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What place for pastoral activities in the economic transformation of Vicdessos (Ariège Pyrenees)?

Pierre Dério, Maud Loireau, Philippe Bachimon, Églantine Cancel et David Clément

NOTE DE L'ÉDITEUR

Research conducted under the SYSTERPA programme, accredited by the Human-Environment Observatory of Upper Vicdessos.

- 1 According to Digard (in Brisebarre *et al.*, 2009), pastoralism is a “method of agricultural farming based on extensive grazing of livestock on natural pastures.” It fulfils many other functions in addition to its productive one in mountain areas (Bornard, Cozic, 1998), which were identified in France with the passing of the Pastoral Act of 1972 (Charbonnier, 2012). This multifunctionality of pastoral activities, which ranges from their essential contribution to the maintenance of the environment (preservation of biodiversity and open landscapes, limiting the risks of avalanches, landslides or fires) to their involvement in the development of territories, leads them to interact closely with other components of mountain territorial systems. It is through these interactions, which confront pastoral actors to other resident-actor groups, managers or users at the local level, that pastoral activities find territorial anchoring, very different from the vertical technical structuring that is induced by their belonging to a specific sector and its network. As Mermet (2010) shows when he analyzes, in the context of the Mézenc plateau, the contrast between the insertion of the meat farmers into local society and the “delocalization of the social space of the milk producer [...] considered in vertical professional relationships”, this territorial anchoring does not

happen automatically. It is the result of a complex social process, at the crossroads of several concomitant phenomena, variously articulated depending on territory:

- The assertion of environmental concerns (biodiversity, landscape diversity) and their regulatory and political manifestation at different scales, which lead to a recognition of the value of pastoralism and to its support in its role as manager of mountain environments (Blanc, 2009; Turquin, 2009; Lepart *et al.*, 2001).
 - The convergence between local approaches adopted by producer groups to rely on territorial origin to promote their products (Frayssigne, 2008, Martin *et al.*, 2000) and efforts towards the re-territorialization of agriculture-support public policies, which had long remained sector-oriented (Rieutort, 2009; Eychenne, 2012).
 - Identification and mobilization of “territorial resources” (Landel, Senil, 2009; Gumuchian, Pecqueur, 2007) for inter-communal constructions at various scales. These consist of approaches in which the encouragement of sectors of activities that have a potential for development (including, where appropriate, pastoral activities) goes hand in hand with their rise in importance in the definition (or redefinition) and the communication of a collective identity (Chandivert, 2005).
 - Among consumers (residents and/or tourists), a dual quest for meaning and quality (Allaire, 2002; Pecqueur, 2001) which pertains both to products (intrinsic qualities and/or mode of environmentally virtuous production) as well as to the landscapes or the coherence and intelligibility of local identities.
- 2 In analyzing the process of “social construction of a quality product” – in this case, the “Free-Range Lambs” of Parc des Cévennes – Blanc and Roué (2005) show how the way these different resources combine creates synergies and constraints¹ at the same time. They further emphasize the fundamental role of actor interactions. Products and services are clearly not the only basis for transactions between pastoral and other actors. Each group at the same time develops its own representations of pastoral activities and their place in the territory, manifesting as various interlinked behaviours, strategies and practices. Turquin (2014) suggests introducing the pastorality neologism to designate this complex of representations, which includes “all the values and characteristics, real or imagined, of what is pastoral, and embodied by pastoral actors” and which does not necessarily create a coherent and shared whole. Thus, regarding shepherds and the aura that surrounds the practices of transhumance, Rieutord (2006) examines this “new system of images and values originating with our urban society”, whose projection on pastoral activities creates a “pastoral myth”.
- 3 Three levels of questions arise from these findings. The first pertains to the integration, at a greater or lesser degree depending on the context, of the reference to pastoralism and its spaces in the imagination and the rhetoric of territories. With regards to this symbolic pastorality of varying intensity, it is also a matter of evaluating, at various levels, the actual role of pastoral activities in the territory’s functioning, with particular attention to all their modes of interaction with local society. We suggest that the thicket of these interactions can be dense, without actually reinforcing pastoralism everywhere within the territorial identity, probably because of the informal nature of some practices of this “usage-based pastorality”. Finally, it seems clear to us that the gradual “revelation” of a territory’s pastorality is most of the time part of a deliberate strategy, which combines using pastoral activities and spaces as resources and, at the same time, the highlighting of their contribution. In this respect, if “the desire for agricultural of the territories” (Turquin, 2012) can sometimes appear out of step with

the representations of livestock breeders, the latter seem equally capable as others to manipulate the symbolic dimension of their work, and to produce – or co-produce – pastorality to serve their own rationales.

