

## FUNCTIONAL GRAZING “MIGRATIONS” IN THE CURVATURE OF THE EASTERN CARPATHIANS<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** – Located on the territory of two neighbouring “land”-type regions and approached from a diachronic perspective, the grazing activity represents the subject of debate in this article. The first part of the paper focuses on the amplitude of grazing during the 15<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup> centuries in the local economy, of the practiced grazing types and number of sheep, the occurrence causal factors and the impact of grazing upon the economic life are rendered. The second part of the article pursues the present functional significances of grazing, by the analysis of sheep and goats and wool production dynamics or by the outline of viable alternatives of grazing perpetuation.

**Key words:** grazing, the Land of Vrancea, the Land of Bârsa, migrations, transhumance

### INTRODUCTION

One of the oldest agricultural occupations specific to the Carpathian – Danube – Black Sea territory, grazing has left obvious marks in the structure and economic life of human settlements and in the mentality of the inhabitants. Subjected to the same transformation process, which defined the entire Romanian society, the grazing activity was very much limited, the place of transhumance grazing and sheep flock cycling was taken by sheep breeding within individual households and by the shepherds' readjustment to other occupations.

The purpose of the present study is that of presenting the functional peculiarities of the grazing activity in the curvature area of the Eastern Carpathians, from a diachronic perspective. The focus is on establishing the present dimensions and importance that grazing holds in the life of local community nowadays. The following objectives are outlined:

- establishing the existing relationships between the Land of Bârsa and the Land of Vrancea, in terms of grazing migrations;
- outlining the impact that shepherds' cycling have upon the local economy;
- determining the grazing elements which were perpetuated along time;
- performance of sheep numbers and of the agricultural outputs associated to the two “land” type regions;
- determining the present functionality of grazing in the two regions considered as case studies;
- establishing an unitary evolution model of the two territorial “land” type units, from the grazing perspective;
- creating possible perspectives of assertion/perpetuation of the grazing in the areas subjected to study.

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## METHODOLOGY

Reduced to an insignificant level, the grazing activity represents the subject of the present study, pursuing on the one hand, the existing situations in the two neighbouring “land”-type regions (the Land of Bârsa Land and the Land of Vrancea), and, on the other hand, the extent of the grazing activities in the 15<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and the present decline of this activity. The dominant means to render these differences was that of the comparative analysis. Closely connected to the purpose and objectives of the article, the study areas were chosen to be the Land of Bârsa and the Land of Vrancea, two regions dominated by the symbol of landscape-man-animal relationship. Located at the curvature of the Carpathian Mountains, the two “land”-type entities have experienced over time a continuous and close inter-conditioning. One of the reasons of the intense exchanges between the two regions is the transhumance practiced on the estates of the Curvature Mountains.

The information found in the literature and during the fieldwork was related to the processed data. The interpretation of some reference sources is supported by quantitative statistic information. For the illustration of the grazing impact upon the local economy during the above-mentioned centuries, the authors start by identifying the types of grazing practiced in the area, then continue by presenting the concrete situation of the animal numbers in the respective time interval and culminate by highlighting the migration flows of the shepherds. For the present situation, the appeal to a comparative analysis between the beginning of a decade (1990) and the first half of the next decade (2003), from the point of view of the sheep number dynamics, as well as from the agricultural dynamics point of view, illustrated cartographically, will be completed by the outline of the new dimensions of the grazing activity and by the possibility of reinvesting in grazing by means of implementing European finance projects. The entire study makes the transition from the shepherd migrations in the Land of Bârsa towards/from the Land of Vrancea to the present “migration” of this secondary occupation in the inhabitants’ preferences, focusing on the disappearance of traditional forms of agricultural occupations.

## PASTORAL MIGRATIONS AND THEIR IMPACT ON LOCAL ECONOMY

Closely connected from the physical-geographical configuration (mountain-plain alternation, valleys opening, the presence of passes), with the entrepreneurial character of the inhabitants, with the traditional spirit domesticated within the inhabitants’ consciousness, grazing has represented one of the main occupations in the analysed area. Moreover, the existence of some large pastures, the privileges that the shepherds in the Eastern Carpathians had, the opening offered by the existing infrastructure, the presence of products sale market have lead to a high concentration of the grazing centres, spread at the foot of the mountain (Meteş, St., 1924, Diaconu, I., 1930, Opreanu, S., 1930, Dunăre, N., 1972, Constantinescu-Mirceşti, C., 1976, Iordache, Gh., 1986, Murgescu, C.-tin, 1996).

