

## CHAPTER 8

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# Continuities and Disruptions in Transhumance Practices in the Silesian Beskids (Poland)

## *The Case of Koniaków Village*

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Transhumance is a phenomenon difficult to define, covering many different practices, which are shaped by ecology and culture. It is a variety of pastoralism, which is supplemented by land cultivation and trade. According to Schuyler Jones (2005), it includes: rural settlement, land cultivation, and periodic migration of people and animals between mountain pastures. In 2004, Piotr Kohut, a resident of Koniaków, managed to bring back to life a seemingly completely extinct institution of the pastoral community in the area of the Silesian Beskids—the so-called *śataasz*. *Śataasz* is a type of farming specific to the Carpathian area, which consists in setting up shepherding companies in which a few or more sheep owners join their flocks, placing them under the supervision of a *baca* (chief shepherd) who is responsible for grazing of animals and shares proportionally the benefits obtained from the milk. This communal grazing, which was associated with certain cultural behaviors and the way of life, was a key determinant of Carpathian pastoralism for many centuries, but economic and political factors disturbed its functioning. After many years of interruption, the sheep of local *gazdas* (owners, breeders) were merged together into one flock again, which was tended by a collectively elected *baca*—a head of the shepherding team—until the end of the pastoral season. This event can be considered as the actual beginning of shepherding restitution in the Cieszyn Silesia region.<sup>1</sup>

Pastoralism in the Silesian Beskids today takes on the form of a nostalgic story about the cultural heritage and history of the region, and in particular about an ideal order existing “before time.” For breeders, academics,

or the region lovers, pastoralism has a “structurally nostalgic” character (to use Michael Herzfeld’s phraseology). It is a kind of myth about prosperity and well-being, about a state of perfect harmony between man and the ecosystem, but also between the state and the citizen, which (not irretrievably at all) was lost in the second half of the nineteenth century. For many, the golden period in the history of the Silesian Beskids ended with the imperial patent of 1853 and the gradual disappearance of *salasz* pastoralism. Since then, pastoralism in this area has been something constantly returned to—in the period after Poland regained its independence in 1918, after the end of World War II or finally after the fall of Communism. It is a project that has never fully come true—constantly disrupted, more in the sphere of wishes than reality. In other words: the transhumant pastoralism in the Silesian Beskids, at least since the second half of the nineteenth century, has been an object of continuation, but also of disruption—both factors have been equally cocreating different variants of this phenomenon in the area, leading simultaneously to its ups and downs. As Frances Pine (2002: 98) noted, in the post-socialist reality, almost every discussion about the change and continuation is disturbed by a certain regularity. Namely, many social or economic processes that seem to be quite new, at a closer look, turn out to refer to former structures, and those that would seem to be continuations in fact appear as completely new creations. The institution of *baca*, *salasz*, or *redyk*—so characteristic of the Silesian Beskids’ pastoralism—seem to a large extent be a part of this very logic.

The COVID-19 pandemic was not originally considered in our research plans. We have decided, however, to extend them by this very subject, and despite the fact that at the time of this study the end of the pandemic still cannot be seen. We think, however, that it will undoubtedly become another disturbance in the series of disturbances in the process of restoring pastoralism in the conditions of post-socialist Poland. This is a phenomenon that affects the changes in the landscape of animal husbandry like none before. Today’s shepherds are not only forced to comply with the requirements of work in the epidemic regime, but they also have to thoroughly rethink their activities: work structure, trailing routes, or distribution systems. With the pandemic, the way of thinking about shepherding is also changing, which in turn has a huge impact on the dynamics of this activity in the economic structure of the inhabitants of the region.

For this reason, among other things, the perspective of “continuation and disruption”—particularly popular when discussing the turbulences of the world economy or neoliberal globalization—has become the center of our investigations into modern pastoralism. Among other things, it raises the following questions: What kind of dynamics can we observe in transhumance in peripheries of Eastern Europe that can be grasped

through the continuity and disruption perspective? What kind of relationships can (new) pastoralism establish with territories, animals, knowledge production, or gender? What are the relationships between pastoralism and the processes of heritagization? To what extent is public support not properly used? To what extent do the new discourses about more sustainable/responsible development, animal rights, or climate change influence herding practices?

## The Shepherd's Centre in Koniaków as a Case Study

The transformations of the Carpathian pastoralism in the post-socialist period, as yet, evoke moderate interest of researchers (Costantin2003; Sedyka and Makovicky 2018). In Poland, for years the attention of scholars has actually focused on one area only—the so-called Podhale, that is, the region closest to the Tatra Mountains, while little is known about pastoralism in the Low Beskids or Silesia Beskids. That is why we have decided to analyze a case study of *śalasz* farming in Koniaków in the Silesian Beskids. In the village of Koniaków, the highest elevated village in the Silesian Beskids, inhabited by about 3,500 people, pastoralism is developing dynamically under the watchful eye of *baca* Piotr Kohut, who is responsible for summer grazing of one of the largest flocks of sheep in the region of about 1,200 sheep. Grazing takes place on Hala Ochodzita, Hala Barania, Magurka Radziechowska, Podgrapy, and Kamesznica, that is, within an area covering about fifty square kilometers. Activities connected with *śalasz* farming are carried out by the members of the Kohut family, especially Piotr's wife, Maria, and include running a Shepherd's Centre, where activities are carried out with the tradition of sheep grazing being the main common denominator. The Shepherd's Centre in Koniaków is a complex which consists of buildings inspired by the architecture of traditional Beskids buildings: *na szańcach* (a mountain hut), *gazdówka* (a shepherd's hut, with utility rooms where sheep and goats are kept), and the Highlander Shop. In the period of summer grazing—when sheep are on pastures—the local shepherd's hut hosts demonstrations of how to make sheep milk cheese, such as *bundz*, *bryndza*, *redykołka*, and *osypek*. Seasonally, apart from sheep milk cheese, tourists can also buy lamb meat. All year round, there is an exhibition of shepherding utensils, and a photo exhibition showing life on pastures.

The Shepherd's Centre offers an interactive educational path on the processing of sheep fleece and wool with the use of old and modern methods. Visitors can participate in lectures on traditional sheep grazing in the Carpathians, its importance for the preservation of cultural heritage and



**Figure 8.1.** The Shepherd's Centre, Koniaków, 2019. © Katarzyna Marcol

biodiversity, and taste traditional regional cheeses or enjoy a demonstration of how milk is processed into *bundz*. Maria Kohut is the president of the Transhumance Pastoralism Foundation, whose main objective is to support activities related to traditional pastoralism in the Carpathians and the Balkans by, among other things, promoting sheep products, organizing events, conferences, seminars, workshops, training, festivals, and concerts referring to the cultural and material heritage of the Carpathian and Balkan communities. The intentions of the foundation also focus on activities to protect the environment and natural heritage of these regions, as well as to support *bacas*, *juhases*, *gazdas*, and sheep breeders. The Shepherd's Centre and the foundation are the organizers of events devoted to traditional pastoralism, which are very popular among the region's inhabitants and tourists: mixing of the sheep (gathering animals belonging to many owners into a single flock) and *redyk* (the first spring trailing of the sheep onto mountain pastures) which start the pastoral season at the beginning of May, as well as the Shepherds' Fair and the Tastes of the Carpathians culinary workshops, promoting folk crafts and traditional Carpathian regional products, especially sheep milk cheese.

