



International Conference on Agriculture and Life Sciences (ICOALS V)

3 – 5 November 2025 – Tiranë, Albania

Round Table Discussion on Mountain Pastures and Shepherds in Albania: Challenges and Prospects

by

The Grassroots Institute | Canada / Western Balkans

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TGI – OUR STRENGTHS TO CONTRIBUTE TO WESTERN BALKANS



THEMATIC/TECHNICAL STRENGTHS

- Participatory Rangelands (Grasslands, Meadows, Pastures) Conservation & Management
- Transhumance, Pastoralism, and Shepherds-Owned Self-Governance
- Sustainable/Organic Agriculture Development; Climate Smart Agriculture
- Micro Watershed Management (Integrated) and Ecological Restoration
- Conservation of Biocultural Heritage, Biodiversity Heritage, CCA (community served area)
- Land Rights, Resource Rights and Multi-Stakeholder Advocacy

METHODOLOGICAL STRENGTHS

- Project Planning, Writing, Execution, Management & Monitoring {Organizing the Local People as Primary Stakeholders [project oriented]}
- Capacity Building and Training of Project Stakeholders [multiple skills & disciplines]
- Process Writing, Documentation and Communication
- Advocacy, Media Advocacy, Skill Training
- Participatory and Action Research
- Curriculum Design and Mainstreaming in School & Higher Education Institutions

TGI Western Balkans | Rangelands and Pastoralism in the Region

WESTERN BALKAN REGIONAL GATHERING OF PASTORALISTS

To observe IYRP 2026, The Grassroots Institute felicitates the Regional Gathering and calls for Partners and Collaborators in all 6 countries of the Western Balkans region. We are in the process of constituting Organizing Committees at the national, zonal, local levels. Interested stakeholders, including shepherd groups/ associations, national or local NGOs, municipalities, government departments, regional authorities, academic institutions, animal products business federations, farmers' cooperatives, youth groups, colleges/schools, and others, are invited to contact us.