As a result of the analysis of the grazing cycle and of the cycling of the sheep flocks, there could be identified the following grazing typologies on the territory of the two regions:

- *sedentary grazing*, with a distribution area focused around the household, regardless of the seasons;
- *local agricultural grazing*, practiced within the limits of the village boundaries (Iordache, Gh., 1986, p. 13), a form of grazing practiced in three ways: the local grazing, without stalls and folds, when the flocks of sheep, the cow, horse and pig herds “spend the night in the village; the local grazing with shed, but without folds, during summer and local grazing with stall, shed and fold” (Dunăre, N., 1972, pp. 174-181);
- *the cycling grazing to the mountains*, which presumes a cycling movement of the flocks of sheep between the mountain where they spent the summer and the plain, where they spent the winter. This was either a simple cycling – the movement of the flocks of sheep in towards the mountain at summer and their cover within households, during winter, or a double cycling – in this case the winter was spent in the forest pastures or from the feet of the forest (Dunăre, N., 1972, pp. 184-201, Iordache, Gh., 1986, pp. 15-16, Murgescu, C., 1996, p. 59).

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- *the transhumant grazing*, caused by the need and desire of the owners to sell their products, by the high demand on the sale markets, the demand for wool production, but also by the national economic policy.

Although it covered a rather small area, the transhumance grazing was focused in a few settlements:

- Bran area: Vlădeni, Zărnești, Tohanul Nou, Bran, Șirnea, Fundata, Șimon, Moieciu, Măgura, Poarta;
- Săcele area: Baciu, Turcheș, Cernat, Satulung, Zizin, Tărlungeni, Purcăreni;
- Brașov area: Brașov (Șcheii Brașovului), Feldioara, Crizbav, Râșnov, Cristian, Vulcan, Sânpetru, Prejmer, Codlea;
- Covasna-Brețcu area: Covasna, Brețcu, Zăbala.
- Vrancea Land: Vidra, Vrâncioaia, Tulnici, Spinești, Bârsești, Păulești, Poiana, Nereju, Negriilești, Colacul, Valea Sării.

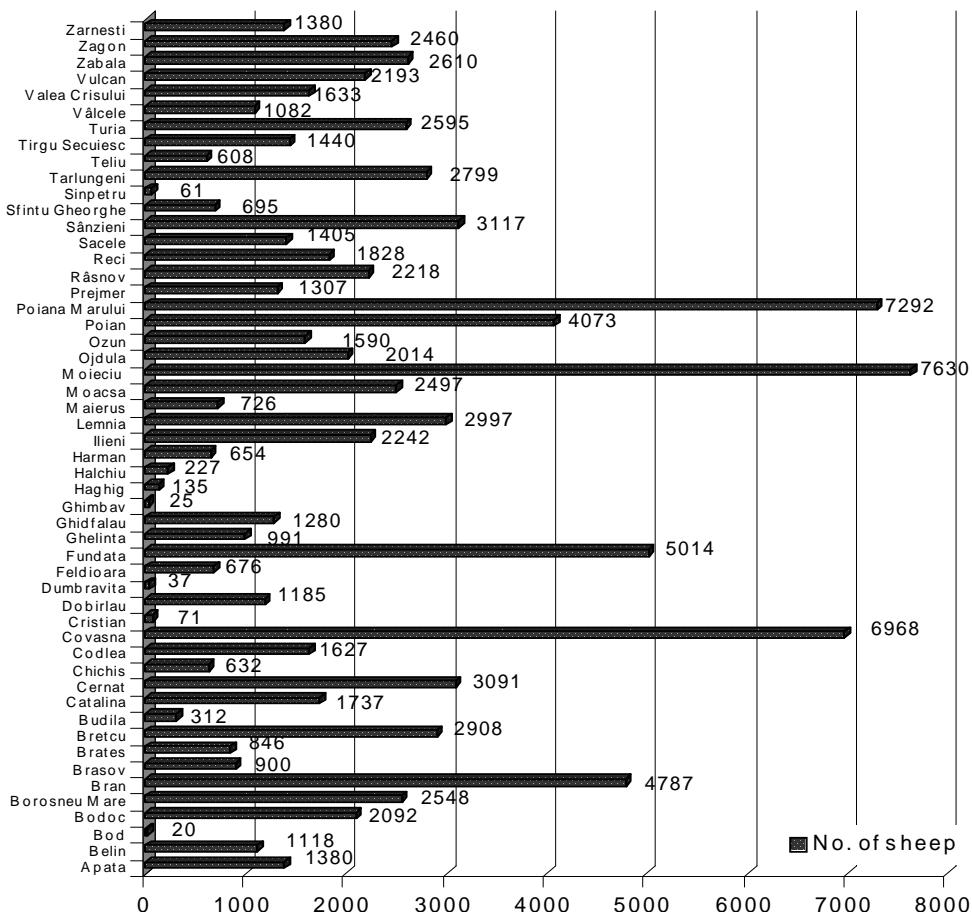
The origins of the transhumance are lost in time. The first documentary mentioning of the shepherds dates back in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but these are very general. No differentiation of the shepherds' origin is mentioned, as the collocation “Ungureni” includes both the Romanian shepherds and the German or Hungarian shepherds. It is clear, as Opreanu, S. states it too, the disproof of the Romanians' nomad character hypothesis, based on the transhumance, which, as opposed to the phenomenon specific to the migratory peoples, occurs as a phenomenon in a continuous geographic unity, stable and blended with other economic activities. Moreover, during the winter period, wives and children stayed “at home”, taking care of the household. During summer, the shepherds did not leave the limits of the village boundaries unless an emergency, as they were working in agriculture.

