

# SHEPHERDS OF VAL ROMEY: CO-CREATIVE MEDIA NARRATIVES FOR TRANSFORMATIVE CRITICAL SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH

UNIBE Young Academics Support / Open Round 2021:

Field Research Report April 2021 by Dr. Des Eda Elif Tibet

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



LILY, OLIA, PRISCILLA, NANNO, MARGOT

It would like to first of all thank all the community members and authorities of the Val Romey municipalities of France for sharing their knowledge and perspectives with us and participating so actively in the research presented in this report. I would also like to thank all of our local partners, who supported and enabled this research and mostly to our closest research partners the pastoralist family of Pierre and Priscilla Blondiaux whom lead their own brand *Au Rhythme Du Troupeau* consisted of a band of 400 livestock, a milking parlour with a cafeteria, shop and cheese making laboratory. We thank them immensely for sharing their lives, challenges and joys of becoming pastoralists, leaving modern urbanity behind many years ago. We also thank their children for providing essential knowledge and insight into their lives as homeschooled and full time farm workers; Lily (13), Margot (11), Nanno (8), Olia (6) and Peyu whom has just born.

Particular thanks to Dr. Rama Mani and Prof. Alexander Schieffer's Home for Humanity Association whom hosted us (myself and research partner Cihan Elci) in the premises of their rural campus where St. Gallen University's Reshaping International Development Programme "Agents for Transformation" MA course takes place. Currently also becoming the central campus of the "Humanity Quest" a global fellowship that will host young researchers from around the world into a transformative applied science journey, it is with immense pride that our research provides the many new initiatives to take place in the region for more regenerative and just societies. Many thanks to Enzo Ikah whom has been tirelessly transcribing from French into English and as well to Cihan Elci my field research partner for having to drive us on and off from Switzerland to and within France, assisting in interviews, sound recordings, for having filmed processes and continuously translated from French to English on the go.

Finally, we would like to thank University of Bern's Young Academics Support Open Round 2021 for generously supporting the implementation of this research, and the Unit of Critical Sustainability research led by Prof. Susan Thieme whom supported the research phase and helping in bringing it all together in this report and in a newly submitted book chapter called "Unorthodox Coalitions: Co-Creative Media Narrations for Transformative Critical Sustainability Studies" that is currently under review at Palgrave Maximillian Publishing House.

This report, and the various ongoing future documents, is the result of the collaborative work carried out by all members of the Shepherd's own Association and partners; mLab of the Institute of Geography, Habitat Tv as our media partner, Home for Humanity as the field site research partner and Theater of Transformation Academy as part of the "Enacting Global Transformation" Initiative at the University of Oxford, for being the major funder of our scientific study.

© Credits for photographs of the pastoralist family; Eda Elif Tibet & Cihan Elci.

# FIELD WORK REPORT: FEBRUARY-MARCH 2021

In a co-creative search for new narratives for sustainability that is grounded in how humans make decisions we seek to understand how the world we live in works. The narratives we develop to make sense of the world play a central role in shaping our decisions about how to solve global problems.

Our research focuses on life-scale examples in co-developing an agriculture and food system, describing the changing rural landscape of Eastern France. It aims to explore the know-how and the tools being developed by pioneering farmers and herders whom are in support of the transition towards regenerative agriculture and pastoralism in this region and beyond.

Our audio visual research in France takes place in Haut Val Romey, Hottonnes with agroforestry practitioners, regenerative farmers and majorly with the only shepherd family in the region as pastoralist herders and cheesemakers.

The reason behind the choice of this field site is for having already established research access with various farmers and shepherds since August 2020 and as well as for having close social ties to the region since 2015.


The support of the "Open Round 2021" made it possible to realise and conduct a two months field research (February, March 2021) on the site and to regenerate new knowledge on and from the ground, following closely the life of a shepherd family.

Our research has taken place for two months with various field site visits to municipality practitionaires , association workers and especially a long participatory observation process with the shepherd family.



Pierre Blondiaux





By closely participating in the shepherd families daily life and routine we have learnt the essentials and documented the processes of milk, cheese and yogurt production. We have collected applications and technical expertise on how the common lands are managed and forests are kept fertile with different permaculture methods for herds nutrition. We have been provided with ethnobotanical and gastronomical knowledge on the plants, species and other animals habiting in the region.

Aside to family interviews, we have also conducted around 12 interviews with various partners and farmers of their connected association establishments, resulting in 720 minutes long interview research data that has been sent to a French to English translator whom is currently working towards finalising the transcriptions.

During these interviews we have secured information on how mobile pastoralism has been received as a prominent form of land use and on how national boundaries shift as the establishment of nature reserves expanded in rural France. We have learnt about the influence and effect the new environmental policies and strategies and media discourses have on the pastoralists lives.

With participatory audio-visual research methods, we have supported pastoralists in acquiring and sharing knowledge, observe and document land use and changes in political discourses. We have observed the tools and information pastoralists use in mitigating and better adapting to environmental stressors and regional and international threats.

We have collected various sustainability narratives and testimonies of which partially made it into the publication of a Book Chapter for "Media, Meditation and Communicative Action: Ethics, Aesthetics and Satyagraha", Edited By Ananta Kumar Giri & Santosh Kumar Biswal, Palgrave Maximillian (UK), co authored with Prof.Susan Thieme.

A documentary Audio-Visual Project; all photographs and short films can be seen at our research website which is continuously to be updated : [www.animatingthecommons.com](http://www.animatingthecommons.com)

Pastoralist's semi  
mild cheese.





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