to cross the territory (Verona 2016: 80–81).

Disputes between shepherds and managers of parks or Natura 2000 areas are also frequent, especially along the great lowland rivers (Verona 2016: 85–88): their mutual distrust—surely compounded by historical stereotypes—could be overcome today thanks to finer entrepreneurial skills and the adoption of a more modern approach by the shepherd, who is seen as a “technician” in the grassland management. The EU legislation treats herding as a homogeneous activity, without considering the difficulties of smallholder breeders, or the diversification of traditional local objectives, strategies, and production. Today, working within a protected area is not always seen as an advantage by breeders, but there could be significant exceptions, when shepherds recognize the Park Authority as a subject capable of coordinating local interests and actors to preserve grasslands (Messina 2016: 116).

The Research Area: The Natural Reserves along the Po River

There are some natural reserves along the Po River; in Piedmont, these were established in 1991. They protect habitats and wildlife in a territory that has been highly industrialized and urbanized. Agriculture has also intensified and the river spaces have remained the main ecological corridors of the Po Plain. Even itinerant shepherds have been limited by the pressure of anthropogenic activities: their animals—whose grazing is intrinsically linked to the natural dynamics of the grasslands—have had to move along the rivers to where they find water available. As a consequence, this has resulted in a conflict between nomadic herding and nature conservation policies along the Po River.

For this reason, we looked with great interest at the participatory planning processes laid out by the technical service of the protected areas of the Po River in Piedmont: they wanted to create a spatial and temporal definition of the itinerant grazing routes. More specifically, these processes initiated by the Park Authority of the Po River were analyzed. The conflict related to the practice of itinerant pastoralism was particularly interesting. Winter nomadic peregrinations (of flocks and shepherds) interact with a great number of actors and are dependent on a large number of factors. Shepherds must request an authorization to have access to private fields, must try to establish good relations with local farmers and guarantee the animals' optimal sanitary conditions, and must conduct their activity within nature conservation policies. If itinerant pastoralism is managed correctly, it can represent a way of operating the landscape and determine a positive interaction between man and nature.

In terms of research, the metropolitan area in Turin is also especially important because in 2016 it was recognized as a Collina Po Biosphere Reserve, and natural reserves are its core zones. Shepherds' routes also intersect this material and conceptual context. These areas are recognized as territorial laboratories within the UNESCO MAB (Man and Biosphere) program, aimed at experimenting with good practices between human development and nature conservation policies. Some flocks of up to two thousand heads cross this region during their wandering. Because of habitat and protected species' conservation, the animals' need for water at the river and need to use sensitive areas has escalated the conflict between these parties, as well as between farmers and local inhabitants. In 2016, the Park Authority of the Po River seized on the opportunity of entering a dialogue with shepherds and coordinating with them pasture routes that would have the least impact upon nature conservation policies. This action of facilitating and coordinating the other territorial institutions involved has been a good practice and has innovatively favored the inte-

gration of itinerant pastoralism into activities entailing the use of the land (Genovese et al. 2018). A similar approach can be found in the guidelines on the wandering sheep pasture of the neighboring Lombardy region (DG Agricoltura 2013: 15–17).

The resulting debate highlighted the importance of starting a dialogue between the conflicting parties. It was an innovative approach to governance of river space through the contribution of all stakeholders, trying to choose the best solutions both for nature and the community, thus minimizing negative impacts. Many topics were discussed and not all problems were resolved, but the resulting dialogue was fundamental in the creation of a new herd landscape. The ecosystem services of this activity have also been considered and enhanced since then, especially in this historical period when transhumance was suggested to be on the UNESCO ICH list. The research purposes were to explore this dialectic through the role-playing tool.

Materials and Method

Natural science didactics have developed a role-playing methodology required to neutrally address some of the major topics of the environmental debate (Colucci and Camino 2000; Camino and Dogliotti 2004) that affect our everyday life and (often) cause emotional distress. This method gives space to a plurality of opinions arising from the debate, without initially privileging the experts' advice. The topic, if not widely discussed, risks not being understood and accepted in the final common decision (Camino et al. 2008). Given the critical issues of territorial management connected to itinerant pastoralism and the several actors involved therein, the decision was made to project and test a specific role-play.