The physical-geographic features (mountain-plain cycling, open plateaus, the extended presence of pastures) have enabled these displacements of the shepherds with their flocks around the Brețcu, Buzău or Vrancea Mountains. On the other hand, the privileges of the shepherds in the neighbouring area represented by custom exemption and high availability to the market in Brașov or in the other neighbouring market towns have represented more advantages for practicing transhumance.

Regarding the records of the animal number, the situation will be presented distinctly for the two “lands”, due to statistic type of reasons.

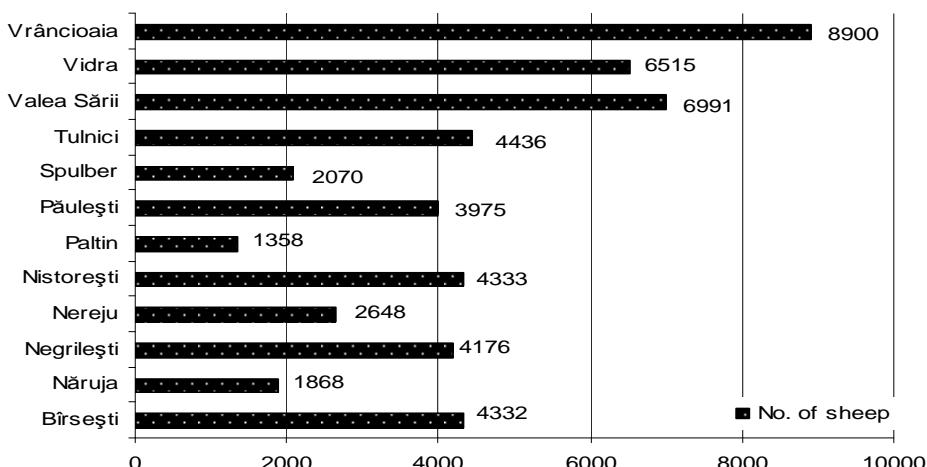
In the case of the settlements included within the Land of Bârsa, one can speak of their official centralization, synthesized in *The Agricultural Census of 1895*, performed only for the counties belonging to Transylvania. According to the composition of an average number of sheep in a flock in the investigated ATUs (Administrative-Territorial Units), respectively 101,753 sheep at the regional level, one could notice particular situations:

- high sheep concentration in the communes with old pastoral traditions: Moieciu, Fundata, Poiana Mărului, Poian, Brețcu;
- low sheep percentage in urban areas, accounted for by the fact that, although Brașov (4.69%) and Săcele (4.16%) had a strong tradition in this occupation, the industrial units occur and the industrial profile of the two localities starts to be delineated;
- in the case of the localities in the outskirts of Brașov, once significant grazing centres, the number of sheep is very low; the development of factories and orientation of population towards the secondary sector represents the cause of these changes (Cristian, Bod, Dumbrăvița).



**Figure 1.** Number of sheep in the Land of Bârsa (1895)  
(Source: Agricultural Census of 1895)

The Land of Vrancea, which had another territorial-administrative planning, held a number of 51,602 sheep in 1927, a higher concentration was recorded in the communes of Vrâncioaia, Valea Sării, Bîrsești, Vidra and Nistorești, Negrulești, Tulnici, with settlements located at the junction with the localities in the Brețcu-Covasna area and at the contact with the mountain chain.



**Figure 2.** Number of sheep in the Land of Vrancea (1927)  
(Source: Diaconu I., 1930, p. 264)

In terms of the folds number and their distribution, one can notice some groups: the people in Brețcu had folds located in Great Swamp of Brăila and Bărăgan, in Dobrudjea (20 folds), in Moldova (7), in Basarabia (2 folds) and other 31 folds in the Vrancea Mountains; the people in Covasna had the folds located predominantly in the Vrancea Mountains; while the people in Săcele held 30 folds in Basarabia, 30 folds in the south of the Walachia and 4 in the Bârsa Plain. Besides these, there were folds where the flocks spent the winter near the villages (Opreanu, S., 1930, p. 24). In the Land of Vrancea there were 68 folds (Diaconu, I., 1930, p. 264).

In the context of the aggravation of the restrictions on shepherds, of the issue of the Law on regulation of rights and obligation of shepherds, which stipulated the compulsoriness of leaving the Land once the period granted by the customs had expired, subsequently, the completion to the *Agricultural Law of 1864*, would be added. This law stipulated the decrease of grazing surfaces and the effects of the World War I. Thus, the transhumance grazing would lose its significance. Many of the animal breeders were forced to spend not only the summer, but the cold season as well, in the Romanian Plain, Dobrudjea, or in the swamps of the Danube, to provide food for their animals. Furthermore, as a result of these decisions, the transhumance shepherds preferred to come down in Ardeal for the winter.