The purpose of this study is to define the sociocultural situation in Koniaków under the influence of pastoralism which is being reborn, from the



**Figure 8.2.** An exhibition of shepherding utensils in the Shepherd's Centre, Koniaków, 2016. © Katarzyna Marcol

perspective of continuation and disruption of this process. This analysis will be used, on the one hand, to show the ways of negotiating social relationships in a local community, and on the other hand, emancipation of shepherds as a separate social group. We will provide examples of actions taken to revive awareness of pastoralism in the local community, giving it meaning through reference to collective memory and establishment of cultural heritage of the Wallachians as the basis of a common identity. In our analysis it is also important to illustrate the individual motivations of the members of the Kohut family to take action for the development of traditional pastoralism, often in spite of adversities like, for example the ones COVID-19 pandemic has recently brought. Listening to the stories of *baca* and his wife has allowed us to observe the way they assign meaning to their work, establish the sense of daily activities, and create self-identification based on pastoral traditions. Because the narratives contain the way of interpreting the reality, they give meaning to activities taken up (Taylor 2001: 95). Understanding one's own experience and giving it a form is possible by referring to known and accepted cultural codes, which makes the human being a self-interpreting creature (Taylor 1985: 54; Ricoeur 2003: 297–354). The narrative is constitutive not

only for creating the reality, events, or experiences, but also for shaping the identification of the narrator who acts and experiences (Carr 1986: 126; Carr 1991: 45–99).

The case study is a qualitative approach that uses in-depth data collection procedures of a diversified character (Creswell 2007: 73). The main research techniques were unstructured interviews conducted in Koniaków and other places of the Silesia Beskids in 2018–20. Beskids' shepherds were the respondents, and the interviews concerned the daily lives of their families, current problems related to farming, the meaning of pastoral culture in keeping the region's traditions, influence of economic factors on the changes of modern culture, and relationships in the local community. Talking about the shepherds we mean both *bacas* themselves (main shepherds running a shepherding company), *juhases* (shepherds grazing sheep on mountain pastures), and *honielniks* (boys helping with sheep herding), and whole multigeneration families for whom shepherding is, on the one hand, a source of income, and on the other, a way of life (in talks with members of shepherds' families a phrase kept appearing that work sets the rhythm of their life and it is not possible to separate work from free time).

The research also included observational studies during visits to cultural events and educational workshops devoted to pastoralism in various towns of the Silesian Beskids, including Koniaków, Istebna, and Wisła in the years 2016–19. These were events connected with spring and autumn *redyks* (i.e., trailing of the sheep onto the mountain pastures and back from the pastures to a farm for winter), museum exhibitions and workshops held at the Shepherd's Centre in Koniaków, concerning, among other things, wool processing, or sheep milk cheese production. We also participated in workshops being a part of the "Cultural Ecology"<sup>2</sup> project devoted to shepherding and running a multifunctional pastoral farm, taking into account organizational, legal, social, and economic aspects, as well as in educational meetings devoted to activities aimed at preserving the natural and cultural heritage of mountain areas.

This study includes also an analysis of how texts are a part of the contemporary public discourse in terms of its cognitive aspects, making it possible to read a certain repertoire of sociocultural beliefs (Van Dijk 2001: 26). In this case these beliefs will be related to the construction of cultural memory and the self-identification of contemporary shepherds and Beskids highlanders. An important role in shaping the image of the past is also played by statements from and actions taken by social actors, i.e., people involved in activities for their group, who are *bacas* and Beskids *sałaszniks* enjoying social respect, such as, Józef Michałek of Istebna, Jan Kędzior of Wisła, and Piotr Kohut of Koniaków. In this chapter we are in-

terested both in the selection of information and the use of language, and the images and symbols accompanying it, that evoke certain visions of the world that influence the process of modeling collective memory, shaping, as a consequence, our own community identity. Our research approach to media sources and public messages (workshops, lectures, promotional materials) assumes their constructivist role in establishing social life, as these messages strongly affect the recipients' beliefs about the world and have an impact on their self-image (they influence self-identification). During the research we also analyzed documents from EU, international, and local government programs supporting the revitalization of pastoral economy in Europe, including the Silesian Beskids, which, on the one hand, made the objectives and priorities of the subsidized activities visible and, on the other hand, made it possible to observe the effects of the awarded grants.

### **History of Shepherding in the Silesian Beskids— Continuation and Disruptions**

The *sałas* and pastoral farming in the Silesian Beskids was the basis for the existence of local highlanders at least until the mid-nineteenth century (Popiołek 1939; Kopczyńska-Jaworska 1950–51). This was the migration route of high mountain shepherds, known as Wallachians, who grazed sheep moving along the ridges of the Carpathians from the southeast part of Europe, from the Balkan, Wallachian, Moldavian, and Transylvanian areas as early as at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (Kocój 2015: 276–77; Kocój 2018a: 55). In sixteenth-century documents from Cieszyn, the Wallachians are recorded as settlers who brought the ability to survive in difficult mountain conditions and to farm based on sheep pastoralism and milk and wool processing to the area of the Silesian Beskids (Spyra 2007: 39–41). They entered into relations with the local population, especially in winter, when they sought refuge in lower villages, which resulted, on the one hand, in certain elements of the Wallachian culture and economy being taken over by the Beskids settlers and, on the other hand, in migrants settling in local villages (Jawor 2000: 39–41). Therefore, over time, the Wallachians passed their culture on to the Indigenous peoples, and with migration many customs and rituals related to *sałas* farming and pastoralism were adopted here, especially the already mentioned community economy (Kocój 2018a: 55–131).

The seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth century are considered to be the “golden period of *sałas* farming in Silesia” (Kiereś 2010: 27). Sheep and dairy products were to be the guarantee of prosperity

and stability of the local population. Thanks to the favor of the rulers of the Duchy of Teschen, the highlanders increased their flocks and pastures at the expense of the trees, paying high taxes to the Piasts of Cieszyn (until 1653) and later to the Habsburgs. The situation changed with a new economic policy, which tightened the regulations concerning the ban on tree cutting in order to preserve forest resources, necessary for developing heavy industry. Wood from the Beskids forests became a scarce commodity as it was used to burn the smelter furnaces in which the local ore deposits were processed. Thus, the forests became an extremely valuable asset, and the *sałas* farming was an obstacle to maximize profits of the Teschen Chamber. However, the decline of the Beskids *sałas* farming was eventually sealed by the issue of a patent by Emperor Franz Joseph I in 1853, under which the Teschen Chamber was recognized as the sole owner of the forest areas and did not have to respect previous agreements with the highlanders as regards to access to pastures, which effectively prevented sheep from being grazed on collective pastures (Spyra 2007: 143). Financial burdens and restrictions on access to pastures imposed upon the highlanders by successive authorities of the Teschen Chamber made shepherds move over time to mixed pastoral and agricultural farming. The change in the lifestyle of the inhabitants of the Beskids villages was later affected not only by the development of the wood economy and metallurgical industry but also by the flourishing of tourism, initiated at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the twentieth century, a further gradual and systematic decline of the pastoral economy continued. After World War I and the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the Beskids highlanders, who found themselves on the Polish side of the border with Czechoslovakia, took legal actions to regain the *sałas* farming areas taken from them, which were owned by the Polish state after the war. The contingent of highlanders who wanted to restore the shepherding in the Silesian Beskids accepted the new Polish state with high hopes. Although the Polish Parliament accepted the *sałas* shepherds' request and in 1921 passed a revision law that established the equivalents for lost property, and the established *sałas* companies were slowly restoring pastures for grazing, World War II put an end to these efforts (Kiereś 2019: 59–71). After World War II, all attempts to revitalize the traditional pastoralism were rejected by the communist authorities, aiming to limit the freedom of economic activity and to liquidate dairy cooperatives (Kocój 2018b: 86). The scale of regression in pastoralism is demonstrated by statistics concerning the number of sheep grazed in the Silesian Beskids: in 1910 there were 4,411 sheep; in 1937 there were 2,310; and in 1947, there were 1,660 (Program Aktywizacji Gospodarczej 2007: 18). The economic changes that followed the collapse of communism in



1989 in Poland led to an even greater decline in the sheep population and to almost complete disappearance of the profession of baca and shepherd (Program Aktywizacji Gospodarczej 2007: 5).

The situation improved with Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004 and with the economic stabilization of Poland within the democratic and capitalist system. Membership in the EU made it possible to benefit from programs and subsidies for the revitalization of sheep farming and pastoralism from an economic, natural, and sociocultural perspective. An example is the Interreg V-A Poland-Slovakia 2014–20 program (financed by the European Regional Development Fund), under which the cross-border Wallachian Culture Trail was created, i.e., an integrated cultural trail to popularize pastoral traditions on the Polish-Slovakian border. In 2012–16, in turn, a project supporting knowledge about the protection and sustainable development of the Carpathians, written in the "Carpathian Convention," was implemented (an international agreement concerning a single mountain region, established on the basis of treaty rules of international law), using the funds of the Swiss program of cooperation with the new EU Member States: Carpathians Unite—Mechanism of Consultation and Cooperation for Implementation of the Carpathian Convention. The main activities carried out by Poland within this framework were: creating a sustainable tourism strategy and a code of good practice for spatial planning; supporting the development of pastoral management (training of shepherds, construction of shepherds' huts, purchase of sheep); promoting knowledge about the nature and culture of the Carpathians; developing a draft national action plan for the implementation of the provisions of the protocol on the "Protection and Sustainable Use of Biological and Landscape Diversity to the Carpathian Convention in the Polish Part of the Carpathians"; and developing a draft protocol on "Cultural Heritage to the Carpathian Framework Convention." In addition, since 2007, in Silesia funds has been awarded for activities related to pastoralism from the budget of the Self-Government of the Silesian Voivodship under the Sheep Plus: Program for Economic Activation and Preservation of Cultural Heritage of the Beskids and the Kraków-Częstochowa Upland. The latest edition of the program, planned until 2020, sets two main objectives, the first of which concerns activities to preserve, protect, and restore elements of nature on the basis of pastoral economy, and the second, to nurture the cultural identity associated with pastoralism, promoting the traditions of folk culture, the development of crafts, and the processing of products of sheep and goat origin. As a result of the implementation of this program, in accordance with the Regulation of the Minister of Labor and Social Policy of 27 April 2010 on the classification of professions and specialties for the needs of the labor market and

the scope of its application, two new professions were registered: *baca* and *juhas*.

The programs supporting the preservation of pastoralism have resulted, on the one hand, in a greater dynamics of the economic activity (the number of sheep grazed in the mountain meadows has increased, thus increasing the availability of sheep products, enriching the range of local products) and, on the other hand, they have increased the awareness of the local community and people from outside the region about the natural and cultural values of mountain areas (Wojewódzki Program Aktywizacji 2015: 6–7). The visitors to the Beskids and journalists increasingly enjoy events such as: *miyszani owiec* (mixing of the sheep) and trailing them to the mountain pastures; the autumn *rozsod*, which is the return of sheep from the pastures and giving them back to their *gazdas* (owners); as well as the tasting of regional products, performances of highlander groups and bands, folk handicraft fairs. Sheep milk products are increasingly sought after by consumers, and *Brinda podhalańska* and *oscypek* cheese, produced in the Beskids among others, have been entered by the European Commission in the register of Protected Designations of Origin and Protected Geographical Indications. Piotr Kohut, as one of the few sheep milk cheese producers in Poland, is authorized to produce these local products.

What is most important for our study, however, is that the revival of pastoral traditions is accompanied by a process of restoring memory of the Wallachian heritage in the local community, and together with it, a sense of identity based on the continuation of this heritage by the Beskids shepherds. The collective memory, lying at the foundations of the rebuilt identity, is stimulated by institutions (mainly NGOs) which raise funds to promote the cultural heritage of the region. Thus, we are dealing with contemporary cultural memory, which is expressed by the group's conscious attitude to the past embedded in a specific cultural space, and its carriers are people involved in the activities of institutions supporting memory and thus affecting group identity (Assmann 2016: 68–71).

### **Continuity? Beskids Shepherds as Heirs to the Wallachian Tradition**

The revitalization of pastoral traditions stimulated by international and local government programs has resulted in a rebirth of memory of the past, especially about the pastoral roots of the local community. As Jan Assmann (2016: 85–86) notes, it is the power—understood in this text as the policy of the state and the European Union as regards setting financial priorities—

that is a strong stimulator of memory. Funds transferred to “nurture and maintain traditions, customs and other elements of folk culture associated with pastoralism” and to “preserve the identity, individuality and heritage of the inhabitants of the region” (as defined in the documents of the Sheep Plus program until 2020) have contributed to the process of searching for sources of identity not only among shepherds but also among the members of the local community. This applies in particular to people who—although not directly associated with pastoralism—are under the influence of factors shaping memory and collective identity based on pastoral traditions, among others, who are participants of cultural events, workshops, lectures on cultural heritage, members of folk bands and ensembles, folk artists presenting and selling their products during handicraft fairs organized during events connected with pastoralism.

