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Launching a Kid Meat Goat Geographical Indication in Albania

Territorial Value Chain Issues coming from the Hasi Regional Analysis – Northern Albania

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Abstract. BiodivBalkans project's ambition is to identify and protect agrobiodiversity as a driver for a sustainable agricultural development in Albanian mountainous regions. In order to address the territorial dimension of local value chains, Geographical Indications (GI) was identified as a possible adequate sign of sustainability and origin to be developed. The Hasi goat (endemic breed) and its kid goat meat were selected by the project in accordance with the Albanian Ministry of Agriculture, with the support of a national Development Agency and implemented by a local NGO. To inform a successful GI building process in Albania and direct support to the value chains with a territory-based action four main points of attention have been identified by the "reflexive pole" of the project: (1) a strong delimitation of the area of origin based on geo-morphological criteria, on the agrarian system history and contemporary evolutions; (2) a detailed goat flock analysis, to better understand the situation of the breed and its outputs in term of production and also to suggest, to the authorities, possible measures of support; (3) the marketing of the breed's products, with the specific attention to the local bottlenecks in order to secure the market premium already acknowledged among Albanian actors; (4) the environmental issue, grazing practices and their relation to the quality of meat and specification to be potentially included in the book of requirement (of the GI).

Keywords. Albania – Quality labels – Geographical Indication – Farming systems – Value chain.

Lancer une Indication Géographique sur la viande de cabri en Albanie. Les questions de la chaîne de valeur territoriale provenant d'une analyse régionale du Has - Albanie du Nord

Résumé. L'ambition du projet BiodivBalkans est d'identifier et de protéger l'agrobiodiversité comme moteur de développement agricole durable. Les indications géographiques (IG) ont été identifiées comme un label de durabilité et d'origine adéquat pour le développement des zones de montagne défavorisées en Albanie. La chèvre du Has (race endémique) et sa viande de chevreau ont été sélectionnées par le projet en lien avec le Ministère albanais de l'agriculture et le soutien d'une agence nationale de développement, puis mis en œuvre par une ONG albanaise. Pour informer un processus fructueux de construction d'IG en Albanie et renforcer une chaîne de valeur territorialisée, quatre principaux points d'attention ont été identifiés par le « pole réflexif » du programme : (1) une délimitation précise de la zone d'origine basée sur des critères géomorphologiques, l'histoire agraire et ses évolutions contemporaines ; (2) une analyse détaillée du troupeau caprin, afin de mieux comprendre la situation de la race et ses résultats en termes de production, et de proposer aux autorités des mesures de soutien ; (3) la commercialisation de la viande issue de la race locale, avec une prise en compte des obstacles locaux afin de conforter le premium dont bénéficie cette viande auprès des acteurs albanais ; (4) la question environnementale, les pratiques pastorales en lien avec la qualité de la viande, éléments qui pourront être intégrés dans un cahier des charges.

Mots-clés. Albanie – Labels de qualité – Indication géographique – Systèmes de production – Chaîne de valeur.

I – Introduction

BiodivBalkans is a research & action project mainly implemented in northern Albania. The main objective is to support local products and agrobiodiversity, crossing environmental awareness for biodiversity conservation with social and economic objectives of rural development (Secrétariat du FFEM, 2011). Along that line, Geographical Indications (GI) have been identified as a suitable tool to strengthen agro-pastoral activities (i.e. securing a proven price premium, reputation and local product quality) and to preserve an important biological diversity linked to pastoral practices. Within that frame, BiodivBalkans project assists a GI building process on an endemic Northern-Albanian breed, the “Hasi goat” and its kid meat goat. An in-depth analysis of the Hasi region (a monograph), led by the “reflexive pole” of the project (applied research), highlighted four decisive issues for this collective action.