The extended plains and frequent mountain passes have facilitated the travelling of the shepherds. Towards the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (1480-1482), the first legal roads were that of Buzău and that crossing the Bran pass. The connection to the Romanian Land was made through the “great Walachian road” which started in Brașov, crossed the Bran-Dragoslavele-Rucăr corridor, and followed the Dâmbovița Valley, up to Câmpulung, where there was the same customs. From here, the road continued towards Curtea de Argeș or Pitești, up to Târgoviște.

Another road of the shepherds, in the east of the Land of Bârsa (the Covasna-Brețcu area), crossed the Vrancea Mountains, at Soveja or Grozești (where there was a Romanian count), continuing its itinerary through Focșani, Brăila and Tecuci. From here, they forded the Prut River (the Târgu Fălcu ford, the mobile bridge in Oancea or the bridge in the Isac's Ford) or followed another path and spent the winter in the Trotuș and the Siret Valleys. Another road of the Brețcu and Covasna inhabitants started in Ghimeș-Palanca (north of Oituz), descended the Trotuș Valley to Onești, where it intersected the road descending to Poiana Sărată. In case they spent the winter in Basarabia or in Dobrudjea (demonstrated by the names of the places), they crossed the fords of Reni (towards the Basarabia) or the ford of Brăila-Măcin (towards Dobrudjea). They stopped at the customs of Ghimeș-Palanca and Poiana Sărată. The Covasna inhabitants spent the summer in the Penteleu Mountain, as they had to pay the sheep tax on the Giurgiu Mountain (Hungarian count) and in Lopătari (Romanian count). They stopped during the winter in the Râmnicești Sărat and Buzău counties or in Transylvania and in the Szecklers' territory.

The inhabitants of Săcele and Bran spent the summer in the Buzău and the Bârsa Mountains, as they were exempted from the presence of Hungarian customs (not to forget the presence of these mountains on the territory of the former Kingdom). For a change, they were stopped at the Romanian counts in Vama Buzăului, Bratocea, Predeal and Bran (Opreanu, S., 1930, p. 26).

Dunăre, N. (1973, pp. 215-216) identifies a few more transhumance roads:

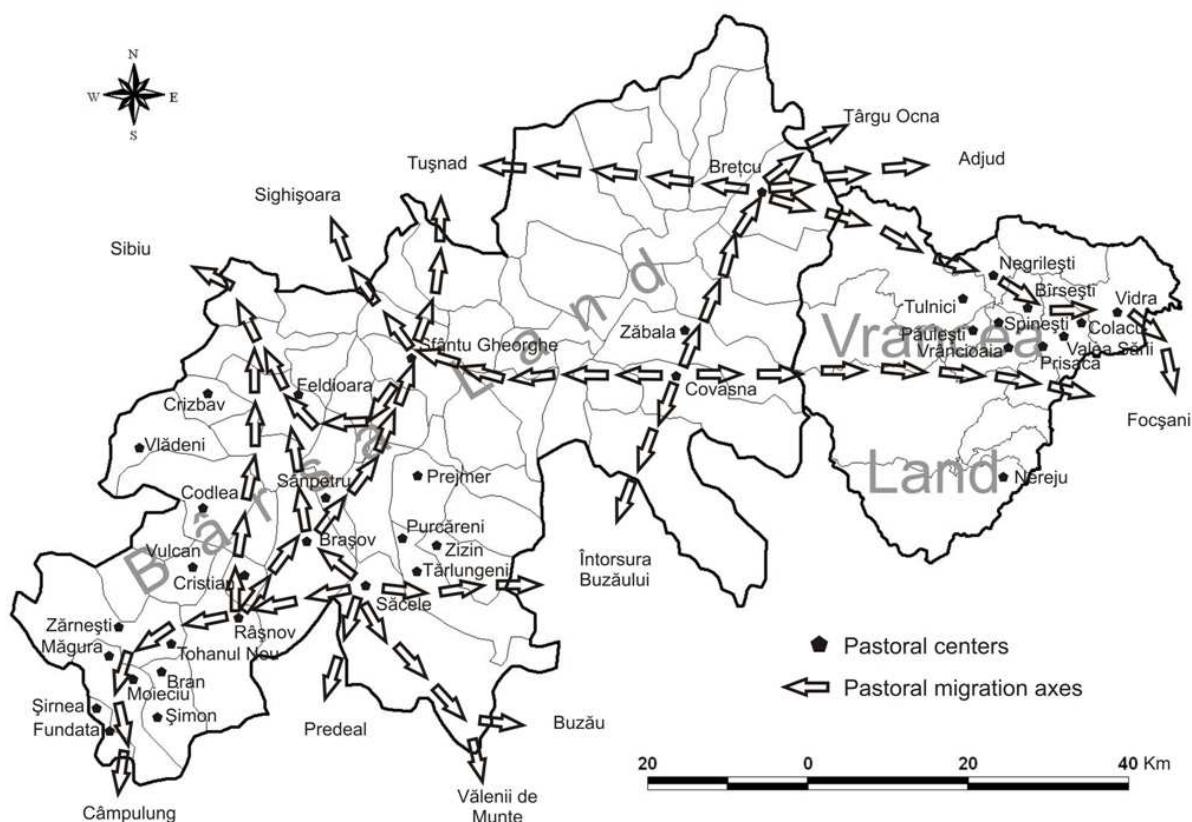
- one of the first roads of the shepherds followed the Teleajen Valley, after crossing the Ciucas and the Zăgan Mountains, resting in the Macovei forest or in the woods of Ialomița;
- the Ialomița Valley was the path of another road, but this time, the starting point was represented by the flocks coming from Bran or Săcele area, from the Prahova Valley, as the summer was spent in the woods at the boundaries of Hăgieni, Urziceni, Ciulnița, Căzănești or Slobozia localities.
- following the Teleajen Valley, the shepherds in Săcele reached the Great Swamp of Brăila or the Ialomița area.