- 4 This questioning underlies the analysis of the place of pastoral activities in the territory on which this article focuses. Vicdessos is a community of communes of the Ariège Pyrenees (10 communes, with just under 1450 inhabitants) which was faced with the need of a radical economic restructuring due to the disappearance, in 2003, of the industry which had presided over its destiny all through the 20th century. The scale and speed of this change have made Vicdessos a suitable subject of interdisciplinary research conducted within the framework of an OHM², in which the SYSTERPA programme, which attempts to analyze the restructuring of this local-scale territorial system, explored the socio-economic as well as the symbolic aspects of pastoral activities. Hitherto marginalized by the dominance of industrial employment, pastoral activities do not appear to be at the core of the strategy of transformation currently adopted by local political authorities, which relies primarily on the touristic attractiveness of mountain landscapes and a wide range of outdoor recreational activities offered by the territory.
- 5 Focused on the “touristic” system and the work of recasting the territory’s identity that accompanies its emergence, our initial studies (Dérioz *et al.*, 2012a; 2012b) did not accurately assess the place of pastoral activities in this new context. This only became possible following the comprehensive survey conducted in 2013³ among farmers of the 15 or so big livestock farms still active in Vicdessos. In addition to the diagnosis of this sector of activity it made possible, this research has also focused on the modalities of the participation of pastoral activities in the emerging tourism system: this second aspect involves as much the livestock farmers themselves and their ability to seize opportunities related to the presence of tourists as it does territorial administrations and their efforts to support pastoralism, re-introduce some of its aspects in their territorial rhetoric, and thereby instil a dose of *pastorality* in the ongoing reshaping of the territory’s identity.

From one system to another, pastoral activities remain marginal

- 6 Closely associated for a long time with agriculture and the use of forest resources, and subsequently, since the mid-20th century, as a more exclusive activity, livestock farming was – and remains – a key component of the construction of mountain landscapes (Davasse, 2006), as it does in a number of Pyrenean valleys. Based on a differential use of resources of each stage of vegetation (Eychenne, 2006), it combines forage production and grazing in the valley, inter-season staggered itineraries on the slopes and mountain summer pastures, which are punctuated with many temporary habitats. These dry-stone *orris* that dot the mountain landscape (Photo 1) are the only pastoral elements subject to a heritage approach; they have been inventoried, analyzed and excavated. Some have even been restored and made accessible to the public along a discovery trail (2008). They appear to visitors as reminders of the ancient pastoral vocation – more representative than the grasslands, hayfields and summering routes, now more or less colonized by ligneous growth, and in retreat over the long term.

Photo 1. Orri of Roumazet (Auzat, Soulcem upper valley), on the “from the orris to the high mountain” discovery trail opened in 2008



PHOTO P. DÉRIOZ, JULY 2008

- 7 The agro-pastoral decline here is inseparable from the industrial development which began in 1907 with the setting up of an electro-metallurgical factory for producing aluminium. As in Maurienne, this factory took advantage of the development of the hydroelectric potential of the mountains whose summits tower more than 2000 m over the Auzat-Vicdessos confluence basin, where the factory was built. Throughout the “Pechiney era”, this small territory of cantonal size enjoyed the stability of industrial jobs, good wages and benefits accorded by Pechiney, whose predominant presence structured all social life. According to Moreno (2006), it was after 1945 that a shift took place: from a population of farmer-workers who worked at Pechiney for extra income when agricultural work permitted to a dominance of worker-farmers for whom it was farming – increasingly oriented towards extensive forms of livestock farming – which became secondary. Because of the lack of people to take over them, the farms saw their numbers decline, and the steepest surfaces (beginning in the 1950s) and some parts of narrow valley floors with fragmented lands (from the 1960s) were abandoned to fallow and the forests soon intruded (Houet *et al.*, 2012; Carré, 2010). Buttressed by RTM⁴ reforestation in the 19th century (Davasse, Galop, 1991), forests took over the slopes. Summer mountain pastures, above altitudes of 1600 m, fared better thanks to the protective measures taken in the 1970s, and because the decrease in local herds was partly offset by the opening up to transhumant⁵ herders from outside the area. But an increase in the share of cattle compared to sheep, which are better able to exploit the less accessible areas, and reduced local per-hectare loads, still led to a deterioration of pastoral quality of varying intensity depending on the summer pasture (Photo 2). The relatively late arrival on the scene (1980-90) of transhumant herds from the piedmont plains reinforces the impression that only summer pastures remain important

(Eychenne, 2008) and, while the local herds climb on foot, the trucks crossing the valley bringing up the transhumant animals contributes to reinforcing the idea that it is mainly farmers from outside the area – even if they come from only a few tens of kilometres downstream – who maintain the mountain. At a time of industrial prosperity, despite the many small herds that remain in Vicdessos, the pastoral vocation there thus seems marginal or even residual.