II – Spatial delimitation of the zone of origin of Hasi goat

The Hasi goat is a local breed –one of the major flock in the area– named after the Hasi Region. Hasi is an ethno-geographic area, separated by the Albanian-Kosovo frontier in two parts. The Hasi district is now part of the Albanian administrative region of Kukës (along with Kukës and Tropoja districts), whereas the Kosovan part falls under Gjakovë and Prizren administrative regions. Since the communist period, the Kosovan and Albanian Hasian territories have obviously followed different evolution paths. The goat breeding tradition persisted on the Albanian side, whereas goats were banned by the Yugoslavian authorities. The Albanian Hasian area can be divided in three sub-regions according four main parameters: geology, topology, vegetation and human settlements (i.e. village organization) (Garnier, 2013; Medolli, 2013). These three zones are (see Figure 1): (i) the **mountain range**: deeply affected by emigration, this area is characterized by a low agricultural production, high extraction of timber (mostly illegal) and a noticeable specialization in Hasi goat breeding, thanks to the quality of the pasture lands; (ii) the **hilly area**, was opened to intensive agriculture (mainly cereals and fruits) during the communist period and exploited by State farms and collective farms (Dir. Stat., 1984). After 1991 and the collapse of the communist regime, fruit trees orchards as well as cultivated arable lands were abandoned to fallow and shrubs till today, regularly grazed by sheep and cattle mostly; (iii) the **perched plateau**, a karstic area characterized by its sinkholes (Krutaj *et al.*, 1998), is overhung by the Pashtrikut Mount (1989 m. high). On this plateau, water scarcity is a limiting factor for agricultural development. The livestock production is limited to small ruminants, and mostly Hasi goats, a rustic breed well adapted to the harsh climatic conditions.

This geo-morphological sub-division of the Hasi area, crossed with the spatial distribution of the livestock concentration (cattle, sheep and goats), was central to understand farmers’ strategies in each sub-agrarian system. In that perspective, the Perched plateau, which is the most important center of Hasi goat breeding, should probably be the area of the GI building. It should also be used for the symbolic identification of the products (Pashtrikut Mount, sinkholes plateau) even if the other sub-agrarian systems may have an important contribution to the overall productive output. This spatial delimitation was also instrumental in the identification of development opportunities for the Hasi goat breed, and contributed to foster a collective action around the GI building process (Bernard *et al.*, 2013).

III – The Hasi goat and its breeders

Hasi goat is recognized as an endemic breed (Dobi *et al.*, 2006; Hoda *et al.*, 2011; Hoda *et al.*, 2012; Kusza *et al.*, 2011). The Albanian Hasi part is still the zone where most of pure Hasi goat flocks are located, especially within the perched plateau and its surroundings. Well known for its adaptation to harsh environments, the Hasi goat has been selected by farmers for its robustness. The Hasi goat has a well-developed body, strong legs and well developed udder. It is an excellent browser in oak forest, oak-hornbeam forests, evergreen forests and shrubs, etc. Herds are raised on pastoral feeding almost all year – except during the bleakness winter.

During the communist period, the total Hasi goat flock grew significantly, through policies of intensification and modernization, but we lack of precise figures of this evolution. What is clear is that the flock size declined significantly after the collapse of the communist regime. Based on local experts' knowledge and our estimations, we can estimate an overall drop from about 22 000 to 7- 9 000 heads nowadays. Migrations, social-economic problems in rural areas, massive sales during the "pyramids crisis" (Civici *et al.*, 2001) and low recovery during the last decade explain this contemporary low picture.

Based on statistical data produce by "PAZA Project"¹ we propose the following typology of goats breeding farms in the region (Garnier, 2014; Biba, 2001):

- **Auto-consumption farms** (<10 heads). Products from this type of farm are consumed by the family or donated to the entourage. Goat farming is a secondary activity, complementary to other agricultural or non-agricultural activity. This type of farms concerns 26% of the 153 goat farms of the Hasi region.
- **Subsistence farms** (10-50 heads). These little flocks (27% of the goat farms), are producing less than 25 kids per year, supplying a low income when kids are sold. The family often combine another activity (mainly sheep farming) giving additional income. But in some cases when it is the only source of income of the family, expenses are minimized: feeding is mostly based on the use of natural resources as pastures, scrublands and oak leaves, and very few cereals.
- **Semi-specialized farms**: (50-100 heads). Beyond 50 goats, animals and milk commercialization may supply a decent income for a family. But the marketing issue is crucial and is, in our diagnosis based on field-work enquiries, a limiting factor for increasing the number of animals. Distance with the marketplace, insufficient fodder capacity, bottleneck of the labour force, and lack of financial and technical support from local or national authorities, lead to stagnation profile of this type of farm, which actually concerns 21% of the goat farms.
- **Specialized farms**: (>100 heads). Those farms often have high means of production (workforce, capital, agricultural capacity) and are supported by the state through the subsidy of 500 ALL² per breeding goat³. They are mainly located within the perched plateau, where the trade opportunities are facilitated by the settled partnerships with goat-dealers who acknowledge the quality of the product. This type of farm may concern 26% of goat farms in Hasi region and the flock seems to grow, particularly in perched plateau.