The connections with Walachia o customs taxes and restrictions, were performed clandestinely, using the paths on Ivan's Valley and Berila Valley (in Sirnea), the Fruntea Plaiului path

(in Moieciu), the Teşti and Fundul lui Bobei paths (in Fundata to make the connection to the localities in the Muscel county or the Curmătura Fiarelor path which lead to the Dâmboviţa county (Constantinescu-Mirceşti, C., 1976, p. 30).

Many shepherds used to spend the winter on the Mureş valley and its tributaries, respectively on the Târnave Rivers. The shepherds in Săcele met those in Brețcu and Covasna at Baraolt, passing through Rupea, Homorod, and reaching the Transylvanian Plain. The inhabitants of Brețcu headed towards Miercurea Ciuc through the Olt Defile, spending the winter either near Târgu Mureş, or near Gheorgheni (Popescu, C-tin, 1970, p. 311).

Besides the frequent stops of the flocks coming from the Land of Bârsa towards the Land of Vrancea, the inhabitants of Vrancea also used to spend the summer in the mountains of the neighbouring “Land”, by crossing four possible roads: the Putna Valley to reach Macradeu, Noveştile, Condratul, Coza Mountains; the Văsiliului Valley to reach the Zboina and Giurgiu Mountains; the Nărujei Valley to reach the Verde, Lower-Căbălaşul and Upper-Căbălaşul, as well as the Zămnici Mountains; the Zăbala Valley for the sheep of Poiana, Năruja, Nerejul and Paltinul villages (Diaconu, I., 1930, p. 262).



**Figure 3.** The transhumance roads in the Land of Bârsa and in the Land of Vrancea  
(adapted from Dunăre, N., 1972)

The migration axes of the sheep flocks in the curvature area of the Eastern Carpathians illustrate the identification of a grazing space highly polarized by a few centres; the physical-geographical factors (position, presence of the mountains, with wide plateaus, of the pastures extension, but also the presence of mountain passes) offered the favourable framework for the extensively breeding of sheep. One can notice, on the one hand, a growing intensity of the flocks' cycling from the Land of Bârsa towards the Land of Vrancea, and on the other hand, a high extra-regional grazing polarizing phenomenon, reflected into the local economy of the study area.

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The intense relationships between the two regions as a result of the shepherds’ cycling will have a significant impact upon the local economic life, illustrated at the level of the following components:

- as a result of transhumance practice, some shepherds have settled down in the places where they spent the winter, thus contributing to the development of settlements, for example the occurrence of the *Bîrsești* locality is directly conditioned by the establishment of the shepherds from Bârsa;
- the presence of “Tzurcana” (long and rough wool), “Tzigaie” (white, short and soft wool) or “Spanca” (delicate wool) breeds, existing in the two regions has led to the development of a powerful homemade industry (rough homespun, cloths, traditional clothing) in centres such as Săcele, Zărnești or Covasna (where there were dedicated factories);
- the privileges granted to the shepherds in Bârsa and Vrancea and the outline of some sale markets for their products have resulted in the development of trade exchanges;
- in order to protect their own interests, the shepherds seldom kept each another company, thus constituting forms of association for the survey of the flocks (Opreanu, S., 1930, p. 22);
- transhumance represented the optimum framework for the development of social relationships, both between the localities composing the regions, and within and outside these regions: “In the Râmnicu Sărat Plain, towards the paths of Buzău and Siret, the shepherds from Bârsa, Făgăraș, Săliște, Sighișoara, Covasna and Brețcu came to spend the winter” (Murgescu, C., 1996, p. 91);
- the cyclical grazing has represented a “place” of preserving the old customs and popular beliefs. The “Land” fairs, respectively “Nedeia” were famous, as people gathered from the elders to children, in order to celebrate and socialize, but also to trade products.