Photo 2. Mugho pines and low woody growth (juniper, heather, rhododendron, etc.) extending over the summer pasture of Bassiès (Auzat)



PHOTO P. DÉRIOZ, OCTOBER 2012

- 8 Industrial activity started declining in the early 1990s, and finally ended with the closure of the Auzat site in 2003. The social and economic weakening of Vicdessos during this period, which coincided with an inter-communal structuring at the cantonal level (district [1989], followed by the community of communes [2002]), led a few elected officials to explore a project for territorial reconversion focused on the development of outdoor recreational activities. To this end, they mobilized significant financial resources relying on the presence of industrial entities (Pechiney-Alcan-Rio Tinto and EDF) and the CTRE⁶ (Territorial Agreement for Economic Revitalization) (CTRE, 2004-2006) designed to mitigate the effects of the withdrawal of the metallurgical sector from the area. Based on the innovative concept of ‘*station sport nature*’ (nature-sports centre), this policy seeks to build a coherent offer for outdoor recreational practices (hiking, canyoning, etc.), construction or modernization of major equipment and infrastructure (snow stadium, via ferrata, climbing park, equestrian centre, climbing gym, stadium at the location of the factory which was demolished in 2006, etc.). The policy also calls for the progressive leveraging of various aspects of local heritage, not only for the purposes of tourism but also with an intrinsic goal of reshaping the collective identity by turning the page, once and for all, on the area’s

industrial past (Dérioz *et al.*, 2012a). A process of active communication has been undertaken by a joint association (*syndicat mixte*) which combines this offer with that of the community of communes of neighbouring Tarascon – entrance of the valley and high spot of prehistory (Cave of Niaux). It underpins this effort to develop landscapes, the natural environment and parts of the heritage as resources, reflecting the transition from productive economic dominance to the preponderance of the “residential base” (Talandier and Davezies, 2009).

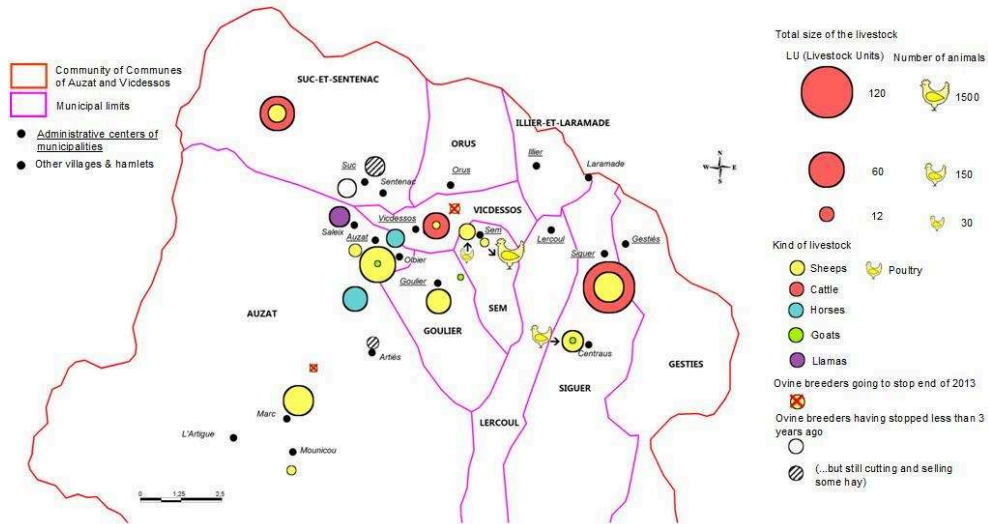
- 9 The disappearance of industry had little impact on the pastoral sector. In particular, there has been no revival of farms or the opening of new ones by former Pechiney workers. Marginal when life in Vicdessos was based around the metallurgical industry, livestock farming has tended to remain so even now given the gradual crystallization of a new recreation-centred system: the declining number of farms (down from 45 to 30 (-33%) for the canton between the agricultural censuses of 1988 and 2000⁷) has lowered the demographic importance of the primary sector, and the lack of ‘territorialized’ production identified by a name or a label – cheese is no longer made in Vicdessos – means that the pastoral sector plays a minor role in tourist communications and in the sports- and fun-oriented promotion of the mountain. The emphasis on ‘nature’ even tends to obscure the contemporary reality of pastoral activities, mentioned only in terms of their heritage legacy (Davasse *et al.*, 2012). Symptomatic of the underestimation of its economic significance, the support extended to the agro-pastoral sector and the restructuring of land in 2004 under the aegis of CTRE came under the heading of “habitat and lifestyle” (Carré, 2010), not of “economic development”. And yet, whether in valleys surrounding the villages where second homes predominate (67% of all residential housing), or high-altitude mountain pastures frequented by hikers, it is the presence of livestock farmers that is the main guarantor of the landscape resource which attracts the tourists.

Vulnerabilities and elements of vitality of the current pastoral system: a difficult assessment

- 10 The local actors’ opinions about the state of pastoral activities range from the optimistic, of finding a form of stabilization, to the pessimistic vision of a continuous decline with external inputs only mitigating some of the effects on the mountain. After careful inventory (2013), it appears however that the 17 livestock farmers in Vicdessos (Map 1) still control much of the canton’s forage area. They are the sole managers of the intermediate zone, on the valley floor and near villages and, contrary to perception, almost half of them continue to obtain part of their feed requirements from the hay. However, a comprehensive churning of men and establishments is going on, with half the farms dating from after 1992, either through the establishment of new units (5/8) or resumption of existing units outside the traditional intra-familial pattern (3/8) with farmers in three-quarters of these cases (6/8) being from outside the territory. The resulting demographics of farm managers show a more feminine orientation (with a quarter of farms being managed by women) and a much younger one than in previous decades (an average age of slightly over 45 years). Pluriactivity has generally declined: one-third of farm representatives (6/17, all male) are pluriactive, but among them are four employee-shepherds (two of them work part-time at this job and during the summer grazing season care for their own flocks at the same

time). Household pluriactivity is slightly more common, with the spouse bringing in an outside wage in 5 cases out of 12⁸.