Even if the Albanian Ministry of Agriculture is focused on specialized farms and shows an inclination to limit its support to all other farms under 100 heads, it seems to us that GI label building and collective action definitely need a broader approach and that a differential support has to be implemented for every Hasi goat farm, whatever the flock's size. Contrary to the "development *doxa*" in most of the Albanian specialised circles, specific technical, economic and marketing support had to be provided to subsistence and semi-specialized farms (especially in our GI case). Auto-consumption farm had also to be included in the global action plan in a way or another. All together they still represent 70% of the farming household and 40% of the production (Figure 2).

Farmers traditionally select this breed according to common criteria, creating a homogeneous and very recognizable breed. But there is no herd book –however necessary for the breed conservation–, that is why the action plan definitely includes the production of a herd book.

¹ PAZA (Protection Against Zoonotic Diseases) is a project financed by the European Union. To prepare a vaccination campaign against brucellosis throughout Albania 2011 a farm and flocks inventory was made in 2011.
² 500 ALL = 3.57 €.

³ Since 2005, the subsidy was given to farms over 50 heads, but in 2013 it has been limited to the biggest flocks (>100 heads) with a higher amount per head. Its objective is to encourage farmers to increase the number of goats in the farms with a view to support the intensification of the production.

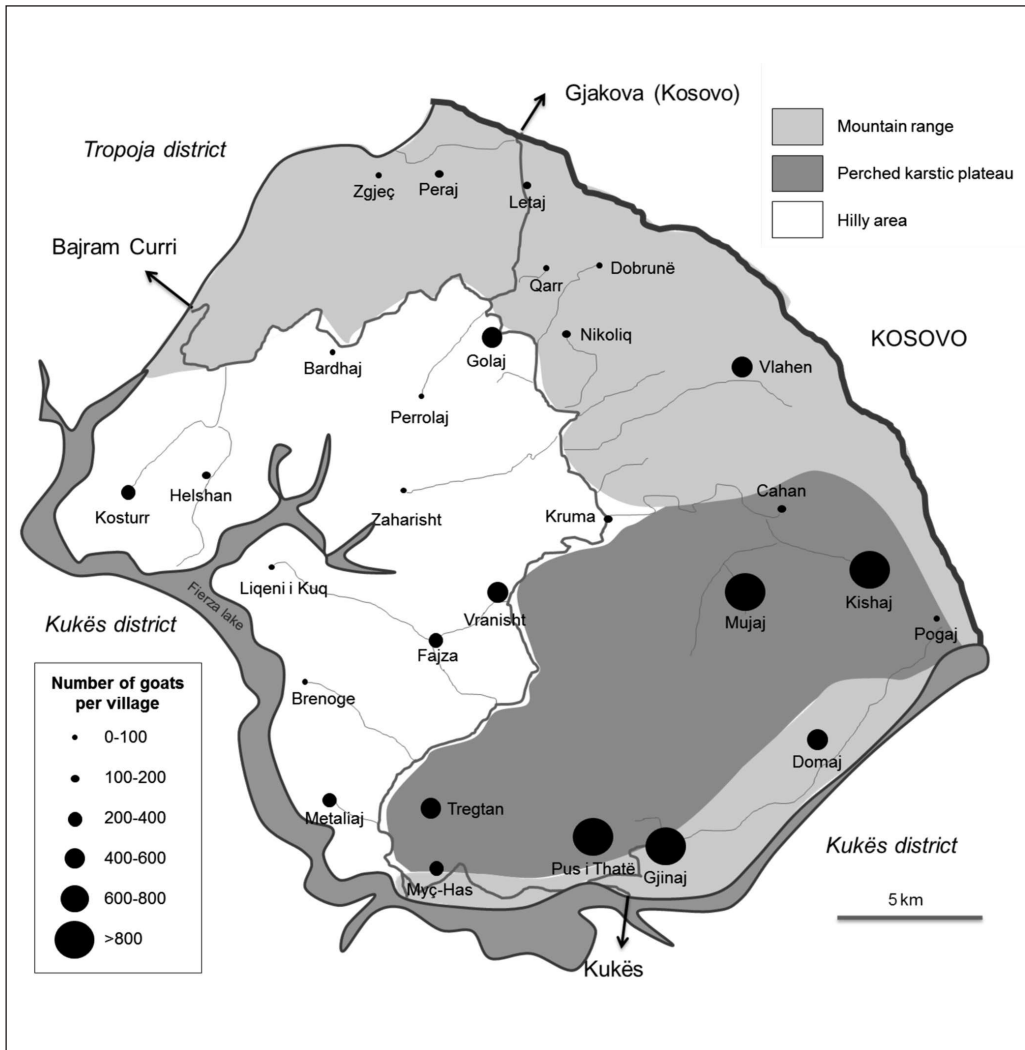


Fig. 1. Albanian Hasi territory: limits, geomorphology and number of goats per village in 2011.

