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Urban Pastoralism

SE4LC Case study 2018

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My connection with pastoralism began with the history of my great-grandfather, a Romanian shepherd that met his wife and establish in Crimea after an almost 2000 km transhumance. There he spends his adult years as state farm shepherd. Due to political conditions (WWII) he returned to his homeland in the Romanian Carpathians mountains along with his small family where he continued this activity involving my grandmother until her marriage.

In my early childhood years, the stories told by the neighbor, an old shepherd, filled with fantastic events, build my admiration for the freedom and knowledge of exploring territories and situations of this category in contrast with typical peasant life.



The communist regime politic of brutal industrialization and urbanization generated a significant category of neo-urban population strongly connected to its rural and agricultural roots. In order to develop a competitive economy, intensive large-scale agriculture was used as a mean to support the development of industrialization. Collectivization along with the export of most of state farm product led to a food crisis in the 70-80. **Semi-subsistence farms and informal network developed in creative way to sustain the food needs of the population, especially in the city.** A common feature in Eastern Europe



countries, the rural branch of the extended family generally assured food supply and raising preschoolers.

I grew up at my grandparents' semi-subsistence farm in small village in the Carpathians Mountains.

My grandmother made her mission our food supply with the best farm product.

The community life was carefully organized in close relationship with environment and food and therefore gardening the landscape framed my relationship with space, although the rest of my life will be spent in urban areas. **The pastoralism activity was a structuring element of agri-food traditional system** in the mountains area. Assisting the lamb birth, reaching the shepherd (situated in hardly accessible areas away from infrastructure) in the summer for obtaining the cheese, the observation of transhumance process, recuperating our small flock in the fall represented moments that rhythmmed the peasant life and my childhood.



Until recently, the shepherd represented an emblematic figure, a symbol of vitality and wealth, a positive social status that balanced the obvious harsh life conditions (isolation and other constraints) related to this way of life.



The rich agenda of traditional events associated with pastoralism dissolute in abrupt manner due to the decay of the

rural community, a general trend in Romania and Eastern Europe.

The transition toward the capitalism, after the revolution in the '90, only accentuated the contrast between the modern and the old way of life so well illustrated by the presence of massive sheep flock in a developing infrastructure.

My academic studies of urban planning at University of Architecture and Urban Planning « Ion Mincu » in Bucharest slightly approached issues related to natural, rural and agricultural



environments or food issues that are relevant to the city development, a general tendency at a political level in Romania, more focused on big infrastructure projects, in a search of modernity that ignored local context

My professional experience exposed me to the french approach of landscape at different scales with more sensitivity towards *multidisciplinarity, systemic approach, multifunctionality, synergy, cultural specificity, edible feature* and other concepts that refined my vision on urban planning.

In an increasing urban context, that marginalized both physically and culturally the agriculture practice, projects and policies need to integrate an agricultural vision. Exploring the city potential as a platform for synergies between food production, environmental and social functions, especially in the a Eastern-European context led me to the PhD focused on urban pastoralism.



The pastoralism activity is considered retrograde due to its low productivity and competition with dominant functions like agriculture and urbanization, especially since industrialization. Among patterns of subsistence that sustain our society development, pastoralism survived in almost its original form because the interdependency between shepherds, the flock and the environment that limits its intensification.

This practice invested mostly land considered as marginal, because of inefficiency for other activities. The friction between urban and rural-agricultural created in the periphery of the city gaps of urbanity that become marginal, and therefore platforms for spontaneous answer to agricultural, land and food crisis.

In Romania, the central planning and management in the communist period permitted the organization of short food chains by developing state large scale farm for fresh food supply next to urban territory. The political shift towards capitalism and EU integration changed this structure by decollectivization (redistribution of public land to its original private owners), arable land abandonment and chaotic city sprawl that fragmented the rural and agricultural periphery, a phenomenon more visible in the case of Bucharest.