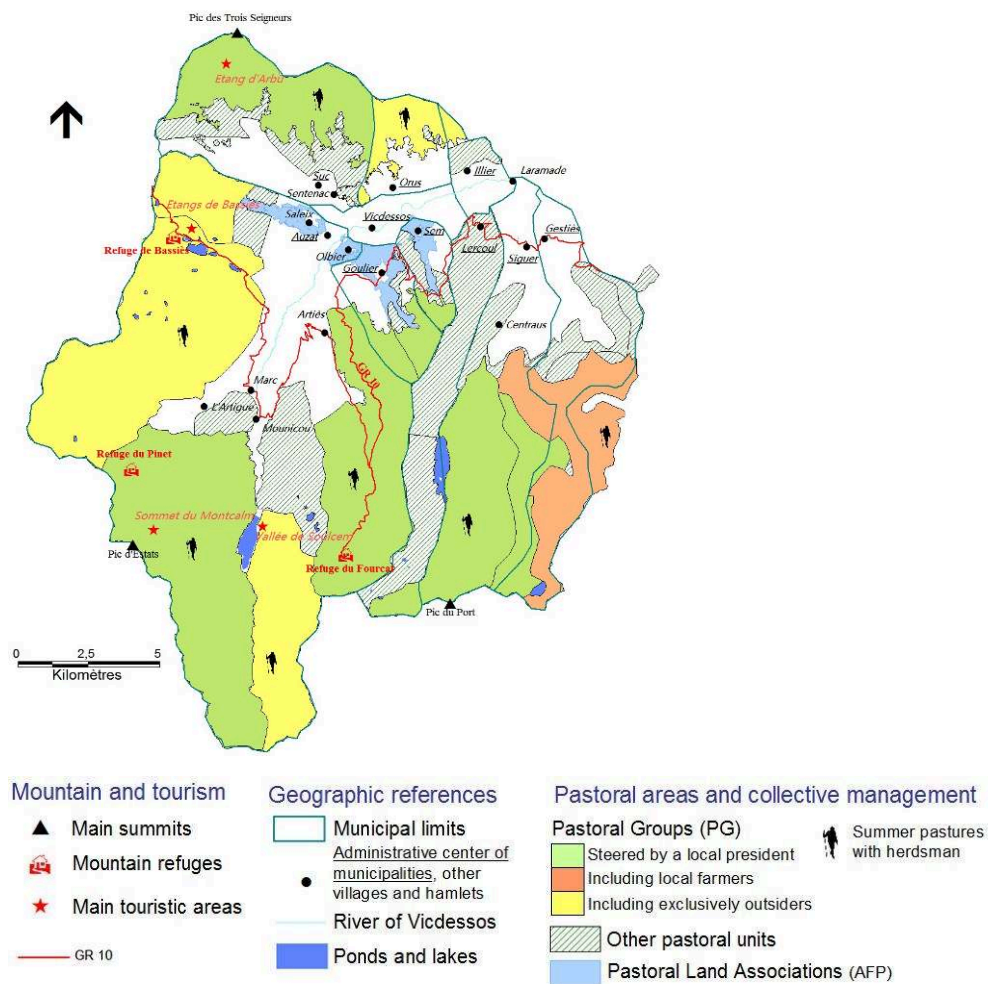
Map 1. Pastoral farms with relatively diverse profiles



SOURCE: SURVEY BY E. CANCEL, 2013

- 11 Most of the farms are oriented towards sheep meat, some are exclusively so (7/17) or supplemented by a small goat herd (3/17). A few farms additionally deal with bovine meat (3/17) or poultry (2/17). But this first impression becomes less clear cut when herd sizes are taken into account. They vary greatly from one farm to another for reasons that can be positive – a desire to breed quality animals – or negative – lack of space, shaky economic viability, and advanced age of the farmers. Many farms have small flocks of sheep or of sheep and goats but the local sheep population as a whole (about 1800 animals of which 1500 are mothers) only represents less than half (290 LU⁹) of the total local equivalent livestock population in Vicdessos (595 LU). The other half consists of cattle (247 LU, 41%), horses (two farms, 59 LSU, 8%) and about 20 llamas (one farm, 10 LU) making up the rest. Mixed farms, combining sheep and cattle, rank among the biggest here.