Source: Garnier A. (2014). Based PAZA statistics (2011).

Size of the flock (number of goat)	<10	10-50	50-100	>100	Total
Number of goats	149 (2%)	1050 (11%)	2557 (28%)	5456 (59%)	9212 (100%)
Number of kids	142*	998*	2429*	5183*	8752*
Number of kids sold					min: 2200* max: 5700*

Fig. 2. Number of kids sold from the Hasi region. Source: Garnier A. (2014). Based on PAZA statistics and estimations from field inquiries.

* These figures have been estimated through average rate of reproduction and average rate of sale in the Hasi region.

IV– Products and Marketing

The Hasi goat is raised both for milk and meat, but only the meat of 3-6 months old kids has been selected for the GI as a differentiated product.

Milk and dairy products, being part of many traditional dishes, are highly consumed in Albania. Products from the Hasi region, often homemade processed with rudimentary transformation workshops are mainly auto-consumed or sold locally through short marketing channels (Medolli, 2013). The only dairy of the Hasi region is located on the perched plateau, even if it is still qualified as a mini-dairy; it produces sufficient quantities to sell its product at a regional scale. The lack of cold chain and steady roads, the absence of differentiation criterion relative to other Albanian dairy products do not enable long marketing channels, and only few farmers can market their products as far as Tirana or Durrës.

However, goat meat follows a different pattern. Because there is no cattle market in the Hasi region, goat kids, when they are not auto-consumed by relatives, are largely sold outside the Hasi region (Figure 3). They are sold mainly between May and September, when they are 3-6 months old.