The creation and processing of identity determinants that are important for the group in the process of distinguishing one’s own (shepherds, highlanders) from others (tourists, people from outside the local community) takes place in relation to collective memory (Halbwachs 1969: 217–61). The identity function of memory is mentioned *expressis verbis* by Barbara Szacka. She defines collective memory of the past as images of the past of one’s own group, constructed by individuals from the information they remember coming from various sources and reaching through various channels. Then this information is selected and transformed according to one’s own view of the world and of socially generated cultural standards. Thanks to these cultural standards, shared by members of a given community, the images of the past are codified, which, in a consequence, allows members to speak about the collective memory of history of one’s own group. The collective memory understood in this way is not static, but changeable and dynamic, and additionally it is a field of clashes and mixing of the past images constructed from various perspectives (Szacka 2006: 47–54).

The basis of contemporary construction of memory of the pastoral tradition is the so-called Wallachian heritage. For the members of the local community, it is a very strong self-identification factor. Wallachians are considered by contemporary shepherds as ancestors, to whom they owe not only the way of farming and organization of social life but above all their own culture and identity, as well as some sort of a transnational connector with other communities involved in sheep grazing and living in the Carpathians. A mediator between tradition and modernity, between ancestors and contemporary inhabitants of the Beskids Mountains is the figure of *baca*—the chief shepherd, and a cultural guide, too. He is the one who is predestined by tradition and community to carry out activities that bring back the memory of the whole shepherding culture and make

the preservation of the shepherding ethos a reality. According to tradition, *baca* was the most important person in *sałasz* farming, and most frequently an older, experienced person became *baca*. He was responsible for processing sheep milk into cheese and for its quality (he was punished for mismanagement), he allocated grazing areas to shepherds and helped with milking. At the beginning of the season, he received sheep from the *miszaniks*, at the end of the season he had to return the same number or compensate the owner for each missing animal (Štika 2005: 15–20). The restoration of the *sałasz* economy in the Silesian Beskids resulted in giving *baca* another “new” function—he has become a guardian of tradition and the duty to preserve the cultural heritage rests upon him. In the statements of Beskids’ *bacas* and shepherds, often a reference to the Wallachian tradition appears, as a source of their own identity and of all Carpathian highlanders. The words of Piotr Kohut can be an example here. He identifies the modern pastoral and *sałasz* economy in reference to the “Wallachian heritage,” speaking of the “Carpathian community.” Piotr Kohut was one of the participants of the Carpathian Trailing of the Sheep: Transhumance 2013, i.e., the shepherds’ trek with a flock of three hundred sheep, with dogs, donkeys, and horses through the areas of Romania, Ukraine, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. During the trailing, in the period from 11 May to 14 September 2013, shepherds with animals covered the distance of about twelve hundred kilometers. The project participants stressed from the beginning that their effort was a tribute paid to the Wallachian ancestors, and the journey is a testimony to the shepherds’ identity, the maintenance of which is the duty of modern highlanders. The Watra Podhale Information Service published an announcement of the Carpathian Trailing of the Sheep together with a statement of Piotr Kohut, who explained the aim of the project as follows:

With our journey through the Carpathians, we pay homage to our Wallachian ancestors, pointing to an identity that should be protected and guarded—above all by ourselves. The dignity of the shepherd results from his awareness of his own identity on the way. Let us not be deceived by the illusory impression of a civilization leap, the presence offering prosperity and longevity in exchange for undermining our spirituality. The world of modern technologies should be used by us as much as possible, but let us not forget, however, that our strength lies in tradition and pastoral roots. (“Ruszył Redyk Karpacki 2013” 2013)

This statement shows that the processes of memory transmission and remembering take place on two planes: social and historical. Robert Traba, discussing Jan Assmann’s theory, points out exactly to the aspect of combining culture, which is common for a group at a certain time, and history, which is a sense of link with ancestors:

The transmission of memory and remembering takes place in specific conditions of cultural development. It creates this culture and, at the same time, makes individuals build bonds between them that enable them to identify themselves as a group with a common culture. . . . On a social level, a sense of cultural belonging is created between the members of the group due to living at the same time. On the historical level, however, a sense of relationship is created with previous generations defined as our ancestors. (Traba 2016: 14)

The community of memory is therefore based on the assumption of continuity between the past and the present. The group constituting itself as a community of memory creates the awareness of identity in time, which means that the remembered facts are selected and defined by virtue of their relevance, similarity, and continuity. Such a procedure is used in order to maintain the group's durability, which is the supreme value requiring the changes to be blurred and perceiving history as unchangeable continuation. If a group realized its own transformation, it would cease to exist as such and would give rise to a new group (Assmann 2016: 56).

Showing the continuity of the Wallachian heritage, and thus organizing the image of the world as a rational consequence of events, without inconsistencies and diversity, is made possible due to mythical thinking. The myth of Wallachians as the ancestors of today's highlanders is formed by repeated stories about the past, being an introduction to almost all workshops, lectures, or exhibitions devoted to pastoralism in the Beskids (e.g., organized at the Andrzej Podżorski Beskids Museum in Wisła, the Shepherd's Centre in Koniaków or the Těšín Museum in Český Těšín). Repeated and standardized texts about Wallachians, who walked along the peaks of the Carpathian Mountains with a flock of sheep and brought their laws and shepherds' habits to the Beskids, are a source of connotations and an interpretative matrix, bringing associations with highlanders as heirs to the Wallachian tradition to mind. Myths, as Jan Assmann notes, are typical figures of cultural memory as they constitute a remembered, founding story which is told in order to explain the present from the perspective of the primeval beginnings. The mythical narrative serves here both social integration and the creation of a collectively shared image of the world and a common system of values. Myth, as Roland Barthes (2008: 239–80) points out, gives things a foundation of nature and eternity and gives them clarity which does not result from explanations, but from the fact that today's shepherds are heirs of the Wallachians, and the Wallachian law, being the basis of the *sałas* economy, not only established the rules of economic functioning, but is also connected with the code of ethics of shepherds resulting from the harmonious coexistence of shepherds with nature.