Map 2. Pastoral areas primarily under collective management



SOURCES: PASTORAL FEDERATION OF ARIÈGE/ SURVEY BY E. CANCEL, 2013

- 12 As elsewhere in the *département* (Eychenne, 2008), the stimulus measures initiated by the Pastoral Act of 1972, with the active support of the Pastoral Federation of Ariège, resulted in the restructuring of land rights and management of mountain summer pastures through the creation of 12 Pastoral Groups (PG). This took place here later than elsewhere, since the first PG (Signer-Neych) dates back to 1986, though more than half of them are less than ten years old. This development has led to the return of permanent guardianship (8 mountain pastures out of 14) and has opened up the mountain to transhumant herds brought in mainly from the piedmont plains of the north Pyrenees or neighbouring valleys (Aston, Miglos), from within Ariège for the most part¹⁰. Local farmers are still at the head of 7 PGs, constitute about a third of the shepherds and represent a third of user farms, all for about one-third the total livestock.
- 13 The obvious appeal of Vicdessos's summer pastures and their evolution towards a more efficient management (pastoral diagnosis by the PG, guardianship, etc.) are also consistent with the growing prominence of cattle, with the corollary of sheep herd sizes often below what can be supported. Such a situation is not able to prevent overgrowth everywhere. In intermediate zones (slopes), the forest cover tends to prevail widely. However, some extensive grassland areas do persist, forming a mosaic

of groves and clearings, which begin in contact with inhabited areas and merge much higher, more or less seamlessly, with summer pastures. Reserved for grazing in mid-season for herds that go up to mountain pastures in the summer, these intermediate fragmented spaces are also under the direct control of the livestock farmers. The physiognomy of these spaces thus depends largely on the ratio between the size of the herd and the surface areas. There are a few signs of overgrazing, but also of insufficient pastoral pressures to control the intrusion of trees

- 14 Despite the weaknesses of some farms and the large proportion of financial aid in their incomes¹¹, pastoral activities are still being undertaken in Vicdessos. But the context is difficult, and many farms have not found anyone to take over them after their managers stopped working (2 cases in 2013). Therefore, stabilization of existing farms and the revival of others seem to depend on two main factors: (i) diversification of activities and of sources of income – half of the farms are already doing this in one way or another, for example, 4 out of 17 sell timber – and (ii) the facilitation of access to land. In different ways, both refer to the integration of livestock farming into the overall functioning of this territory in mutation.

Usage-based pastorality and symbolic pastorality

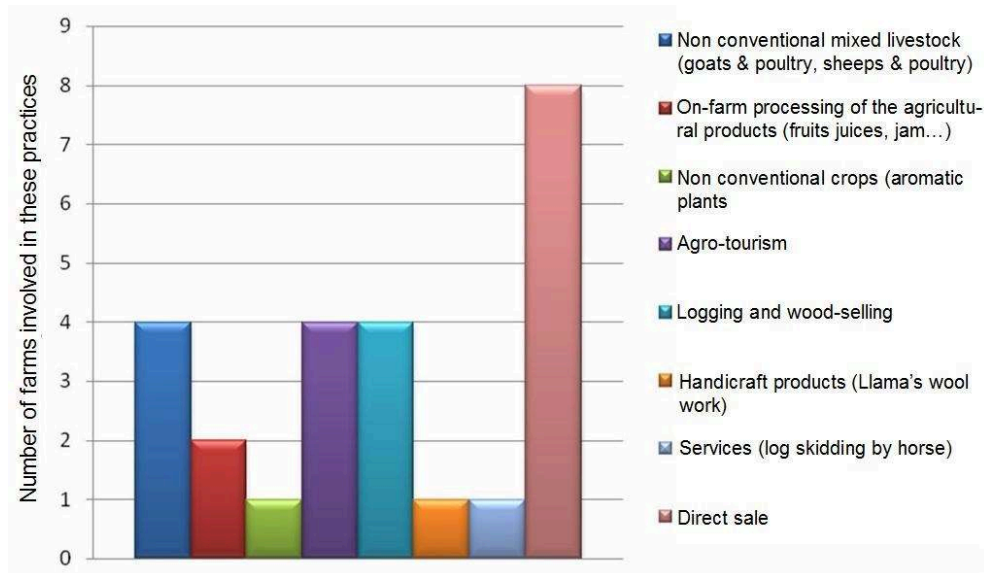
- 15 *Pastorality* is understood here as the pastoral dimension of a territory's identity and the territorial system. It is appreciated in two ways, first, in terms of expressions that pertain to the sphere of communications (discourse, events, image building, etc.) and which mobilize pastoral activities in the service of broader objectives. And, secondly, through interactions of usage which connect livestock farmers to the rest of society. Since these interactions, which revolve around pastoral uses, are not "staged", they are less visible than the first type of expressions of pastorality. Yet they relate to the various forms of transactions which integrate the circumscribed domain of pastoral activities into the territory's reality – landscapes, social relations, representations.
- 16 Thus the land-rights question, essential to the proper functioning and development of livestock farms at the technical level, inevitably pits the farmers against the owners, public or private, of spaces they use or want to use. Things are relatively simple as far as summer pastures are concerned, where the traditional usage rights are still used to regulate herd access, with priority accorded to local rights holders where the land belongs exclusively to the communes or, more often, to the State (regular renewal of multi-year grazing agreements with the National Forestry Office for summer pastures on State-owned land). But access to land becomes much more complicated in the intermediate zone and in the valleys due to its extreme fragmentation, further complicated by the absence of many non-resident proprietors. Much of the land used by farms is based on more or less insecure verbal leases and agreements, which usually require the owner's consent for any technical intervention (fencing, clearing, access road, etc.).
- 17 It is, above all, the realization that the forest is "encircling" the habitat that has convinced elected officials to push for the establishment of four Pastoral Land Associations (French abbreviation: AFP) centred on villages, starting with Goulhier (1975, one of the first in Ariège), followed by Sem (1996), Olbier (1998) and Saleix (1998) (Map 2). The dynamising effect of the creation of these AFPs on farms is undeniable; they have directly led, starting in 1998, to the farms' revival and to the establishment of four