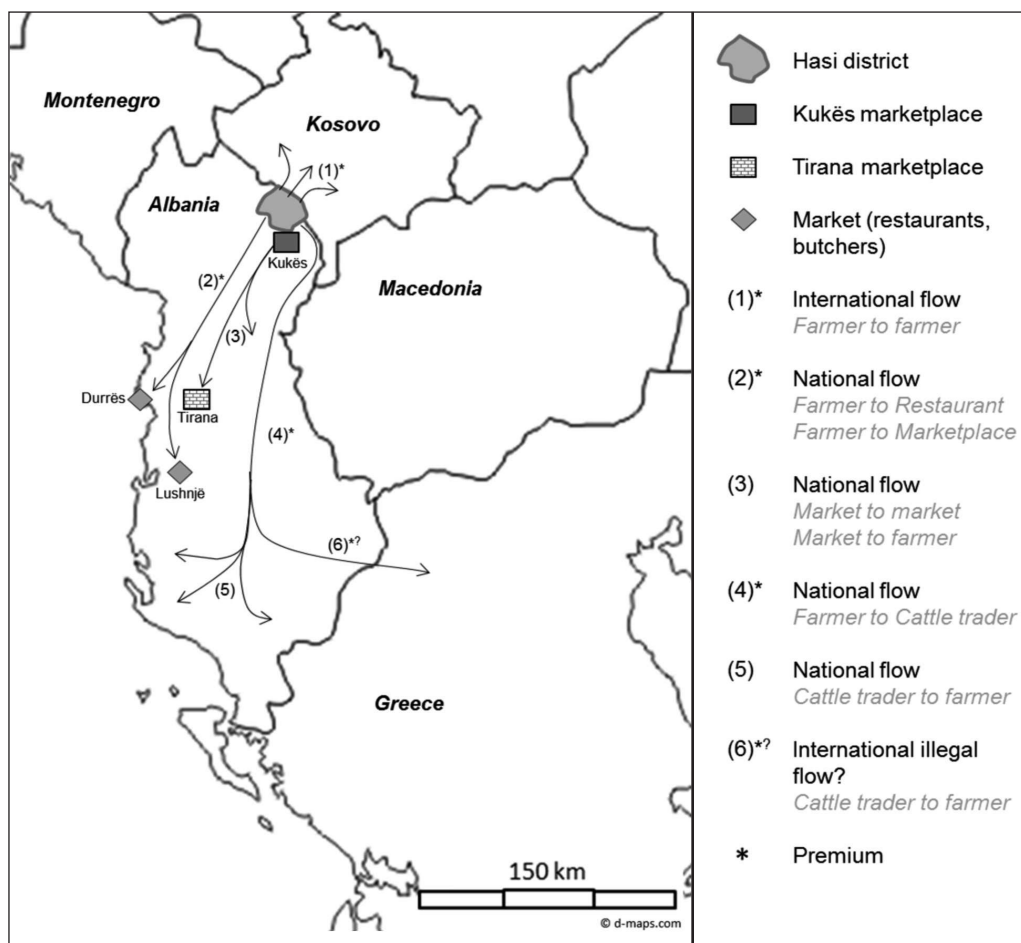


Fig. 3. Hasi goat kids flows. Source: Medolli B. (2014). Realised by Garnier A. and Medolli B. according to field inquiries (2013-2014).

Several types of marketing channels have been identified through our field-work (Medolli, 2014) (Figure 4):

- **Cattle-traders:** Hasi farmers appreciate this channel because it is a safe outlet and prices are suitable. Cattle-traders come directly to the Hasi region to bulk-buy goat kids, especially on the perched plateau (Figure 5), known for the quality of its pastures, and where there is a concentration of Hasi goat's farms with big flocks. Kids are resold on national or regional markets (mainly in Greece or Kosovo) for slaughter or farming.
- **Short marketing channels (restaurants, butchers, consumers):** Some farmers sell regularly to butchers, restaurants or consumers with which they have tacit contracts, locally around Hasi region or further, in Tirana or Durrës. It is often through this kind of channel that sale prices are most favorable for farmers; nevertheless restaurants and butchers often require providing durably a sufficient amount of kids, that essentially specialized farms have the ability. That is not the case for consumers who are of all kinds and accessible to all types of farms.
- **Livestock marketplaces:** Farmers who are not connected to cattle-traders or short marketing circuits are doomed to sell on the Kukës marketplace, where sale is unsure and prices are lowered while costs to go there are high.

	Cattle-traders	Butchers, restaurants	Consumers	Kukës Marketplace	Kosovo farmers
Who is concerned:					
Auto-consumption farms	+		++		+
Subsistence farms	++	+	++	+++	+++
Semi-specialized farms	++	+++	+	++	++
Specialized farms					
Price:					
Live weight (ALL/head)	9 000 - 10 000	9 500 - 12 500	9 000 - 15 000	8000 -10000	1 200 - 16 800
Slaughtered weight (ALL/kg)	750-800	750-800	(80 -120 €)
Conditions for farmers	- Perched plateau - Big flock - Pure Hasi goat breed	- Big flock - Social or family connections - Pure Hasi goat breed	- Social or family connections	- To be near the market place or money to pay the transportation	- Big flock - Pure Hasi goat breed
Constraints	- No negotiation power (prices determined by the trader)	- Transportation costs	- Only retail	- Transportation and entrance costs - Unsure market - Concurrence with other goat breeds - Prices volatility	- Only wholesale

Fig. 4. Detail of each marketing channel for Hasi goat kids. Source: realised by Garnier A. and Medolli B. according to field inquiries (2013-2014).