Collective memory functions as long as it is transmitted in the process of communication, so the transmission of knowledge about the past is a condition for the memory to exist. Memory lives in and through communication, and if the transmission is interrupted, changed, or the frame of reference disappears, then forgetting occurs (Assmann 2016: 53). The revival of the pastoral economy in the twenty-first century made it possible to return to the memory of the cultural heritage of the ancestors, which as a result of sociopolitical processes from the mid-nineteenth century to the first decade of the twenty-first century was forgotten by the community and ceased to be a factor shaping collective identity. The memory of shepherding did not disappear altogether, but functioned within a communicative memory, passed on orally from generation to generation in families where sheep breeding has been a daily activity for many generations. Nevertheless, it did not have a dimension shaping the identity of the local community, as it did not go beyond the family circle of narration and did not take on an institutional form. Community forgetting can have various foundations and can be the result of different social processes. It often results from the fading of social memory, located in individual memories, when the generation that kept the knowledge about the past in its memory passes away. The reason for forgetting can also be the concentration of attention on the present and modification of an attitude towards the past, in which generational changes play an important role. Finally, forgetting can be a result of deliberate political actions, carried out by various centers of power and with the use of various methods of exerting pressure (Connerton 2008, 2012: 87–93). It seems that in the case of the Beskids highlanders, each of these factors contributed in part to the process of forgetting the cultural heritage of the shepherds and to moving away from the identity shaped on its basis. Cultivation of this heritage has not been fostered by the authorities (from the Habsburgs' management at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, to governments during Communism and the period of political transformation in the twentieth century), whose efforts have led to the successive collapse of the pastoral economy and the marginalization of the professions of baca and shepherd, resulting in the disappearance of the reference frameworks for collective memory. At the same time, there was gradual disappearance of memory as a result of the interruption of intergenerational transmission and disappearance of the collective ritual practices that would maintain this memory. With the revitalization of pastoral traditions, images of the past of the Beskids highlanders came to life, which refer to pastoralism as the source of their own identity. As Paul Connerton (2012: 87–93) notes, the images of the past and knowledge of it are stored and maintained only in the process of communication, which takes place through language as a carrier of

symbolic content and through collective ceremonies or ritual practices. It is due to the specific discourse and ritual practices currently undertaken by the Beskids shepherds that the memory of the past is shaped, which affects their own identification and the identity of the local community.

However, collective memory, like identity, is not given in its form once and forever, but undergoes transformations under the influence of external factors. The dynamics of memory results from the fact that it is an outcome of everyday discourse, constantly constructed by it from scratch. Thus, collective memory is a social construct variable in time, not a natural feature of the group, and it is closely related to the present and responds to the cultural and social needs of the community.

### **Disruptions Resulting from Reviving Pastoralism**

The revival of traditional sheep grazing in the Silesian Beskids is not without disturbances at the level of social relations. As the Beskids *basas* note, pastoralism is met with incomprehension on the part of those villagers who do not benefit from either sheep breeding or grazing. The problems vary, like for example from an unpleasant smell to violation of land ownership rights during transhumance. These issues give rise to special emotions among those who profit from tourism—i.e., the decisive majority of the rural community—for whom only the right direction for the village to develop is to transform it into something like a health resort and completely get rid of the agricultural activity. What is interesting is that in no way does it prevent the number of sheep and goat micro-breeders from growing. In the case of three villages called Trójwieś (Jaworzynka, Istebna, Koniaków) one can even talk about how trendy it is to have these animals in one's livestock and—what is worth emphasizing—without a clear objective.

That is why the shepherds call themselves a minority among the local highlanders, because of the system of values rooted in the pastoral ethos, which is supposed to make them different from the inhabitants of the cities (the so-called lords), but also from their closest neighbors who, nevertheless, lead the lives of ordinary farmers or entrepreneurs in the tourist industry. This is why local shepherds often refer to themselves as an exclusive, separate group—a kind of ethnic minority or perhaps we should say economic and ethnic. According to the theory of classical anthropology, the identity associated with a place or group is always relational and associated with maintaining differences, sometimes referred to as social boundaries (Barth 1969). In the case of Polish shepherds—or, more broadly, even highlanders—in the second half of the twentieth century the

bureaucratic and economic structures of the state became an emanation of the “foreign” (Makovicky 2014).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, regulations and projects of the European Commission became a new axis of conflict, which for some of the inhabitants of mountainous regions stood in opposition to the previous national prerogatives of the state. This is also linked to the emergence of a new understanding of peripherality—a category often referred to by shepherds from the Silesian Beskids—in which peripherality is understood not as an exclusionary force but as a building force, constituting a kind of value that should become a carrier of identification in the local or regional (pan-Carpathian) dimension. The famous Carpathian transhumance of 2013 referred to this kind of imaginary community. “The peripheries take over the role of the center, at the moment when the center becomes aware of the need for the periphery to function. When there was a problem in the village, when someone was sick, one went to *beca* for advice. Then he was in the center. He often knew better what was going on in the village,” that is what one of *becas* of Istebna said in one of the interviews about the uniqueness and the role of shepherds.

One of the basic problems every *beca* faces is to find the right personnel to work as shepherds (*juhases*). In the past they were usually young, unmarried men (Reinfuss 1959). Today, as in other pastoral communities in Europe, people involved in grazing are generally older men who, more importantly, have no one to replace them. *Juhases*’ work is no longer attractive to the young generation, which is no longer able to reconcile it with the modern rhythm of life: school, work, or private life. Above all, however, it is not a job that has an economic value (Sendyka and Makovicky 2008: 5). Fortunately, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, the gap in the structure of shepherds of the Silesian Beskids managed to be filled by temporary workers from Ukraine. Interestingly, these are not accidental people. They come from the region of the Eastern Carpathians (the so-called Hutsul region), where shepherding traditions are still alive. It is worth adding that this region of Ukraine was within the borders of the Second Polish Republic before World War II—for this reason, these people can enjoy the status of familiarity in the Beskids (although they have little in common with Polishness today). Lack of problems in mutual communication is emphasized, for example. Ukrainians from the Hutsul region communicate in a dialect, which is supposedly understandable also for the Beskids highlanders. Since 2011, the Kohut family has been cooperating with one and the same group of Ukrainian shepherds. Piotr Kohut met them during his peregrinations in the Eastern Carpathians. Two of them, aged about sixty-five, have extensive experience in working



with sheep; the others, although they come from the same region, had to learn the job. However, they also live every day on farms with smaller or larger livestock. “So, there was no need to teach them the responsibility for animals and the routine of working on the farm,” argued Maria Kohut. They choose their own new co-workers (including Ukrainians) and train them to work as shepherds. The employment of workers from Ukraine enforced legal and organizational changes. The Kohut family house in Koniaków remains the logistic center; while in the field, the shepherds live in *kolibas* or campers. They feed themselves, receiving additional funds for this purpose. They also receive snuff rations. In addition, they have a passenger car and an off-road vehicle at their disposal. The Kohuts also provide them with a router for the internet. They are legally employed, and social security contributions and other required taxes are paid for them. They receive their wages in cash after the end of the season, usually on the day of departure. They are also entitled to milk products and wool without restrictions. They work in shifts—coming twice a year, in the spring-summer or autumn-winter season. Some also change after two or three months to carry out the necessary livestock-related works at home. Those who do not have agricultural farms usually stay for the whole season. Ukrainian workers also help in the winter season and take care of animals during lambing.

