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How to maintain a ‘natural’ aspect of mountain pastoral landscapes better with public policies: some lessons from the history of the French volcanic Chaîne des Puys public policies?

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How to maintain a 'natural' aspect of mountain pastoral landscapes better with public policies: some lessons from the history of the French volcanic Chaîne des Puys public policies?

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Keywords: pastoralism, landscape policies, volcanic landscapes, chaîne des puys

The volcanic ridge Chaîne des Puys is a unique landscape located in the French Massif Central, famous for its original and perfect landforms. For more than 40 years, this site has been affected by different national and European measures and policies to protect its 'natural' character.

Sometimes driven by the regional park or the local authorities, sometimes by the state, focusing now on farming activities, now more oriented towards conservation, sometimes normative, sometimes more open to negotiation, these measures have enjoyed varying degrees of success. Some places have seen their biodiversity and landscape quality increase while others have been abandoned or reforested, with closer landscapes and less biodiversity. Why?

Even if these landscapes look natural, they are the result of the interaction between local inhabitants' practices in forest and grassland management and natural vegetation dynamics. Thus our hypothesis is that, to be efficient, these policies need to integrate the reasons why, at a certain moment in time, the landscape has a certain aspect or the biodiversity a certain level and then propose actions oriented on these factors instead of enforcing normative 'good practices' disconnected from the local ecological, historical and social context.

Based on an review of these policies of the last 100 years, their scope and implementation and their effects, combined with a systemic modelling of the interaction between human activities and practices, socio-economical context and natural processes and its evolution during the same period, this communication aims to propose a general framework that could help new policies to be more efficient for acting on mountain grazing landscapes with the support of local communities instead of against them.

Mountain grazing landscapes caught between abandonment, rewilding and agro-environmental bureaucracy: the case of England's Lake District

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Keywords: pastoralism, rewilding, land abandonment, agro-environmental bureaucracy

Mountain pastoralism customarily involves a fluid mix of environments depending on the season, the age of the animals and a variety of other factors. It can involve free summer grazing on extensive high-altitude areas of unbounded treeless hill or mountain commons; spring and autumn grazing in common wood pastures with varying densities of trees; winter grazing and feeding on enclosed meadows, fields and barns at the valley floor. Grazing in distant lowland areas may be important for young animals gaining strength for their future life in the hills and for older animals being prepared for sale. Pastoralism may also involve a blending of genetic material by crossbreeding hardy, but lean, mountain breeding stock with weaker, but meatier and/or woollier, lowland breeds. Environmental and agricultural bureaucracies, as well as environmentalist rewilders, however, tend to standardize and classify environments within manageable boxes corresponding to particular bounded typological areas (e.g. with regard to the classification and mapping of wood pastures, nature areas or food production districts). The result is that mountain grazing landscapes often fall between the cracks of agricultural, food and environmental policy and support schemes. This contributes to their abandonment and the consequent loss of their cultural and biological value.