## PRESENT FUNCTIONAL “MIGRATIONS” OF GRAZING IN THE LAND OF BÂRSA AND IN THE LAND OF VRANCEA

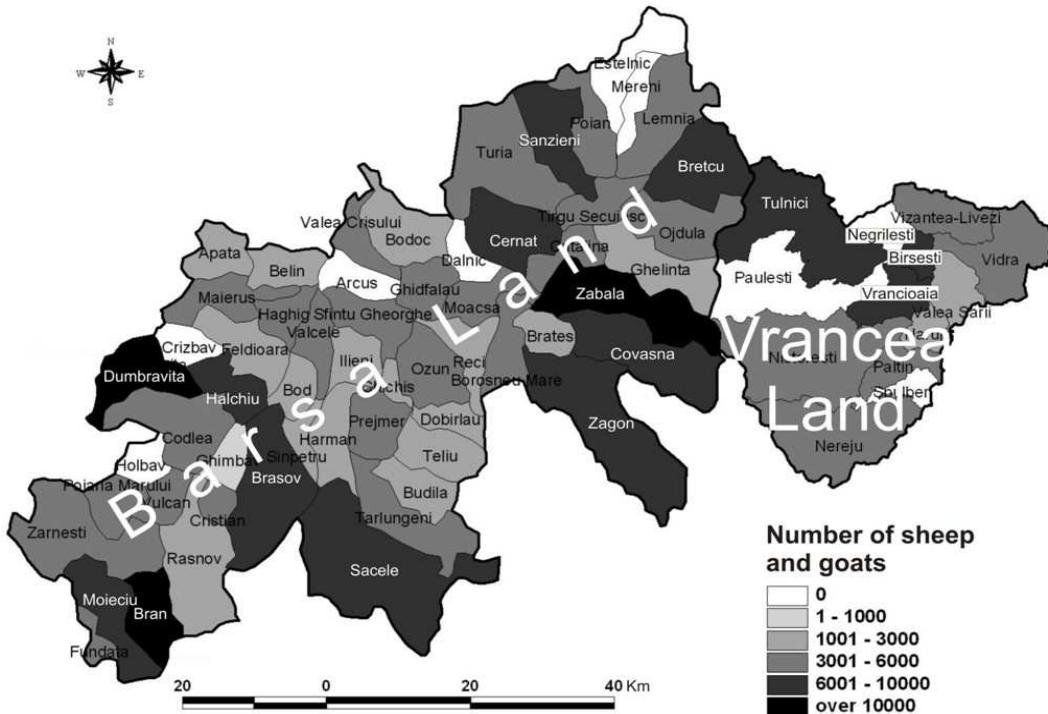
The approach of such a topic as grazing, which might seem obsolete and peculiar to old times long gone, demonstrates that a large-scale society or community does not live only by its present, and the image of present and future are directly dependent of the past. Nowadays, grazing is subjected to a decline process, but it still represents one of the gates to relaunch the Romanian agriculture, and regeneration viable solutions are needed.

Starting from the extensive sheep-breeding specific to the cyclical grazing, the transition was made, over time, towards the practice of intensive and sedentary sheep breeding.

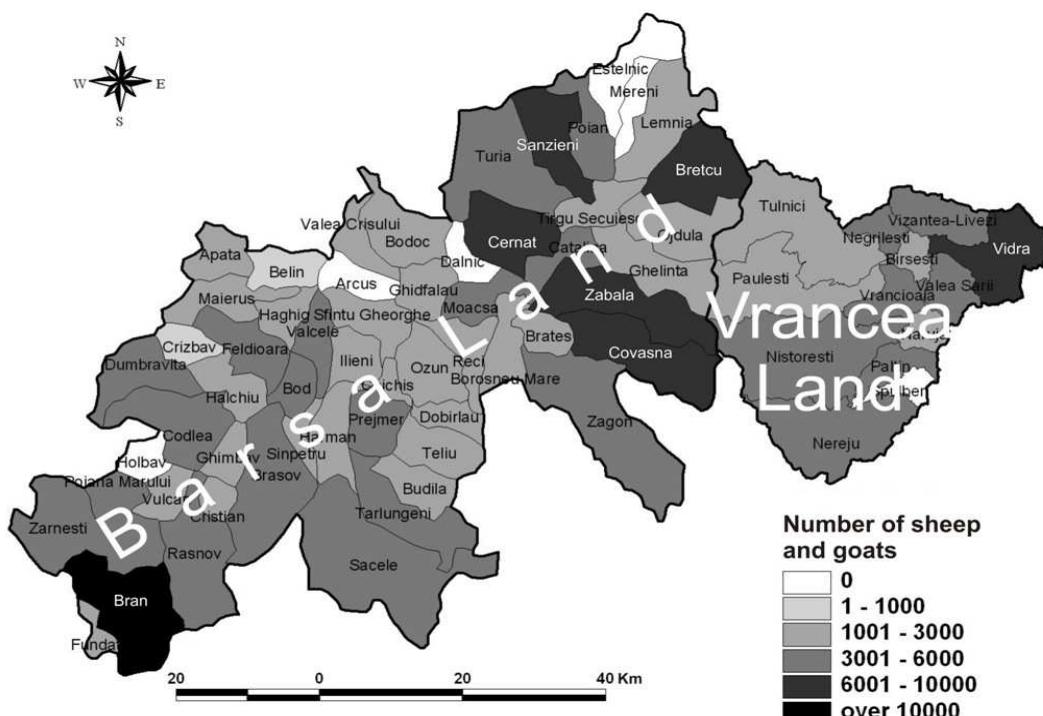
Paying attention to the dynamics of the number of sheep and goats in the two regions, by comparing the years 1990 and 2003, the following features could be emphasized:

- one could notice the general trend of decrease in the number of settlements having large numbers of sheep and goats. The only administrative units that present high values are the communes of Bran and Moieciu. This might be explained by the occurrence of some associative agricultural forms, by maintaining the interest of the owners in animal breeding and by practicing grazing to a larger extent. On the other hand, one of the obstacles of perpetuating this traditional economic activity is represented by the lack of passage corridors, followed by high taxes paid by the shepherd in each commune. In this context, the increasing percentage of abandoned folds caused by their low efficiency must be mentioned.
- high values of the sheep and goat numbers were maintained during the two reference years in the communes of Brețcu, Zagon and in the town of Covasna, but also in most of the Vrancea localities. This fact is explained by the ancestral tradition of grazing and by the existence of a vast mountainous territory.
- from diachronic perspective, one can notice a decrease in the sheep number from the mountain towards the plain territories. The dependence on the vegetation cover (pastures and hays, also affected by geomorphologic risk phenomena and by overgrazing) is an important factor.

- the administrative-territorial units whose value is null represent units which, at that time (1990 or 2003), did not benefit by a superior statute, as these were settlements included in the neighbouring communes.



**Figure 4.** Number of sheep and goats in the Land of Bârsa and in the Land of Vrancea (1990)  
(Source: map created by Mureşan, Al.)

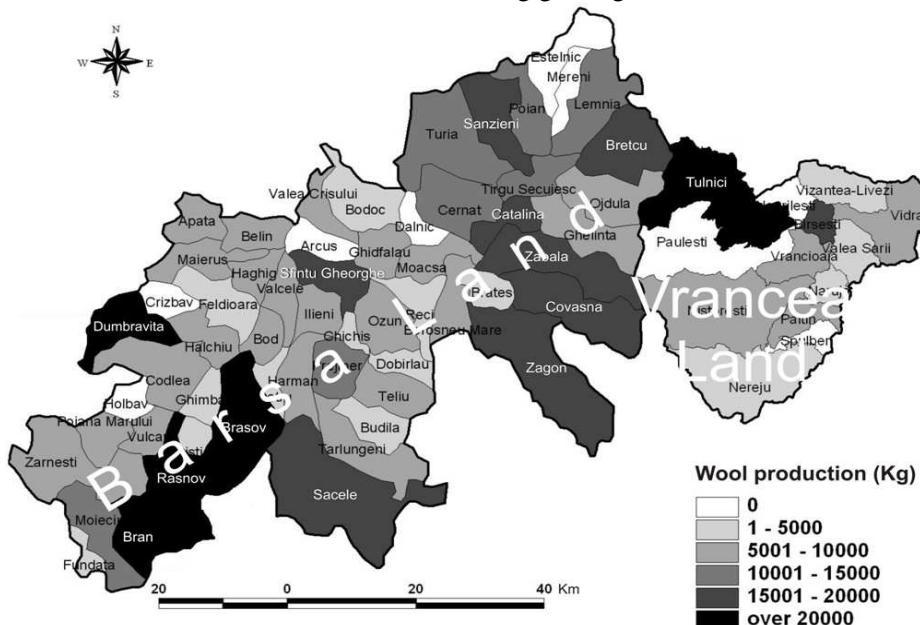


**Figure 5.** Number of sheep and goats in the Land of Bârsa and in the Land of Vrancea (2003)  
(Source: map created by Mureşan, Al.)