Another important factor negatively affecting the revitalization of traditional pastoralism is the fragmentation of land between numerous owners and the accompanying strong sense of private ownership. The post-socialist period is marked by a significant increase in the volume of trade in land, the transformation of land use plans by conversions of agricultural land and pastures into plots of land for development and their subsequent sale by owners to incoming people from large cities who use them for recreation or commercial purposes, running hotels and boarding houses. The fragmentation of large areas into smaller plots of land is also caused by the division of land between children and grandchildren so that they can run their own farms. These processes make the shepherding areas shrink immensely, and the preserved meadows and pastures are the property of people who do not always see the need to make them available for grazing. As the shepherds do not have their own land on which to graze their sheep, the shepherd is forced to negotiate the conditions for using the pastures individually with many owners (in 2020 the number of landowners on which Piotr Kohut grazed his animals reached eight hundred). This is not the case in Romania, where the mountain pastures are mostly publicly owned and managed by local authorities and can be used after paying a tax, or in the French Central Pyrenees, where access to the grazing land is legally established by municipal syndicates (Sutcliffe et al. 2013: 62–63;

Constantin 2003: 68). However, Polish legislation does not provide for such possibilities even if the pasture is wasteland. The situation is further hindered by the EU law on so-called direct payments. These are granted to persons who actually use the land and should therefore be collected by *bacas* for grazing sheep on pastures, while owners do not want to give up collecting payments and therefore do not agree to the entry of the flock. Shepherds, wishing to run the *sałas* economy, must make individual arrangements with each landowner and establish rules of settlement with each one of them in accordance with the principle that “Łod dogwory moc zależy” (a lot depends on the agreement). That is why the preservation of the “free sheep grazing” in mountain areas is considered by the Beskids shepherds to be absolutely fundamental not only for the continuation of pastoral practices but also for the preservation of ecological balance. So far, this demand has not received any reaction from the authorities.

### **Shepherding in the Narratives of Piotr and Maria**

Ideology, religion, and values are other important issues we have decided to devote a little more attention to during our research. In historical literature, transhumance was generally reduced to the spatial mobility of only one gender or age group—in contrast to nomadism in which all members of the community were in movement. In the case of contemporary transhumance pastoralism, the issue seems a bit more complicated. Especially in order to understand contemporary forms of pastoralism, it is necessary to listen to the narratives of the different people involved. Pastoralism today (but also yesterday) is not only about people (usually men) involved in grazing: shepherds, *gazdas*, or *juhases*—as in the case of the Carpathian arc. This institution also includes their families, whose individual members play almost equal roles in the production process, and pastoralism is a factor determining their lives regardless of the season. This is especially true today when pastoral activity often has to be combined with other, more profitable activities. In the reality of post-socialist Poland, the following polarization became the rule: *baca* is a sheep breeder, his wife is a businesswoman who sells the products of the shepherding farm. This arrangement is fostered by legal regulations which, for example, prohibit a shepherd from selling cheese directly to shops (Sendyka and Makovicky 2018: 11–12). This is not a completely new situation. In the past, the division of labor by gender was also kept—a man produced, a woman, in turn, was responsible for the sale and distribution of dairy products to the local markets. The woman’s work was not a separate activity but was covered by a variety of family roles and responsibilities—simply it was

what belonged to the woman's duties as a wife, sister, or daughter of a farmer (Pine 2002: 101). Today, we are dealing with a modification of this model, to be more precise, with the intensification of the role of a woman in a shepherding farm, who takes on her shoulders much more than she used to, and her activity is formally separated (most often in the form of her own business) and focused on the private sector. All this makes her a person at least as important in the whole system as *baca* himself, and she converts the whole activity into a kind of family business. A good example of this phenomenon is the Kohut shepherding family.

The Kohuts, as we have mentioned, live on pastoralism and related activities. This in turn irresistibly brings business activity to mind. For example, one of the recent projects was the construction of a guesthouse for tourists. The couple already run a shop where they sell souvenirs and food products such as cheese, cold cuts, or meat. On the premises of the farm—called a Shepherd's Centre—there is also a living museum. I would not call the conditions they live in as spartan. Their traditional style villa is one of the most impressive in the village. But the Kohuts would never call themselves entrepreneurs. The term business was rather reluctantly referred to. The reason—as they said—is that income is uncertain, and the business requires constant financial support. There seem to be other reasons too.

For both, being engaged in sheep breeding is more than a profitable activity. In our conversations, the topic of economics was always pushed into the background. The main theme was usually culture. And so, according to Piotr and Maria Kohut, the essence of their activity is tradition—to be more precise, immersion in the archaic pastoral practices and customs of the Western Carpathians. Interestingly, they both come from two different micro-regions: Piotr from Koniaków in the Silesian Beskids, and Maria from Zakopane at the foot of the Tatras. They did not take over the knowledge and shepherding skills from their ancestors, in direct intergenerational transmission, but they acquired it through their own intellectual search or *baca* courses. Both of them belong to the enthusiasts of Carpathian shepherds' cultural heritage. The practices and customs they collect are incorporated into—as they call it themselves—traditional, cultural grazing, in which they actively participate. The event in which the cultural drives of the couple become visible is the ritual of mixing of the sheep. It is organized in Koniaków at the beginning of May to officially start the pastoral season in the Silesian Beskids. The date of the ritual is given on the internet as a tourist attraction of the region; the website of Istebna commune informs about it. It is an all-day event filled with numerous rituals and magical rites, such as burning incense, blessing sheep, burning bonfires, all with the participation of a large audience and to the



**Figure 8.3.** The ritual of mixing of the sheep, Koniaków, 2017. © Katarzyna Marcol

accompaniment of highlander music. The focal point is the mixing of the sheep and trailing them three times around a fir tree. Each year, the centuries-old customs are added.

All this, according to the Kohuts, is to revive the tradition, so that it is not just an open-air museum spectacle. Their role in this process seems extremely important. They also have a clearly defined opinion on this subject. For example, in their opinion, the cultural heritage of the Beskids shepherds should stem from both written sources and oral traditions, and should be open to people from outside, to tourists. Piotr Kohut, however, has one reservation: “The mixing of the sheep is our (pastoral) holiday. Tourists are important, but not the most important.” Piotr Kohut is improving the tradition all the time—he sees himself as a promoter-restorer of archaic customs. He also stresses the social dimension of his work—the need to be an authority, a man of impeccable reputation. In his case, one can even talk about the ethos of the Beskids *baca*: a man as hardworking as he is honest and trustworthy. Without this, cooperation with local breeders and landowners would not be possible.