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25-26 APRIL 2026

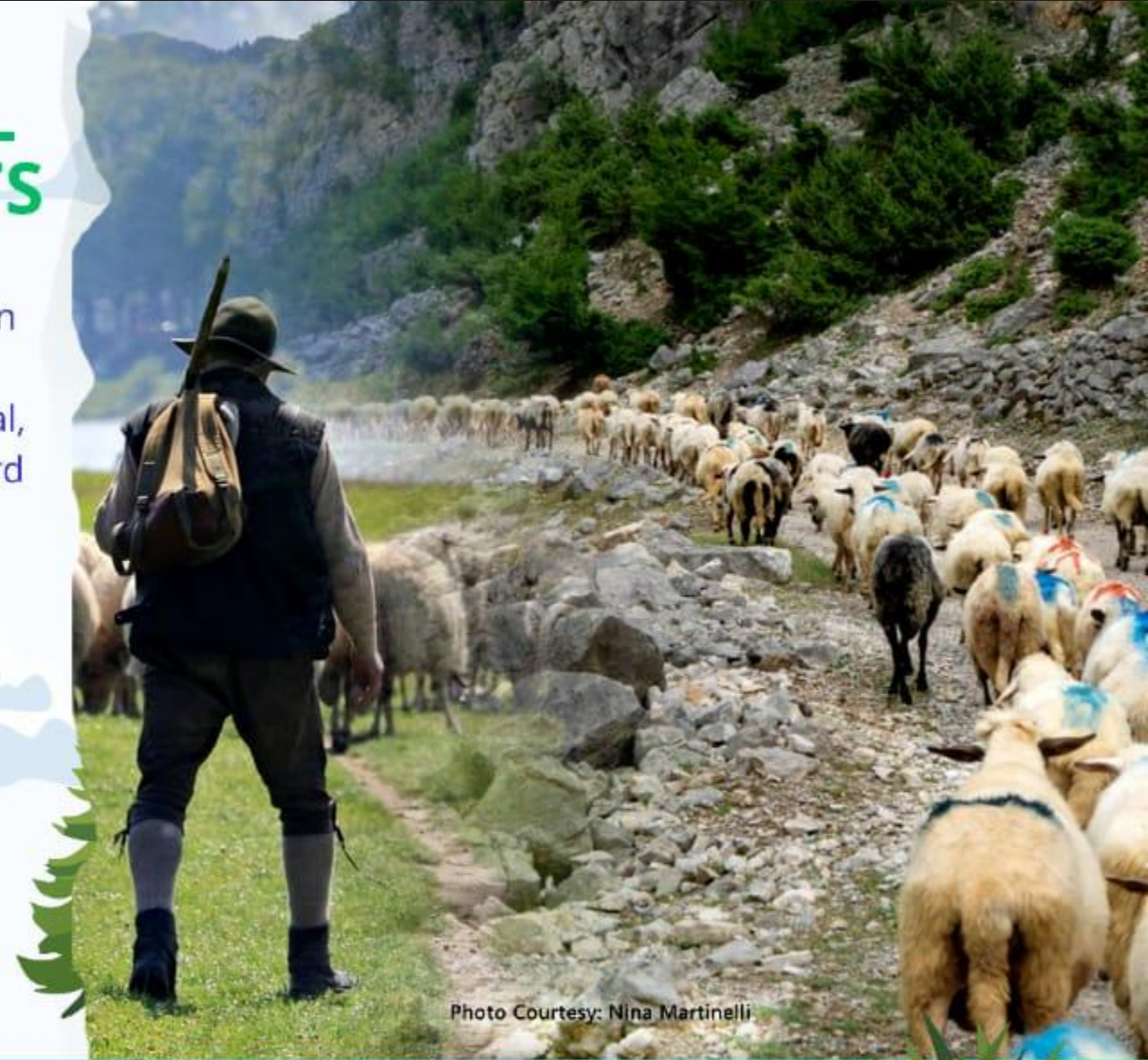


Photo Courtesy: Nina Martinelli



Grazing as an Enemy of Natural Ecosystems: Dilemma of Deep Ecologists

By: Hasrat Arjjumend

The phrase "*Grazing as an Enemy of Natural Ecosystems*" comes straight from the DEEP ECOLOGY and PRESERVATIONIST SCHOOL — which often views pastoralism as inherently destructive, an intrusion into "wild nature".

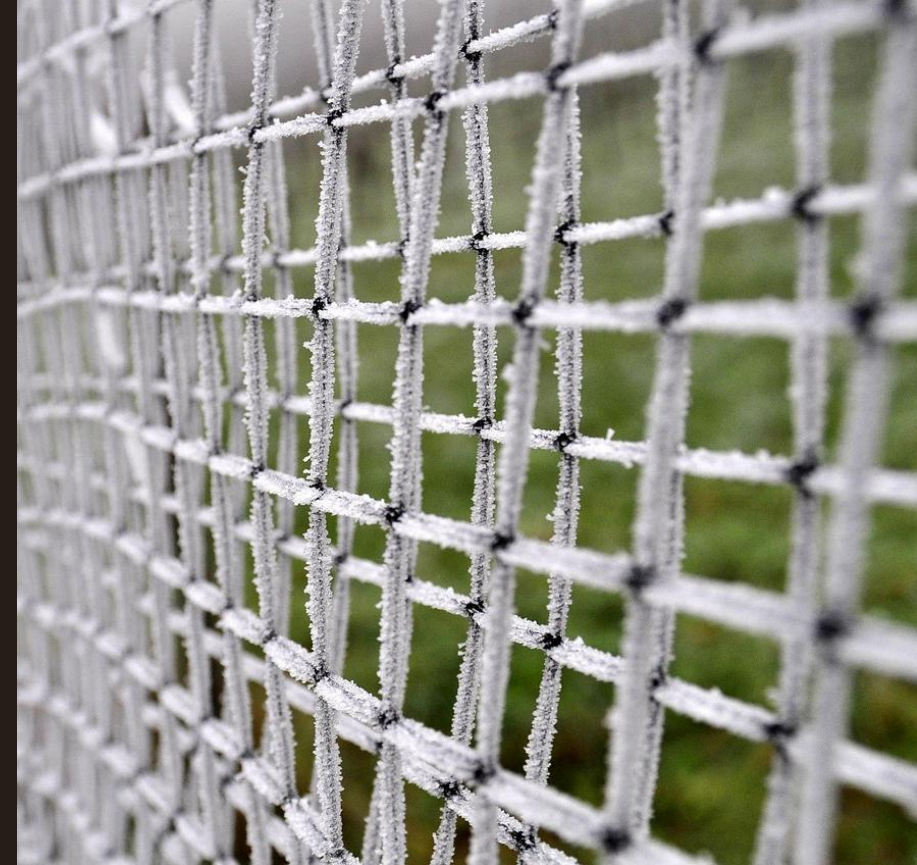
The Myth of the “Pristine Nature”

