

The role of pastoral schools beyond education

XIV European Mountain Convention - Workshop

1 July 2026

On a joint initiative of the three projects [LIFE ShepForBio](#), [Eu4Supa](#) and SHEP4ECO, the workshop “[The role of pastoral schools beyond education](#)” took place on 1 July 2026, in the framework of the [XIV European Mountain Convention](#) by [Euromontana](#) and [SUACI Montagn'Alpes](#). The session was moderated by the team of [Euromontana](#) and [D.R.E.A.M. Italia](#).

Objectives

The workshop aimed to introduce the three projects, as well as the technical dossier on European pastoral schools developed within [LIFE ShepForBio](#), and to stimulate collective reflection on the broader role of pastoral schools beyond vocational education and training. Through an interactive fishbowl discussion, the 42 participants explored how pastoral schools contribute to the future of pastoralism, for instance by supporting skills development, generational renewal, professional recognition, innovation, territorial development and environmental stewardship.

Workshop format

The session combined a short introductory presentation with an open fishbowl discussion involving representatives of pastoral schools, training organisations, public authorities, farmers, researchers and practitioners from across Europe. Participants exchanged experiences from different contexts, with a particular attention to the French situation, and reflected on the evolving functions of pastoral schools as actors supporting both pastoral communities and rural territories.

Among the pastoral schools (or clusters of pastoral schools) represented were the [LIFE ShepForBio Shepherd School](#), the [Alpage École de Sulens](#), the [EPLEFPA Chambéry-La Motte-Servolex](#), the [CFPPA Savoie Bugey](#), the French National Association of

Transhumant Shepherd and Herder Schools – ANEBVT and the [School of Shepherds of Catalonia](#).

Key discussion points

Pastoral schools as territorial actors

A recurring message throughout the discussion was that pastoral schools have evolved beyond their original educational function. Participants described schools as platforms that **connect farmers, aspiring shepherds, researchers, local authorities and environmental organisations**. Through these networks, schools facilitate knowledge exchange, strengthen professional communities and increase the visibility of pastoralism within local development strategies.

Several examples illustrated how schools actively contribute to regional development by supporting innovation, applied research and collaboration across sectors such as tourism, forestry, landscape management and nature conservation.



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Supporting generational renewal and rural development

The discussion highlighted the indirect impacts generated by pastoral schools on rural areas. Beyond training future shepherds, schools contribute to **maintaining the population in remote areas** by supporting newcomers, former students, who decide to **establish their professional activities locally**.

Experiences from different countries showed that many schools also **facilitate farm succession**, connect retiring farmers with new entrants and offer practical support during the transition into professional activity. This way prevents animals from these older farms from being sent to slaughter. These services help address structural barriers such as access to land, professional integration and the transfer of knowledge.

Awareness raising and framing the profession

The importance of **presenting a realistic image of pastoral work** was emphasised. While pastoralism is increasingly recognised for its environmental and social value, participants stressed that training must also **prepare students for the physical, economic and organisational challenges** associated with the profession. Often, schools contribute to **representing the profession in the media**, and to **disseminate key messages** to the wider community about the importance of pastoralism in fire prevention, the protection of biodiversity and food sovereignty.

Yet, pastoralism continues to face challenges related to difficult working conditions, limited social recognition and economic uncertainty. Improving the profession's attractiveness requires structural changes beyond education, including better working conditions, stronger professional recognition, adequate remuneration and supportive public policies. **Short courses on communication, the relation with employees, and role management** for farmers were suggested as a priority, and the **organisation of 'job dating' sessions**, featuring role-reversal exercises to foster mutual empathy, was proposed.



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Beyond technical skills

Participants underlined that today's pastoral schools teach a broad range of competences extending beyond livestock management. Training increasingly includes **biodiversity conservation, wildfire prevention, climate adaptation, ecosystem management, communication with the public, business development and conflict management**, such as in the case of tourism. Some schools offer field workshops to help communities understand each other's expertise and needs, thereby facilitating future decision-making and land management in mountain areas.

Several contributions highlighted the growing importance of interpersonal skills, particularly **communication between employers and shepherds, mediation with recreational users of mountain areas and collaboration with local stakeholders**. Continuous professional development and short training courses were identified as valuable tools for both new entrants and experienced professionals.



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Schools as centres for innovation and lifelong learning

Several examples demonstrated that pastoral schools increasingly function as **centres for experimentation, applied research and lifelong learning**. Schools **collaborate with research institutions to test climate adaptation practices**, grazing systems and innovative management approaches while also responding to the evolving needs of practitioners through short, specialised courses.

Participants highlighted that **continuous training** is becoming increasingly important as pastoralists face new environmental regulations, technological developments and changing societal expectations.

For instance, the CASDAR Amber project produced a series of [videos](#) showing shepherds at work and reflecting on their actions, capturing complex knowledge such as flock dynamics and sheepdog handling.



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Strengthening professional recognition

Participants discussed the diversity of qualification systems across Europe and recognised the need for stronger recognition of pastoral competences. Although national approaches differ, pastoral schools could contribute to developing common competency frameworks and strengthening the professional identity of shepherds across Europe.

The discussion also emphasised that shepherds should increasingly be recognised not only as livestock managers but also as landscape managers delivering valuable ecosystem services.

Main conclusions

The workshop confirmed that pastoral schools have become key actors in supporting the long-term resilience of pastoral systems. Their contribution extends well beyond vocational education by fostering professional networks, facilitating generational renewal, preserving traditional knowledge, promoting innovation and strengthening the social recognition of pastoralism.