Another matter—I do not know if not even more important—shepherding is a kind of lifestyle for both of them. And so freedom is important

for both spouses—but each understands it a bit differently. For the man it means the possibility of full devotion to the shepherding lifestyle, a kind of escapism, effected through active participation in seasonal grazing. The man dons a woolen coat, puts on a hat and fills a pipe. So equipped, he sets off on his journey, becomes a wanderer, even a pilgrim—as Piotr Kohut himself puts it. This journey has a strong symbolic, religious or as an ethnologist would say: liminal meaning. He finds peace of mind in the pasture, says Piotr Kohut in one of his interviews. He likes this unhurried rhythm of life when he can patiently perform his duties. Looking calmly as time passes through his fingers and contemplating immeasurable landscapes, so different at different times of day. According to Piotr, the shepherd puts himself under the protection of God, and he is also an executor of His orders: he farms the land, takes care of the animals, slaughters them with his own hands, following the kosher principles, which, in his opinion, is the most humane. The same applies to milking. Piotr even uses the term “tactile pastoralism” on this occasion. He always milks with his own hands, which for him is the essence of shepherding—just like the closeness between a man and a woman in marriage. This allows him to create a special relationship with the animal. “Every sheep passes through our hands. We know everything that happens to her. When milking [manually] we know how she is, we can plan . . . we have a touch, there are sheep, that if someone milks her badly, she will not go to him,” Piotr Kohut explains. Therefore, being in the pasture has a deep, existential sense for him—it transforms him, at the same time bringing him closer to the mystery of life. For him, wandering with sheep is a symbol of life. According to him, life is a road. It has its beginning and end. It has everything that is important: love, responsibility, diligence. Finally, Cain and Abel, a global pastoral myth about the polarization of human societies, appear in his narratives. This makes him feel that he is part of something larger. In the stories of Piotr Kohut, echoes of the sacredness of the institution of *baca* in folk culture can be heard. “Every *baca* has his own magic, but keeps its secrets to protect the sheep and the people,” write Maria and Piotr Kohut (2018: 242). However, not only quasi-liturgical practices are meant such as wearing amulets, burning incense, or having the flock blessed, but understanding, full of mysticism, of the functions of *baca*.

Above all, it is to protect against all evil. The responsibility is taken not only for people, but also for animals, nature, dogs and various property. Mixing of the sheep protects. That’s why the incense herbs and blessing three times. In the past everything that was supernatural allowed *bacas* to produce the energy that protected the flock during that mixing. And they had to watch. At the beginning, because you get to some things, after another mixing and another, [judging by] various behaviors, I know what the season will be. I

can already predict certain things, even during the mixing. Because some things happened to me, here and there, and it happened so later. Maybe this is my imagination? But some things are becoming clearer to me. (Kohut and Kohut 2018: 243)

And some other time: “Nature talks a lot, only very slowly, sometimes for 10 years, you have to learn to read signs. Just like with a tree that is withering. Earlier, it calls for help. This is a language. This observation must be learned too. It is very similar with animals. First of all, the animal understands a lot.”

For Maria Kohut, in turn, shepherding is more a matter of what is inside, the possibility of building an intimate world based on feelings and emotions, a parallel between work and family. A woman is characterized by a certain ambivalence towards standard business procedures, such as, for example, using loans for companies or transferring ownership rights to a company. Each thing, however, matters to her, has an emotional value and is connected with some sentimental detail. Many objects used in the Centre have been in her or his family for generations. Above all, she appreciates the possibility to decide and the self-sufficiency through multiplication of activities (production of cheese, meat, wool, artisan souvenirs, hotel activities). All these fields are, above all, her specialties. They all require creativity from a woman. What to do nowadays with wool—a product, as the interlocutor said—is “unsellable.” Family is also important in all this, raising children. The Shepherd’s Centre is both a workplace and a home. Different quality spaces intersect there. Shepherding has also been elevated to something almost sacred, full of mysticism. Thanks to the children, the eschatological element becomes visible in it. Children observe the mystery of death, learn the relationship between humans and animal, develop their own attitude towards carnivorousness, and finally learn humanitarianism in a half-Christian spirit (the idea of sacrifice, the idea of divine order) and half-archaic or even animistic spirit (the idea of mediation, equality in the world of nature). Why do we kill animals, can we guarantee them a dignified death?

The Kohuts—like many parents today—do not want their children to do what they do. The activity is too difficult and uncertain, and is connected with a label of outsidersness, peripherality. Consciously or not, they understand that their children’s world will be diametrically different. This fact gives the shepherding an even deeper dimension—a breeding ground of values, of what is true, of what is unchangeable, of a certain post-capitalist, but also post-traditional philosophy of life.

To sum up: tradition, determination, creativity, sensualism, and freedom are the key words of the Kohut’s pastoralism. They should be read in a relational, non-formal way, as each spouse looks at sheep farming in a bit

different manner. The new neoliberal economic system, which has existed in Poland since the 1990s, is responsible for replacing the local work and labor arrangements. This seems to be particularly evident with regard to gender. New dichotomies—private-public, internal-external—have become elements of these new dynamics. The renegotiation of work, entitlements, or production are new forms of relations of the human being and market in rural areas. Finally, these elements are linked to the accelerating proliferation of the Western culture, often also in the opposition to it, in terms of economic life or consumption (Pine 2002: 98).

### **Disruptions during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

During the COVID-19 pandemic there was no formal ban on grazing, and during the lockdown the sheep were still wintered at the breeders. However, the business activities of the Kohut family became dormant, primarily the operations of the shepherd's center in Koniaków (it was closed to tourists and residents until 4 May). Not only was the animation activity (lectures, workshops) discontinued, but also the sale of dairy products was stopped. The Kohuts decided also that in 2020 there would be no direct sale of dairy products at the baca's hut. Finally, there was also no mixing of the sheep organized every year during the long May weekend (1–3 May). The biggest problem of the initial phase of the pastoral season was not the lack of tourists, but the labor supply shortage. Closed borders prevented Ukrainian shepherds from coming, who, as we have reported, have been the core of the shepherding team for some time. There was hardly anyone who could replace them—not only because this activity is no longer popular among the local people, but what is important, during the pandemic an additional need appeared for a large part of the population to take care of children and provide them with help during distant learning. For many weeks this paralyzed, or at least made all kinds of livestock-related work or professional life of the inhabitants of the three villages much more difficult. Eventually, a team of Ukrainian shepherds arrived with some delay and in a reduced composition. It was decided that two oldest shepherds from Ukraine would not participate in this year's season (there were fears concerning their health). Four Ukrainian shepherds managed to arrive on 5 May and after a two-week quarantine they started working. The flock belonging to the Kohuts set off from the farm on 2 May, and within the following days they were joined by sheep of other breeders. Officially, the pastoral season was inaugurated on 9 May without the participation of tourists, "within the group of the closest family, friends and newspapers," as Maria Kohut reported on Facebook. During the quarantine of the

shepherds, *gazdas* (flock owners) were working with the sheep. “This is community grazing, so everyone understood the situation and knew that if they wanted to give a sheep for grazing for the whole season, it was necessary to help during these two or three weeks,” that is how Maria Kohut explained the whole situation.