For this research, a role-playing game was designed and implemented. It dealt with the conflicts associated with the practice of itinerant pastoralism. The case was inspired by existing grazing bans, infringed upon by shepherds, and mentioned in newspapers. It was set in an unspecified lowland municipality near the city of Turin, characterized by the presence of a river and habitats of naturalistic interest; this territory is traversed by a selection of itinerant shepherds and their flocks.

The flock under study is made up of two thousand sheep, who cross the municipal territory two-to-three times a year between late autumn and early spring.

The case being discussed in this role-play is inspired by a petition from a group of citizens who had previously asked the municipal administration to ban the practice of itinerant pastoralism in the local territory for a host

of reasons. Such a petition was indeed received and implemented by certain Italian municipalities affected by the practice of nomadic pastoralism.

In this role-play, the city council gathers to discuss whether to sustain or uphold the ban.

The object of the discussion is therefore not the legitimization of the itinerant pasture over a large area, but the specific opportunity to have the presence of transhumant flocks on its municipal territory for a few days a year. University students in environmental and agricultural courses were chosen as participants in the role-play since the research aimed to evaluate this method in terms of professional training also (Davodeau and Toublanc 2019).

The role-play was carried out within three different contexts:

- A. May 2017 with twelve Master's students in Forestry and Environmental Science (Torino University, Italy)
- B. December 2018 with nine Landscape Engineering students of the Ecole de la Nature et du Paysage of Blois, Val de Loire (Institut National Sciences Appliquées, France)
- C. March 2019 with fourteen Master's students in Animal Science (Torino University, Italy)

The Role-Play in the Analysis of Itinerant Pastoralism

This role-play is specifically designed to analyze existing opinions and stereotypes about itinerant pastoralism. This tool is an opportunity for reflection among participants and represents a synthesis possibility for the researcher, who can compare fictitious opinions that highlight students' personal knowledge and skills.

Here is a sample of some of the game cards that were randomly distributed among the participants.

Card 1: Mr. Alberto Conti, forty-eight years old, mayor.

Who is he? A manager in a small company that manufactures wire nets. From a young age active in volunteering, first, scout and then a volunteer in emergency services.

What does he think? "I have received a request to ban itinerant pastoralism on the territory, but I think breeding and agriculture are a resource for the municipality. Although itinerant pasture is a form that puzzles me."

Card 2: Ms. Roberta Costa, fifty-five years old, town council member.

Who is she? An architect, she works in a design studio in Milan with her husband. She loves to spend her free time taking long horseback rides.

What does she think? "Greenways are an important element in urban planning. The action of the shepherds is useful to keep these corridors clean and accessible."

Card 3: Mr. Fabrizio Leone, fifty-two years old, town council member.

Who is he? He has a degree in accounting, deals with accounting in a small wholesale paper distribution company. He is allergic to lactose.

What does he think? "I am quite indifferent to the pastoralism issue, but it does not seem right to know that they graze so freely while the local companies pay all the taxes.

Card 4: Ms. Annalisa De Giorgi, forty-six years old, town council member.

Who is she? A primary school teacher. After high school she enrolled in the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and in her youth participated as a volunteer at WWF summer camps in Sicily for turtles.

What does she think? "I have heard that the itinerant flock is a problem for wildlife, but it too is an activity to defend. A compromise must be made."

The three discussions help us to understand how itinerant pasture is perceived. "Is it a relevant phenomenon? What is the fallout from this activity? Who is actually disturbed by the passage of animals?" Considering that itinerant pastoralism is a relevant topic for the city council, the implicit questions that participants asked themselves during the initial stages were: "What economic consequences are there for the country?" and "How much does this activity influence tourism activity?"

A territory's overlapping uses is also expressed in leisure and sports activities, and in interaction with nature conservation policies too. In one group, an interesting discussion concerned who is more entitled to use those lands (farmers, itinerant shepherds, or hunters), evoking and claiming the greatest right of one to practice over another, even recalling the evolutionary steps of human history. Of course, the itinerant pastoralism which takes place on the territory bears witness to "activities which have been practiced for several generations." Finally, "the evolution of the population on the territory" has to be harmonized with a complex "functional cohabitation between the parties."