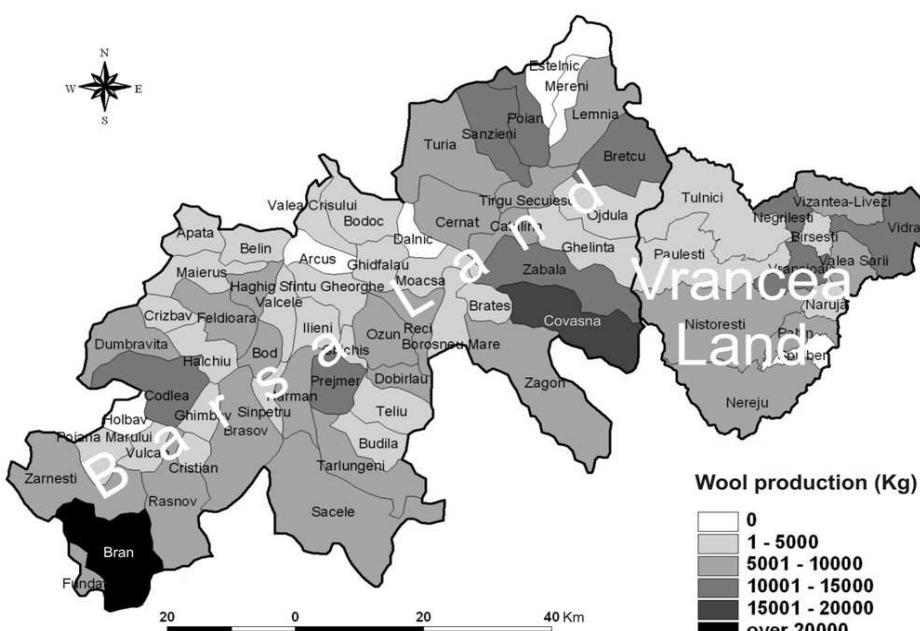
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The wool output, rendered for the same years, illustrates the following aspects:

- the wool productions have decreased in 2003, if we refer to the beginning of the '90s, closely connected to the slow decrease in animal number and the wool processing centres;
- while in 1990, the urban settlements could still boast about a consistent wool output, in 2003, the only town with higher wool outputs was Covasna;
- the type of fodders or the decrease in grazing surfaces, the sale market of the animal products and the opening of the export market for various food products (milk and meat) represent essential factors to be considered in relaunching grazing.



**Figure 6. Wool production in the Land of Bârsa and in the Land of Vrancea (1990)**  
(Source: map created by Mureşan, Al.)



**Figure 7. Wool production in the Land of Bârsa and in the Land of Vrancea (2003)**  
(Source: map created by Mureşan, Al.)

The first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century focus on a few functional issues, more or less durable, directed influenced by the grazing activity:

- sheep and goat-breeding represents an economic activity practiced to a large extent in the households of the population, for the provision of their own products. In the context of the increase in internal sheep meat consumption per capita, it is necessary to form exploitations or associations to supply the inhabitants of the two regions with such products;
- the old manufactures were replaced by craftsmen, whose handicraft products could become the image of the regions in the curvature of the Carpathians;
- found directly in the markets and fairs or in dedicated shops, the autochthonous food products are not truly valued yet (sweet ewe-cheese, fermented ewe-cheese, round cheese, vat cheese, whey, sweet whey-cheese or salted whey-cheese); their certification as ecological traditional products may confer the region the development of a powerful local market;
- in Miorița native space, there are a few customs and traditions which lasted in time, dependent on the grazing life cycle. In spring, there is "Boteitul Oilor", practiced in Negriilești, Valea Sării and Paltin. Once the calendar starts, in October there is another custom called "The Fire of Sumedru", a traditional custom developed on the border of Moieciu. By this custom, the shepherds and flocks are being purified. Two of the most famous fests related to grazing are "Scattering of Sheep" in Bran, developed during the National Cheese and Pastrami Festival, in September. According to the tradition, the best animal breeder and the best shepherd are chosen, but this festival represents also an opportunity to sell cheese products. Another famous festival is the Folklore Festival called "At the edge of the fir-tree" in Nereju, organized in September-October, as well. The "Sintilie" [Saint Elijah] festival and "Nedeile" celebrate the God of Sun and Fire, and these are organized in Săcele and Covasna.



**Figure 8. Fold in Negriilești**  
(Photo: Mureșan, Al., 2009)

The place of the old privileges given to shepherds a long time ago is now taken by the possibility of acceding the benefits as European Union member country, by the creation of viable grazing associations and agricultural exploitation associations, by the ecological labelling of some products or by the elaboration of some trade market policies on the internal and external market.

A good example, successfully implemented at county and regional level, is represented by the project LIFE05NAT/RO/000170 "Enhancing the protection system of large carnivores in Vrancea County", financed by the European Union through the program LIFE III, with

the purpose to repopulated and preserve large carnivores (*Ursus arctos*, *Canis lupus* and *Lynx lynx*) in the ecosystems of Vrancea county, supplemented by the initiatives of another project LIFE (LIFE02/NAT/RO/8576), "In situ protection of large carnivores in Vrancea County", coordinated by Vrancea Environmental Protection Agency. In order to protect the flocks of sheep and the folds from

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the attack of large carnivores, electric Gallagher fences were built on the pastures near Bîrsești and Negriilești communes.

### CONCLUSIONS

The Land of Bârsa and the Land of Vrancea are territories that have fully benefited by the advantage offered by location, physical-geographical and economic-social features, historic context, and represented two of the regions where cyclical grazing was materialized and acknowledged. Nowadays, it is limited to a sedentary grazing, located around the households, in most of the administrative units in the depression area, but there are also isolated phenomena of relaunching this activity. By the cooperation between authorities and local communities, the identification of best solutions in preserving grazing activity is possible, in a form that respects both European products quality standards, and the maintenance of a local grazing cycle.

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