

URBAN PASTORALISM

SPONTANEOUS LARGE SCALE PRACTICE IN ROMANIA AND EASTERN EUROPE
THE IMPORTANT BENEFITS OF THIS PHENOMENON

roxana.triboi@gmail.com

Urban agriculture in Romania, including one of its significant components, urban pastoralism, is a neglected, devalued and marginalized phenomenon. Instead of seizing the potential of this endangered practice and using it as a sustainable urban management tool, local authorities fail to regulate and at most tolerate this practice, which was officially banned until recently even in the suburbs. This situation further weakens the status of the shepherds and animal breeders from the urban areas. The legal way of practicing this form of pastoralism is complicated, very restrictive and generally ignored by practitioners.

Strong points:

- An already effective organization despite the pressures and the rapidly changing urban development
- Short food chain
- Maintenance of the "green" spaces inside the city
- Use of "gaps" from the periphery in the fragmentation resulting
- Maintaining and recreating ecological corridors, green grid
- An land exploitation according to geography of the area
- Efficient and sustainable abandoned land management (private and public)
- Reducing the maintenance of public green spaces

Its many benefits are noticed and encouraged in Western Europe where this grassroots practice is artificial revived. Urban shepherds are paid to maintain the urban public spaces according to consistent and simple operating rules.



THE LOCAL CONTEXT

A significant phenomenon

Currently, the most important large-scale phenomenon of urban agriculture in Romania is represented by urban pastoralism.

In the last years, due to a combination of factors, pastures developed and prospered mostly in the green pockets of urban peripheries. Currently the practice of pastoralism in and outside of the city exists in an unregulated form and the lack of organization causes the deterioration of landscapes and various other negative effects.

In Bucharest the funding requests from APIA (Agency for Payments and Intervention in Agriculture) shows that until 2012 the number of goats and sheep had an upward trend (almost 45 000).

Unarticulated urban space development that generated gaps of vacant land

The radical change of property form by "de-collectivization" at the beginning of the 90 and the uncontrolled expansion of the city over the rural and agricultural suburbs created a chaotic mix of urban areas.



Important benefits of urban pastoralism

Because in Romania the management of green public spaces is badly managed by public authorities, the introduction of urban grazing as a regulated practice may allow higher benefits from the urban areas left un-used (commercial and industrial complexes on the outskirts, the roadsides, etc.). Even more, the most important possible benefits are related to this spontaneous practice in the peripheral urban areas. Some of them I have listed here:

- Articulating unused green lots.
- Developing biodiversity in general.
- Create a mosaic of habitats and preserving a variety of backgrounds.
- Maintaining a diverse flora through restorative and differentiated management.
- Saving forever and rustic species, valuing local breeds.
- Limiting or halting the development of certain invasive species without machines or chemicals;
- Establishing biological corridors.
- Reducing the environmental footprint for management public green spaces by green waste removal, natural fertilization of soils, eliminating the noise generated by mechanical equipment, and probably the most important is the decrease of management costs, especially in difficult accessible places.
- Providing a picturesque landscape.
- Preventing reforestation.
- Supporting short supply circuits (milk, cheese, meat).
- Ensuring the social dimension of green space.
- Creating animation-related events (mowing, milking).
- Providing a pedagogical function on agriculture and food.

It may become a model of sustainable management by:

- The recognition of the presence and the status of this urban and suburban shepherds
- The recognition of the environmental, economic, social benefits and cultural changes brought by this practice
- The organization of urban pastoralism through collaboration and in the interest of all stakeholders (shepherds, authorities, local community, planners, associations ...)
- Compliance with the elementary rules of hygiene in the production, storage and distribution of the stock products
- Promoting pastoral tradition, products of "territory" and organizing animations related to the events of this activity
- Developing pedagogical function of this practice
- The inclusion of these activities into urban policies and plans