Some participants pointed to respect for private property and the perception that the itinerant shepherd freely takes advantage of a resource which belongs to residents who take care of it throughout the year. Indeed, agreements for land use do not always exist and are not always fully formalized. Nevertheless, some players—acting as residents—refused the shepherds' attitude by stating that it is an "exploitation of the territory without paying taxes or anything," or putting forward the notion that they "steal the grass" or doubting the actual legitimacy of their actions: "but do the shepherds have an authorization?"

Although it often takes place in the marginal areas of the municipal territories, transhumance represents an economic activity which—due to its characteristics and manner of conduct—interferes with the social dynamics of the villages crossed. In this sense, the intervention of the municipal authority is required: "private individuals have not the right to take

everything they want; it is the municipality that must control this through the police." There is a risk that stereotypes about the nomadism and the itinerant shepherd will prevail in political decision-making. In very small communities, the opinion of individuals can influence the decision of the municipality, excluding possible technical alternatives: "We are here to decide as a municipality, the shepherds have already made their decision: to graze everywhere!"

Shepherds require in-depth knowledge to find grass every day for the flock among the different vegetative cycles of crops and uncultivated lands. One participant in the role-play pointed out that "the shepherd is a figure intrinsically linked to the environment and ecological function." On the other hand, from the objections of others, it seems that at present "the shepherds are not able" to assume this role and we need a "shepherd who adapts to the reality of our times." "But who would choose shepherd as a profession?" What is required to support itinerant pastoralism is "an action for men, not for sheep!"

The mayors in the role-play are required to end the city council session and decide upon the ban on wandering grazing. The decision is left to the participant's improvisation. It requires compliance only with a closing time within which the city council must be terminated.

All three groups respected the deadline and the mayors ended the discussion of the item on the agenda with a decision. Mayor C opted for a vote by show of hands (nine voted against, three in favor, and the mayor abstained); in the other two cases, the mayors took into account the expression of the apparent majority which emerged during the stages of the debate. Here are the final speeches of the City councils delivered by the three mayors:

Mayor A: "A solution must be found and the option to abolish grazing in our municipality must be ruled out. We must summon the petitioners, explain and negotiate a solution in order to allow grazing in the municipality while ensuring that these animals do not eat in people's gardens, so that the pastoral activity which has always existed in our municipality can continue."

Mayor B: "The petition is being reviewed by our office. The framing of the profession of the itinerant shepherd on our territory requires better definition. We need a technical service to support this profession and a study to explore the potential of this practice, which should no longer be experienced as a constraint but as a strategic element for our municipality."

Mayor C: "Pastoralism is part of our tradition but we live in a society that is very advanced and this type of breeding is at odds with the new farming methods. We must consider everyone, even those who came to live in our country from the city. We indeed lose typical products, but if there are no more itinerant shepherds it will be the settled breeding farms that will take charge of them. The strongest justification behind this decision I am making is linked to health and a biosecurity risk: this is a problem for all of us and

our children. That's why I'm presenting the petition by which the itinerant pastoralism will be banned."

After receiving the role card, the participants played the corresponding character during the city council meeting game. They argued their position in relation to itinerant pastoralism based on their knowledge, but also according to the information on their role card. This allowed them to detach themselves from the technical viewpoint which stemmed from the mindset of their professional training.

Thanks to the freedom granted by the role, the participants were able to highlight aspects of the practice of itinerant pastoralism, which contributed to the construction of a practical description of the activity. Many of the problems attributed to itinerant pastoralists emerged: for example, the difficulty of managing large flocks in areas unfit for breeding, damage caused to vegetation and the dirtiness that follows their passage, abandoned and exhausted animals, employees living in caravans, and little care or interest in the management of pastoral resources. The technical problems overlap with the stereotypical cultural associations made towards "vagrants": this triggers a contradictory relationship between agriculture and breeding, sedentary and itinerant, urban and rural. Nomadic shepherds remain on the fringes of communities, not only because of the problems their animal breeding approach entails, but also because of the social isolation inherent to their trade.

On the other hand, participants highlighted that today's urbanized generations no longer know how to relate to the rural context and its players. Despite belonging to families of peasant origin, most locals from the places affected by itinerant pastoralism are today poorly informed about agriculture. They don't recognize the fatigue and the work that breeding requires: "But how it is possible to enhance the products of the region if there is no knowledge of the countryside?"