new ones. Also deserving mention is the turning over of the management of the equestrian centre set up by the District – now owned by the community of communes – to private managers through the mechanism of a *Délégation de Service Public*. Other livestock farmers have also gained access to additional areas there, thus facilitating the operation of their farms.

- 18 At the same time, these AFPs have engaged farmers in a new type of relationship with the residents of these villages, the vast majority of whom are secondary residents¹² whose rates of local presence and frequencies of visits can vary widely but who very often have local family ties which are the source of their land holdings. In return for giving livestock farmers access to some or all of their lands, these owners generally have expectations, more or less clearly formulated, concerning the quality of “maintenance” of the pasture(s) by the herds, their dates of access, or the preservation of trees, which many owners view as assets and not as intruders to be removed to regain forage quality. No wonder then that the relationship between livestock farmers and owners become periodically strained within these AFPs whose spatial ambit starts at the edge of the villages. In fact, renewal of the AFPs of Olbier and Saleix, which came up during 2013, appears uncertain. Because they are based on collective approaches, the AFPs seem to become centres of conflict (Davasse *et al.*, 2012), in which the various criticisms directed towards livestock farmers reinforces their belief that the land owners are largely ignorant of livestock farming requirements.
- 19 Yet it would be unfair to say that AFPs do not work. The mechanism is indeed considered useful both by the community of communes, which is concerned about the future of some sectors weakened by retiring farmers, as well as by the recently established Regional Natural Park of the Ariège Pyrenees, which launched a programme in 2012 to reopen the landscape around the villages of Sem, Goulier and Lercoul, extended in 2013 to three other villages. In addition to the ongoing efforts to convince land owners, followed by various land-clearing operations¹³, managing reclaimed areas also involves defining modalities for the intervention of herds necessary to maintain these areas. Even though the demand for all these communes came from the municipalities, most owners in general responded very positively to this approach, whose initial objective was a “return to patrimonial transparency”, with the aim of finding valley-centred views and to improve the quality of life by limiting the ‘*feeling of suffocation*’ that many residents, primary and secondary, admitted to.
- 20 New links are thus being created between the territory and its livestock farmers, centred on inhabited areas in the intermediate zones and on valley floors. These links offer opportunities for exchanges or collaborations (occasional help from residents, herd visits during the calving or shearing periods, accompanying the climb to the summer pastures, etc.). Some of these opportunities are even economic: the direct sale of meat – not generally visible because publicized only through word of mouth – practiced by more than half of the farms is part of this new “contract” under construction between livestock farmers and the territory. Even though no local products has a “bio” label, thus making local animals and their products ineligible for distribution through Auzat’s “from the source” AMAP¹⁴ supply chain, 8 farmers – of which 5 in a big way¹⁵ – deliver meat to individuals packaged in cartons (sometimes in the form of merguez sausages in order to make best use of cull ewes) or hold markets, although the nearest abattoir is that of Pamiers (100 km round trip) and only one

farmer has a cutting plant (Figure 1). The Auzat central kitchen also obtains supplies from two livestock farmers of the region.