Changes occurred in other fields too. In Koniaków and other neighboring regions, greater fragmentation of flocks occurred—division into separate *sałas* flocks and putting them under the care of other *basas*. Thus, at the beginning of the season, joint grazing of lambs and ewe lambs was organized in the Żywiec Beskids. Due to the new sanitary regime, the trailing route was also reduced, and the flocks were directed to more deserted pastures. Finally, in the case of grazing the Kohuts’ flocks, their number was reduced by about 150 animals. In the 2020 season, 650 sheep were milked, while in 2018 about 1,500.

The answer to the question to what extent the pandemic brought about disruptions in the pastoral season and whether the disruptions will make permanent changes is obviously difficult at this point. We will be able to say this only after a long period of time, when the consequences of what happened are fully known. Looking at shepherding in the age of pandemic we can suppose however, that it will result in some changes, and in any case, as it is evident from the talks with the shepherds, it provoked some discussion among breeders and shepherds about how transhumance pastoralism should change.

Attention was paid to the increasing role of the family—reduction in business activity and employment of external staff. Particularly aware of this fact was Maria Kohut, who had to take on her shoulders, among other things, the role of driver (distributing the farm’s products to customers). In her case it was all the more necessary as the gainful activity she was customarily engaged in—running the shepherd’s shop—“got frozen.” During the pandemic crisis, cooperation between breeders (*gazdas*), who had to engage more in joint grazing, turned out to be extremely important. Another issue was the relationship of shepherding and tourism. The question that had kept appearing for some time was in which direction should pastoral activity go, should it serve the most faithful reconstruction of cultural grazing of sheep, or should it rather meet the expectations of the commune and tourists halfway, join in the promotion of tourism in the region? An event on which this dispute focused was the aforementioned “mixing of the sheep” festival, or more precisely, its date. It is obvious for all those living on revenue from tourism that this holiday should become an inherent part of the long May weekend, during which a lot of tourists go to the mountains. For Piotr Kohut it is a factor of secondary importance—according to him only the welfare of the flock, for which he



is responsible, should count. It is possible, or even necessary, to turn even more towards tradition. The pandemic crisis showed that this is a feasible postulate.

The pandemic also revealed smoldering animosities within the rural community. In the opinion of the inhabitants, the shepherds became a kind of privileged group, and thus their economic distance increased even further. At a time when people were losing their jobs and income from tourism, shepherds were allowed to carry out their activities as before. "Isn't that unfair?" asked one of the interlocutors running an agritourism farm in the area. The pandemic will probably result in even greater dynamization of the social structure in the rural areas of the Śląski Beskids.

## Conclusion

Unchangeability and continuity are the most desirable human experiences, deeply inscribed in the cultural patterns of many communities (Becker 1999: 5). Mythical images of the Wallachian ancestors and the heritage they left behind, which became active with the revitalization of the *sałas* pastoralism in the Beskids, and which became part of the cultural memory of the shepherds, give a sense of continuity, and with it, a sense of work done. However, should the practices described above be regarded as continuations or, on the contrary, are they completely new acts? The work of *beca* is tantamount to a vocation. It is no longer the fruit of intergenerational transmission. It is based on culture-building actions, constant development of a range of memories, and refers to belonging, based on an imaginary and in a way created from scratch, geography. At the same time, institutionally supported collective memory is a guarantee of the preservation of the pastoral identity, since the traditional intergenerational message no longer serves as a means of conveying knowledge about the past and no longer plays a decisive role in shaping identification. The collective identity, that is, the image of one's own group, is created through the identification of its members, and its permanence depends on the extent it motivates the thinking and actions of people belonging to the community. However, the willingness to maintain continuity, which is a guarantee of identification, is very often put to the test by various types of interference. These distractions—or, if you prefer, a continuum of distractions—have an important place in the structure of memory of people engaged in shepherding, and thus are a component of group identity. It is the memory of the man-shepherd struggle with adversities, the source of which was most frequently seen in the activities of a distant political cen-

ter. In this story shepherding is a heroic passion. And its history consists of constant attempts to return to the sources.

European governance structures prove to be important for the rebirth of pastoralism in the Silesian Beskids. They influence, for example, the policy of local authorities on the issue of restitution of the shepherding subculture. Of course, they are also accelerators of local culture and identity. However, the perception of the influence of EU institutions by social actors is far from unambiguous. Some see the impulses coming from Brussels as the source of another bundle of distractions as a part of the myth of a distant and hostile center.

The basic way to consider distractions and continuity is the narrative that human beings tell about themselves. They reflect their experiences in the way the human being wants to see them and in the way they want others to see them (Becker 1999: 25). The stories of the shepherds reveal the experience of the relationships with nature, animals, and people. Sheep are not so much a passion or hobby for the Kohuts—in their narratives—as they are the foundation of their self-identification. The shepherds' relationship with animals anchors them in the ecosystem, in the calendar of nature, which, in turn, is connected with the Christian calendar. It strengthens their sense of holism and universality. Nature gives a sense of permanence and invariability even in the event of a sudden pandemic like COVID-19. The pastures became green, the sheep have to go out to graze and their milk has to be processed into cheese, which in turn has to be sold. Isn't this proof that the pastoral lifestyle is right?

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## Notes

1. In the Beskids we are currently dealing with three types of sheep grazing: seasonal transhumance, when the sheep are taken out of their farms at the end of April (traditionally after St. Adalbert and St. George, i.e., after 23 April) and move with the shepherds for six days to pastures located in different mountain locations or places near the mountains within different voivodships, and for the winter they return for five days to their own farms around mid-October (traditionally on St. Michael’s day); *redyk*, where the herds move under the watchful eye of shepherds between mountain pastures in different localities within a relatively short distance from their own farms, staying there from the end of April to mid-October; *salasz*, where grazing takes place during the summer season in one village, on one or two pastures. In any case, it is communal grazing (the flocks are made up of sheep belonging to many owners) in areas not owned by the shepherds (they are usually owned by different private individuals), and the main benefit of grazing is to obtain milk for the production and sale of cheese and other dairy products.
2. The “Cultural Ecology” project was carried out by the Faculty of Ethnology and Educational Sciences of the University of Silesia in 2015–16, supported by Norwegian and EEA funds, coming from Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway.

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