
Preface

In our societies livestock grazing has a disgusted smell. It was the reason for the soil loss in the Mediterraneans, it was the reason for the degradation of forests in Central Europe in historic times, and it is the driving force for the clearcutting of primeval forests in developing and underdeveloped countries. Pictures of over-grazed land in arid zones come into our minds, the soils unprotectedly exposed to the eroding powers of wind and water.

In Europe livestock, like no other human activity, coined cultures and landscapes over more than 5 000 years. Like in other continents it was not always a kind of use which we would call “sustainable” in modern interpretation. However, it generated diversity on the landscape level and supported the development of ecosystems and species which we today like to protect. Most of the nutrient-poor grassland and shrub ecosystems owe their existence to the grazing of livestock or the necessity to feed them. Thermophilous plant and animal species found new habitats on grazing land, including forests.

This book summarizes the results of scientific investigations on the influence of large-scale pasturing on nature, conducted in Germany, Sweden, Ukraine and Georgia. The basic thought is: if livestock pasturing has contributed to generate the values of the kind of nature and landscapes which we today strive to protect, why not use it as a management tool? Of course, some modern forms of livestock keeping are obviously unsuitable to meet conservation targets. Today livestock is often kept in stables and if not is allowed to graze on small fenced paddocks only, which are normally fertilized, hosting only a poor level of biodiversity.

But merging modern and historical techniques might result into a strategy well suited for landscape management. The validity of such models depends on the costs, for the farmer and for society, compared to other alternatives. Only if economical analyses back up such perspectives they will be realized on ground.

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