Figure 1. Different types of diversification of livestock farms in Vicdessos



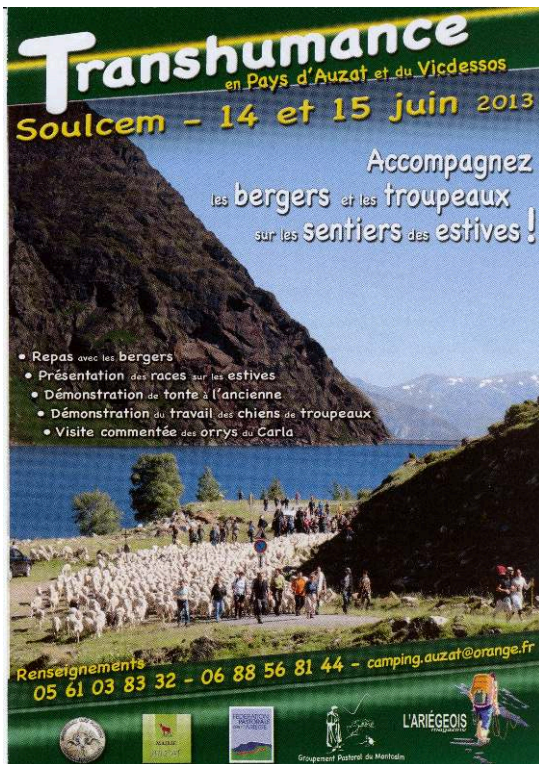
SOURCE: SURVEY BY E. CANCEL, 2013

- 21 These forms of usage of pastorality in Vicdessos, which also encompass the provision of services (hauling by horses), are not cut off from the “touristic” model adopted for the territory’s economic conversion, because the farms’ clientele is, for the most part, drawn from the population of secondary residents – the demographic base of the local system, which is, strictly speaking, more numerous and stable than tourists¹⁶ – and because some forms of diversification tend to add to the touristic offer. Granted, there is no labelled production which explicitly refers to the territory and which could be an integral part of its identity. The production of “Auzat cheese” made from cow milk, traditional in the valley, ceased in the early 1980s and three recent projects to establish dairies (or convert to them) for making cheese came to naught, respectively involving cows (Vicdessos), goats (Goulier AFP) and sheep (Sem). But the dominant local breeds (pure or crosses) enjoy a good reputation, with Tarasconese sheep, Gascon cows, Pyrenean goats and Mérens horses helping anchor farms in their territory, especially as many have adopted measures to improve quality and a few sell breeding animals (3/17). Other farms (4/17) incorporate some agro-tourism and offer handicraft products (wool work) or processed farm products (fruit juice, jam, preserves), offer farm visits, rent llamas for portorage during hiking, offer catering (farmhouse B&B) or just accommodation (lodgings). Three of them are part of the *Bienvenue à la Ferme* (“Welcome to the Farm”) network.
- 22 Finally, some collective developments show a beginning of integration by farmers of territorial changes underway, such as the recent creation of a Fraternity of Shepherds (*Confrérie des Pastous*) to organize the Tarascon Fair, held annually in early May (last big livestock fair before the climb to the mountain pastures), revitalized in the past ten years. It promotes the image of the Tarasconese sheep breed and holds presentations to attract a large audience (over 20,000 people) (Document 1). The setting up, in 2011, of an association headed by a farmer native to the territory has similarly helped revitalize

the fair of St. Matthew, held in Vicdessos for more than 700 years to mark the annual descent of sheep from summer pastures, with the active support of the municipality and the community of communes. While it is primarily a trade show for breeders, a clear desire to court the general public was seen in the parallel organization in 2013 of a farmers' market and the opportunity to enjoy an "Ariégeois meal" under a large tent accompanied with the performance of traditional songs. Festive activities that accompanied the climb of the herds to the summer pastures in mid-June (walking with the herd, shearing demonstrations, demonstrations of the abilities of sheepdogs, meals on summer pasture, etc.) and the associated communication effort (Document 2) involve both livestock farmers and communities, and are based on the same philosophy. The livestock farmers are not, as some of their counterparts from neighbouring Couserans have accused, merely participating in the development of tourism with a folklore orientation (Chandivert, 2005). Indeed, for them it is a matter of taking their rightful place as economic actors and land managers, of highlighting their territorial role and even perhaps of taking back the initiative after the particularly bitter conflicts in Vicdessos around the reintroduction of bears – experienced by them, according to Eychenne (2006), as a symbolic violence perpetrated against them. As far as elected officials are concerned, it is matter of moving beyond support for livestock farming solely as a sector of activity¹⁷ to incorporate a part of pastorality in the ongoing work on recasting the territory's image.

Documents 1 and 2. Cover of the brochure of the Tarascon Fair (8-9 May 2013) (doc 1), and events to accompany the transhumance towards Soulcem, cancelled this year due to persistent snow on the summer pastures (doc 2)





- 23 In this transitional period, when the indications of a pastoral renewal overlap with those of its continued decline, the opportunities offered by the development of tourism, the engagement of municipal councils concerned by the risk of farm abandonment and the existence of active support structures (Pastoral Federation of Ariège¹⁸) are indeed beneficial factors. The creation of the Regional Natural Park of the Ariège Pyrenees (2009), whose charter emphasizes the prominent place of pastoral activities in the mountains, opened up a scope for experimentation in the mobilization of land (Dérioz, 2013) or the valorisation of products, even if, given its current means of action, the park still appears to have less importance than the Chamber of Agriculture and the General Council (Milian *et al.*, 2012).
- 24 Even though the multiple links of “user-based pastorality” closely interweave pastoral activities in the functioning of the territorial system, it seems that the secondary role into which these activities were shunted by industrial development continues to weigh on their local image, most conspicuously manifested by their exclusion from the list of potential resources at the time of conversion. After all, the initial decision by the joint association (*syndicat mixte*) representing the two communities of communes (Vicdessos and Tarascon) was to rely on a touristic message built exclusively around a recreational view of the mountain, which mobilized only the heritage aspects of pastoralism (*orris*), not its contemporary vitality.
- 25 It is mainly the recent initiatives taken by livestock farmers of Vicdessos themselves to ‘highlight’ their profession that have led to more space being accorded to pastoral areas and activities in tourist brochures. Despite the legitimacy they derive from their function of maintenance of space, the ‘extra touch of soul’ that the pastoral culture brings to the mountain, or even their ability to deliver directly meat of high quality, pastorality retains a secondary role in the ‘offer’ of the “station sport nature”. Nevertheless, the recognition and visibility of pastoral activities have increased. User-

based pastorality and symbolic pastorality tend to reinforce each other, with the territorial image gaining in complexity.

