

SHEPHERD BRIDGE

SHARED KNOWLEDGE BOOSTS
SHEPHERDING IN EUROPE



PROJECT CODE: 2019-1-TR01-KA202-077190

CALL: ERASMUS+ KA202 CALL 2019

PERIOD: 24 MONTHS

BUDGET: 187,501.00 €

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“Empty Spain”, a term illustrating the issue of depopulation in rural areas happening throughout the country, was the center of intense political debates and was a decisive issue in the last election. But the problem is not a recent one. Its roots can be found in the lack of social, financial and work opportunities that has been going on in rural areas for years, making young people look for new opportunities in cities. In order to reverse this process, it is crucial to make people put down roots in these regions by means of activities that guarantee access to socially and financially recognized jobs, with better working conditions.

Project Shepherd Bridge pools different experiences and knowledge on shepherding in different European countries

In this context, Project Shepherd Bridge came about with the aim to analyze the current shepherding situation in different European countries and transfer the acquired experience and knowledge in order to improve this activity. Led by Turkey's Ministry of Agriculture, the project is relying on the experience provided by the University of Cordoba in Spain, the University of Belgrade in Serbia and the Hellenic Agricultural Organization “Demeter” research center in Greece.

“Shepherding continues to be a very important activity from an economic, social and environmental standpoint”, explains research

er Carlos C. Pérez Marín, coordinator of the research team at the University of Cordoba. It is a kind of sustainable livestock farming, allowing for an increase in the profitability of flocks and herds by means of using natural resources that would be lost or eliminated otherwise. In addition, productivity as well as soil and pasture quality increase. Also, the mountains are better protected from possible fires since brush and undergrowth are removed.

Nowadays, shepherding is offering new employment opportunities for people from rural areas and could contribute, at least in part, to alleviating the issue of depopulation. However, a return to shepherding cannot be taken lightly since there is a considerable lack of information and training.

In order to provide a solution to all of this, Project Shepherd Bridge is taking on the task of compiling information from different partnering countries regarding culture and traditions associated with this sector and about the understanding of sheep and goat breeds. This will be done by means of designing specific questionnaires in order to understand the current shepherding situation in each country, which will allow for a comparison between the reality of each environment and a quest for improvement strategies. Books, audiovisual content and online resources will be put together and made available to professionals. Moreover, specific training courses for shepherds containing

all the acquired information will be taught in the countries that take part in the project.

Among the topics that will most be underscored, we can find those related to animal welfare, health and reproduction, as well as new technology that monitors livestock -known as precision livestock farming- in order to improve the efficiency of farming operations. “The technological revolution has to make this offer more attractive and improve working conditions”, points out Carlos C. Pérez Marín, who works at the Department of Animal Medicine and Surgery at the university. Professor Dolores Pérez and Doctor Francisco Maroto, both from the Department of Animal Production at the School of Agricultural and Forestry Engineering, make up the rest of the group. This research team has vast experience in ruminant animal welfare and leads European and national initiatives related to precision livestock farming.

Shepherding currently has a fairly complicated situation, above all in terms of training and innovation, in spite of the weight it has in these countries’ cultures and traditions. Transhumance was declared Intangible Cultural Heritage in Spain in 2017, and shapes the cultural identity of many regions that are watching as their populations plummet. “In the same way that progress reaches any profession, shepherds are no exception and they must have access to new insights, the latest technology and social recognition”, concludes the researcher.