At livestock shows and transhumance fairs, participation and recognition is high; however, the problems arise in the day-to-day life when people who have no experience of breeding are faced with—and negatively perceive—critical issues about nomadic pastoralism. This sentiment is generally felt in the plains and metropolitan areas, where it becomes difficult to define what animal "welfare" is. Many students were struck by a video contribution of a satirical newscast, which presented the extreme situation of a flock left in the open field in the winter season: "I never questioned the fact that the droppings could be a nuisance or that the animals could be cold: the role-playing game helped me to think about that."

Communication lies at the basis of each project: but in the case of the itinerant pastoralism, how can one communicate to the public something that the public opinion itself considers to be wrong? Many people, as role-

play participants, felt that they had to intervene by directly supporting the shepherds and conducting public awareness-raising activities and providing voluntary support to assist the jobs and lives of these permanent walkers. In the Alps, new small farms are starting up thanks to new shepherds, some of whom also have a university degree. “Perhaps a new generation is possible” and with this new generation comes a tourist-cultural development which may also positively affect itinerant pastoralism. What are the chances of seeing farmed animals in the meadows of the peri-urban area of Turin? It does happen, and cars stop along the highways and roads to take a picture of the flock! Itinerant shepherds must strive to innovate and create a different, more respectful, image of their person and their job: “They must be the first to hone their skills and join in a lobby if they want to survive.” The cultural promotion of transhumance is a great opportunity and shepherds must “concretize their cultural function on the landscape because they are among those who best know the land.”

Therefore, if the desire is to reframe the perception of itinerant pastoralism in a cultural lens, how can we intervene in the ongoing political conflict, where the opinions of the settled inhabitants—as legal voters—dominate the point of view of the itinerant shepherds? Is it purely a matter of technical mediation? Will the shepherds, caught between constraints and ecological limitations, ever be able to become itinerant stakeholders of the greenway projects along the rivers? The candidacy of Transhumance to UNESCO ICH list could in this sense be a stimulus for the local populations and for the municipalities to recognize this practice that characterizes and defines their territory (Ballacchino and Bindi 2017).

Conclusion

Among the aims of this research is the attempt to summarize different discussions and identify common and recurring elements in order to better understand itinerant pastoralism as perceived in the social and territorial conflict. Through their role-play characters, many participants exemplified stereotypes, prejudices, and expectations about this breeding practice and also tried to suggest solutions. The different players—who adopted stances either in favor or against the adoption of the ban on itinerant grazing within the municipal territory—have sometimes come up with similar arguments or viewpoints; other times, they have put forward more original considerations. Thanks to the audio recordings, it was possible to analyze the various contributions (first, from the simulation of the city council session, then in the “out-of-role” discussion that followed), piecing together a final synthesis.

Itinerant pastoralism is an activity that generates many conflicts. Its very existence along extremely long routes leads to repeated, daily interactions with a host of different players, which all belong to the same categories (Verona 2016). The shepherds must know how to lead the flock and how to relate to the many players and stakeholders they encounter: the farmers who own the land that the livestock moves across, the police officers who patrol the bridges and villages, the park rangers who protect habitats and wildlife, and the rural and urban citizens who will be encountered along the way. Only good relations and the proper sanitary management of their flocks allow shepherds to obtain permissions for grazing (DG Agricoltura 2013).

People are constantly talking about returning to a “slower pace”: yet the shepherds—who practice a slow and ancient trade which follows the natural rhythms of life and seasons—struggle to harmonize this dimension with space-related activities (Verona 2016).

The sustainability sciences developed the methodology of role-playing games (Colucci-Gray 2007; Camino et al. 2008). This tool was devised to understand and analyze the tradition of the itinerant shepherd. It allows people to move away from the assumption of stereotypical roles and develop a mature opinion about this age-old trade. The game and its role cards highlight the limits and problems associated with itinerant pastoralism but, at the same time, they emphasize the cultural and anthropological values of these skills.

