Transhumance of Sheep in the Western Region of Slovenia

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Abstract

In the western region of Slovenia, wide areas are covered by calcareous rock of Cretaceous origin. Therefore, thick soils are found in the bottom of declines only. These conditions result in poor agricultural productivity. This is why the inhabitants have had to engage in transhumance of sheep and goats in this region.

Before the Second World War, the border with Italy lay to the east of Postojna. Sheep transhumance moved freely as follows: In spring and autumn, the base villages were located in the Vipava and Piuka valleys; in summer, in the hilly or mountainous areas areas (1,000 ~ 1,200 m a.s.l.); and in winter, in the coastal areas of the Adriatic Sea and Gulf of Triest.

After the Second World War, however, the border was changed to run east of Triest. So, sheep were moved to the coast of the Istria Peninsula in winter. During the socialistic regime, collectivization of sheep was not done. As a result, the number of sheep holders decreased gradually. In the 1960's, transhumance of sheep decreased severely. The hilly areas of Vremščice became the center of sheep breeding under the Biotechnical Faculty of Ljubljana University.

After the Independence War, the Istria Peninsula became part of Croatia. Transhumance of sheep became completely impossible, because the route to the Adriatic Sea coast was cut off. After this event, the number of sheep holders increased gradually for the production of sheep meat. In 2004, Slovenia became a member of the EU. Sheep holders were also able to get support through aid from the EU. The number of sheep increased gradually through the combining of outdoor and indoor breeding practices. Slovenia has a legal obligation to protect wolves in Europe. Therefore, many sheep bred outdoor have been attacked by wolves. In the future, the balance between wolves and sheep will become a serious problem for sheep breeding.

This process of sheep transhumance in Slovenia will serve as one model for future processes in neighboring countries where sheep transhumance is likely to decrease.

Keywords: Western Slovenia, sheep transhumance, karst area, EU member, land degradation

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