- Deep ecologists tend to romanticize wilderness as a state untouched by humans. But globally, *no landscape is truly pristine*. Pastoralists — from Mongolian herders to Sahelian Fulani and Albanian shepherds — have *co-created* ecosystems for millennia.
- The European Alps’ meadows (natural heritage) are in fact human-made through centuries of grazing. With abandoned grazing, flower-rich meadows turn into dark spruce forests — *biodiversity collapse*. In Balkan mountain pastures, biodiversity declined after grazing stopped.
- POINT> The “natural” state is often an *artifact of pastoral human history*. Removing herders in the name of wilderness restoration can *destroy* the ecological complexity that humans helped create.
- Grazing is not degradation — it’s the memory of ecological co-creation.



Deep Ecology's Colonial Blind Spot

- Deep ecology preaches “nature without local people”
- Indigenous and pastoral communities are displaced/ evicted for “fortress conservation” projects across Africa, Asia, other poor countries. Restrictions imposed on pastoralists in Albania and Balkans.
- Commodification of nature for consumer tourism.
- Guardian pastoralists are made trespassers and criminalized, dispossessed, alienated, repressed
- **POINTS>** Deep ecology replicates a **colonial logic** — privileging elite, urban ecological purity over the ecological knowledge of local people.
- The real ecological violence often comes from removing those who sustained the landscape.





Nomadism as Deep Ecology in Motion

- Pastoralists practice what deep ecologists *preach*: mobility, minimal materialism, deep attunement to land cycles, and respect for limits.
- Example: The Kyrgyz, Albanian, Carpathian, Himalayan seasonal movements mirror ecological rhythms more than modern sedentary conservation systems. The “enemy” (herder) is actually *the living embodiment* of the deep ecological ethic — but deep ecologists do not accept it.
- **Point>** Nomadic and transhumant herding synchronizes with ecological rhythms — rainfall, forage regeneration, and animal migration, embodying restraint, mobility, and coexistence. Hence, pastoralism *is* lived ecology: low-impact, temporally adaptive, non-accumulative, resilient and non-destructive.



Grazers as Ecosystem Engineers

- Deep ecologists celebrate wolves, elephants, and bison as “keystone species.” Yet they deny pastoral livestock a similar agency. Why?
- Example: Traditional transhumant grazing in the Mediterranean maintains soil fertility, prevents woody encroachment, and sustains pollinator diversity.
- Livestock herd → plant mosaic → soil microbes → wildlife diversity
- Livestock act as “ecological movers”: distributing seeds, recycling nutrients, shaping habitat structure.
- Transhumant grazing prevents shrub invasion and maintains open habitats for birds and pollinators.
- **POINT>** The pastoralist and her/his herd are *a species assemblage*, functioning together as ecosystem engineers. The “domesticated-animal complex” is a *co-evolved biome*, not an anthropogenic disturbance.

The Pastoral Ethic: A Counter to Industrial Modernity

- Deep ecologists often critique industrial modernity but misplace the enemy. The real ecological threat is *mechanized monoculture, industrial feedlots, and urban expansion* — not small herders with 50 goats or sheep.
- The true ecological threat: industrial agriculture, feedlots, monocultures.
- Pastoralism, in its traditional form, represents *the antithesis of industrial agriculture*: decentralized, regenerative, adaptive, non-extractive.
- **POINT>** Grazing is not the enemy of nature — it's one of the last living systems resisting capitalistic extraction of nature. Deep ecology targets the shepherds while ignoring the combine harvesters — a moral misfire.



Resilience Through Grazing Disturbance

- Ecological theory shows that *disturbance* is essential for resilience.
- Grazing is not degradation; it is *creative disturbance* — keeping systems dynamic, preventing stagnation. Grazing disturbance increases plant and soil diversity.
- Example: Studies in Tibet and Mongolia show that controlled grazing increases plant species diversity and soil microbial heterogeneity.
- **POINTS>** The rhythm of bite, trampling, and dung is an ancient ecological metronome — not a destructive force. Nature thrives on disturbance — not stillness. The hoof, the bite, and the dung are ecological poetry.

Philosophical Challenge: Anthropophobia in Disguise

- Can a truly *deep* ecology exist without accepting humans as co-actors in the ecosystem?
- Is the ideal of a human-free wilderness a form of ecological narcissism — a desire for purity over complexity?
- The shepherd's existence proves humans can belong — not dominate.
- POINT> Deep ecology risks turning into anthropophobia — fear of human presence. Yet humans are also *a species among species*, capable of ecological reciprocity.