The role-playing game was directed at university students on different training courses; these students were near-graduates, that is to say, they will soon have a job as technical advisors (Davodeau and Toubanc 2019). Firstly, participation in the game allowed them to analyze and experience the logistical criticality of itinerant pastoralism and to challenge their basic knowledge and skills in a hypothetical scenario. However, most of the participants had never had direct experience with itinerant pastoralism; consequently, the participants’ involvement in the game was informed by both an emotional response and a cultural perception of itinerant pastoralism.

Some students who are enrolled in the Animal Science degree come from families of sedentary breeders; during the role-playing discussion, these participants were more engaged in topic discussions than other students, who seemed more detached when sharing their opinion. Despite their animated engagement during the game dynamics, the students from breeder families showed a consistent and appropriate behavior during the role-plays and did not let their emotions condition them when debating issues.

What did condition all students, however, was the different degree course they attended; this had an impact on the solutions provided to address issues within itinerant pastoralism. In the game, the students of Forestry and Environmental Sciences opted for technical spatial planning; the students of the Ecole du Paysage of Blois preferred sociological solutions and recommended training for the shepherds and reaching out to the resident population; the students of Animal Science showed far more concern in addressing the logistical difficulties and health risks that this breeding practice can entail, particularly on very long itineraries.

In the discussion, the need for institutional subjects who can mediate the concerns of pastoral caregivers and people affected by itinerant pastoralism was emphasized by many. Through mediation processes, it is possible to reduce the territorial conflict associated with the itinerant pastoralism. The Park Authority of the Po River has understood the value of this approach and has been able to integrate grazing by itinerant flocks into conservation measures. In the eyes of the population, the legitimacy guaranteed by the Park Authority has ensured a new interpretation of the work of the itinerant shepherds, even if cultural stereotypes remain.

The need to understand this job and to interpret its needs and limits is essential for its the survival. Despite growing difficulties, this practice is still functional to this day in certain forms of landscape governance and to preserve habitats that cannot be maintained in other ways. The zoning and concerted grazing solution adopted by the Park Authority of the Po River represents an innovative approach to managing the activity of the itinerant shepherd. If supported, it can also become a strategic practice in the management of the environment, and above all, it can act as an example of an integrated policy between man and nature as specified in the program MAB UNESCO, of which the territories of the Po River are Reserve of the Biosphere.

In an interview, Lora Moretto Albino, itinerant shepherd along the Po River, said to us: "If there is a conflict, for us everything is lost." The itinerant shepherds live among conflicts and, in certain cases, they themselves represent these conflicts. The role-playing game allows us to reflect on potential solutions, but even more importantly, it is a tool which enables us to become aware of an ancient figure whose periodic passages continue to tell the story of the changing seasons to the modern person.

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Dino Genovese has a PhD in Agriculture, Forest and Food Science with a research project about public-private agri-partnership model analysis in landscape governance practices. In particular, the goal of his research is the role of livestock farms in these systems. He graduated in Forest and Environmental Sciences and he holds a specializing degree in Architectural and Landscape Heritage. With twenty years of experience in natural protected areas of Po River and Collina Torinese, he specializes in management of forestry, environmental education, relationship with farmers, and hiking network planning.

Ippolito Ostellino was born in Turin on August 16, 1959. In 1987 he graduated in Natural Sciences and worked in the management and design of Alpine Scientific Gardens. In 1989 he participated in the foundation of Federparchi Italia. From 2007 to 2008 he was National President of AIDAP, the Italian Association of Directors of Italian Parks. In the Turin area he is the promoter of the Corona Verde project and teaches at the Polytechnic of Turin, where, in 2016 the recognition process of the reference territory brand in the UNESCO Man and Biosphere program was coordinated. He curates the blog “Protected Areas and Biosphere” on the national magazine, *.Eco* (rivistaeco.it); collaborates with the platform “La Natura Returns to Art”; and is a member of the scientific committee on the book series on protected natural areas at the ETS publishing house in Pisa.

Luca Maria Battaglini is Professor of Animal Sciences and Technologies in the Department of Agricultural, Forestry and Food Sciences (DISAFA) at the University of Turin. His research, teaching, and public engagement activities concern livestock farming systems sustainability through an ethical and sociocultural framework. As a member of many national and international research groups, he is interested in environmental impact, ecosystem services, livestock biodiversity, and animal welfare, with reference to the Alpine region.

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