<http://periferiab.ro/poveste/videostana/>

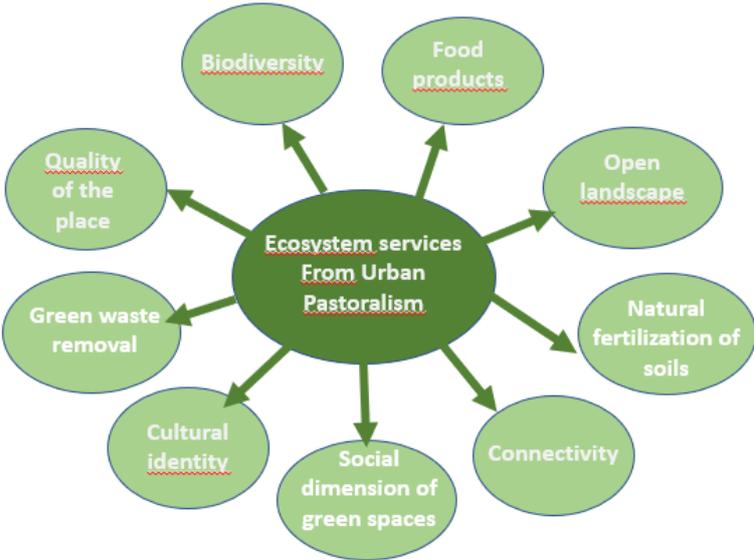
This permitted local shepherds to develop their activity in a spontaneous manner by extending their flock due to new large surfaces for pasture availability, while juggling with uncertainty of land availability, a negative reputation, lack of political support and the fluctuation of demand for their products. Being familiar to constraints and transition all their life, they managed to adapt until today though aging process of flock owners, concurrency from large scale food distributions chains and other factors negatively impact their presence on urban territory.

Even if on urban land, animal production is legally forbidden, APIA, the institution that distributes European subvention for agriculture, had register almost 40 000 in the periphery of Bucharest, the number of sheep presence is higher according to interviews with owners that do no register because of complexity of applying rules and low subsidies.



The dimensions of the sheep flock start around 500 (when economic viability is reached) to 2-3 000 maximum that pasture thousands of hectares of urban and peri-urban land.

Though a difficult to quantify phenomenon, urban pastoralism is obviously an important phenomenon that transforms large-scale ‘urban gaps’ in **green infrastructure** by adding *productivity, biodiversity and interconnectivity* layers to this land. The recognition of ecosystem services brought by this resilient productive practice can mediate the traditional antagonism between city and nature and improve human wellbeing and life quality.



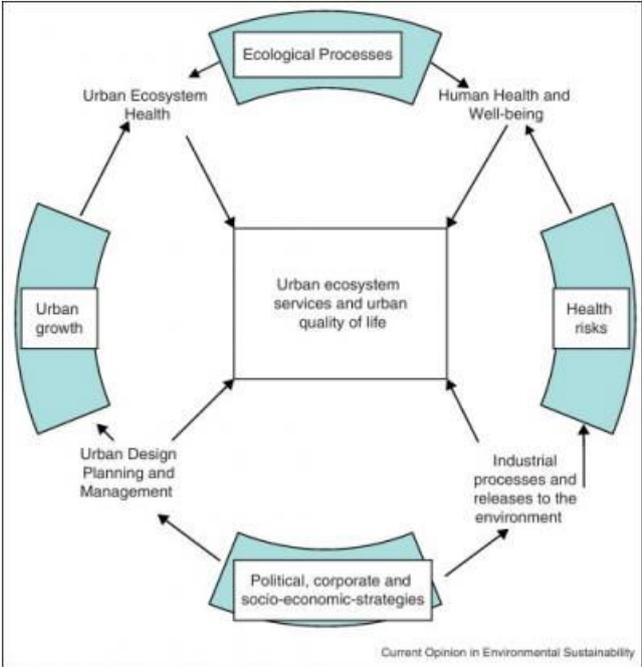
A sustainable urban planning strategy could enhance the *multifunctionality* of this system of interconnected pastures by organizing them also as platforms for leisure, cultural, educational and gastronomic activities.

The EU 2020 Biodiversity Strategy, elaborated in 2011, suggest that the biodiversity loss should be addressed by

spatial planning by considering Green Infrastructure: “By 2020, ecosystems and their services are maintained and enhanced by establishing green infrastructure and restoring at least 15 % of degraded ecosystems.”



Source: BFN 2017



Source: <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877343512000966>

Local Challenges

- changing the paradigm of pastoralism as a retrograde and low productive practice destined only for marginal land;
- understanding that with proper management and collaboration the synergies between the urban and the pastoral systems can be positive and transform unused land of becoming green infrastructure;
- recognizing the value of ecosystem services;
- approaching sanitary issues related to animal production next to urban areas;
- enhancing the multifunctionality and interconnectivity by transforming this space in platforms for additional activities linked to urban way of life (leisure, cultural, educational and gastronomic activities);
- connecting a traditional pattern of subsistence to present context and challenges trough corroboration between different actors involved.

While traditionally perceived as a rural phenomenon, the pastoralism values both the social, economic, ecological and agricultural dimensions of urban territories and with appropriate recognition and management can be transformed into an important tool for sustainable urban planning.

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