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NOTES

1. Most notably the contradiction between production of free-range lambs “growing along with the grass” and the choice of holidaymakers as target customers, who have already left when the lambs are old enough to be sold.
2. “Human-Environment Observatories” (in French: *Observatoire Hommes-Milieus*); part of INEE (CNRS), “Human-Environment Observatories are devoted to the study of socio-ecosystems that man has severely impacted at the ecological, economic and social levels, and which a sudden major event has profoundly transformed.”
3. Semi-structured interviews conducted between April and August 2013 by E. Cancel (intern, Human-Environment Observatory (Systerpa programme) and the Community of Communes of Auzat and Vicdessos), complemented by the meeting of actors in ‘expert’ positions (Regional Natural Park, pastoral federation, etc.) and landscape analysis of all pastoral sectors.
4. “Restoration of Mountain Lands” (in French: “*Restauration des terrains en montagne*” or RTM), first applied in Vicdessos as far back as the 1880s.
5. For the residents of Vicdessos, the local herds are said to be “summering”, whereas herds brought to the same locations from outside the area are designated as “transhumant”.
6. Territorial Agreement for Economic Revitalization (in French: “*Contrat Territorial de Revitalisation Économique*” or CTRE)

7. The agricultural census of 2010 shows a slight increase (34 farms, or double the number shown on Map 1). This difference is explained by the inclusion of apiaries as farms, by the retirement of three farm managers since 2010, and especially by a broader definition of what constitutes a farm, including as it does very small non-commercial units and even those that are unproductive.
8. Five farm managers are single.
9. LU: 'livestock unit'. An adult cow or horse adults represents 1 LU, against 0.15 LU for a sheep or a goat, and 0.45 for a llama.
10. All the presidents of PGs are from Ariège. The few "outsiders" are also originally from Vicdessos, where they are still viewed as enjoying rights of use of mountain pastures, having sometimes moved just a few tens of km away because of their inability to expand their existing local farms.
11. AO (French abbreviation): aid for sheep, with an equivalent for goats. Since access to the subsidy for maintaining suckler cows (French abbreviation: PMTVA) is set at a threshold of three eligible cows, all the farmers receive it. ICHN (French abbreviation): Natural-handicaps subsidy. PHAE2 (French abbreviation): agri-environmental grass premium (formerly just "grass premium"). SPE: single payment entitlements, European aid based on surface area, decoupled from the act of production. Cumulatively, these subsidies and entitlements often represent over a third of a farm's financial resources.
12. 85% of second homes in Goulier, 81% in Sem (INSEE 2008) and 90% in 2013 in Olbier (field survey).
13. Logging carried out by a forester or by the owners themselves in Goulier (the largest surface, but also the easiest site to work on), by a livestock farmer in Sem (still forested small areas in the AFP) and within the context of worksites for students lumberjacks (CFFPA Pamiers) at Lercoul (all areas with few trees, it is a matter mainly of clearing undergrowth).
14. "Association for maintaining peasant agriculture" (in French: *Association pour le maintien d'une agriculture paysanne* or AMAP)
15. Typically, more than 20% of production, up to 100% for one of them. Sales are mainly to cooperatives (cattle) and to traders (sheep). Sales of live animals at the time of Eid are also significant.
16. About 2000 second homes for a little fewer than 1500 tourist beds.
17. This thus led them to help the rehabilitation or construction of pastoral huts.
18. Associative structure which is the 'veritable "armed wing" of the pastoral policy of the département' (Milian *et al.*, 2012). Such an investment of the General Council in pastoralism is quite exceptional in France.

RÉSUMÉS

Once a major part of life in the mountain landscapes of Vicdessos (Ariège, southwestern France), pastoral activities were marginalized when industries brought full employment to the area. The "Pechiney era" (1906-2003) was characterized by the return of fallow lands and forests on the slopes and on some valley floors. Now that this small territory is engaged in a voluntary conversion oriented towards outdoor recreational activities (*Montcalm nature-sports centre*), the twenty or so livestock farms still in operation seem to be the best guarantors of the landscape resource on which tourist attraction depends (village surroundings, high mountain pastures).

The creation of Pastoral Land Associations around some villages reflects the awareness of this issue by elected officials, and has led to permissions for the expansion of some farms and the creation of new ones. Even though the amount of livestock is sometimes insufficient to prevent the return of brush and trees to pastures and even though the farms, some of them in economically precarious states, do not visibly take part in the new tourism system, these livestock farmers are gaining recognition for their role as landscape managers. In addition, the increased direct sales of their products and the events they organize to enlighten people of their activities (fairs, transhumance celebrations) highlight their role – material as well as symbolic – in the territory's development. However, the issue of modalities of access to grazing lands remains crucial for this pastoral renewal, which will, in any case, have to depend on innovations (diversification of livestock, short food-supply chains, agrotourism), especially when many older livestock farmers will soon retire.

INDEX

Keywords : territorial system, economic reconversion, pastoral activities, mountain landscapes, dynamics of pastoral spaces, pastorality

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