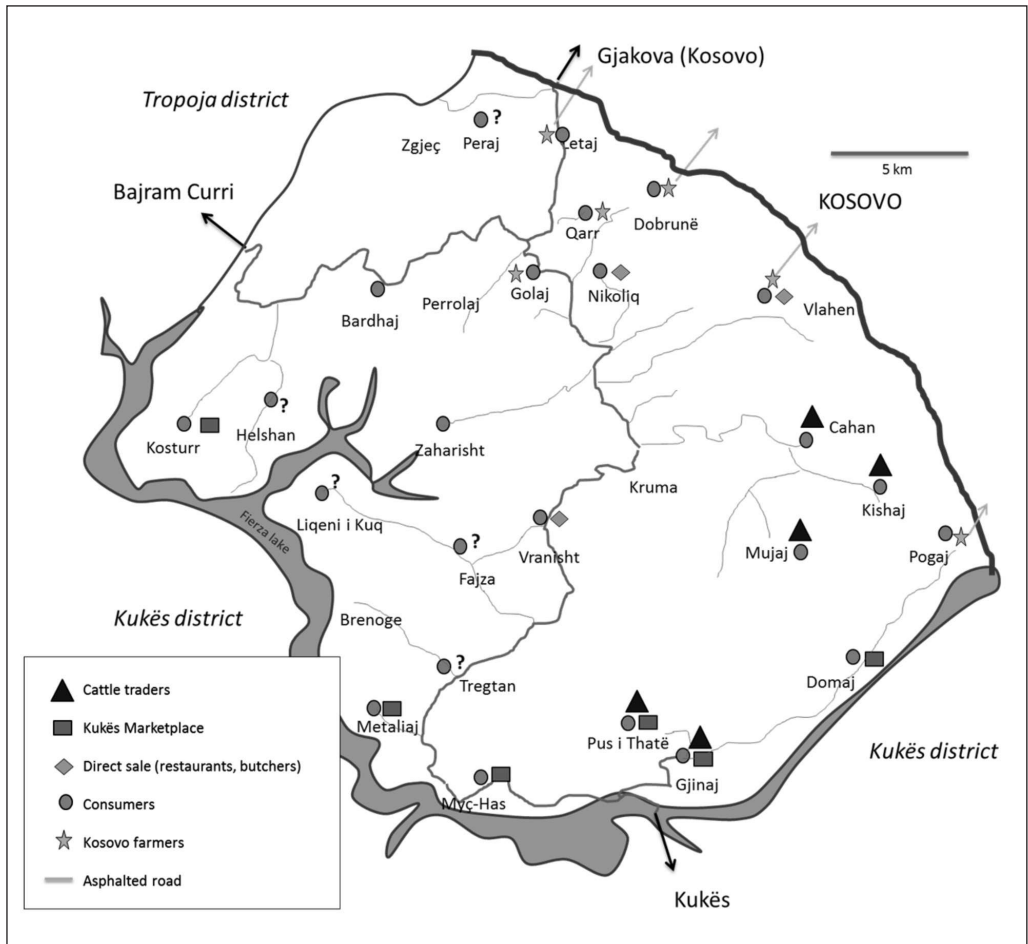


Fig. 5. Trends of kid marketing strategies for each village in the Hasi region. Source: Garnier A. (2014). Realised by Garnier A. and Medolli B. according to field inquiries (2013-2014).

- **Kosovo’s farmers:** Last but not least, another way of marketing kids is in direction of close Kosovo, where more and more farmers are starting to breed Hasi goat, whose meat begins to be appreciated in the country. Farmers can sell a lot of kids in one time, with good price due to the difference on currencies (Kosovo use €).

Slaughter for Hasi kids is done at the end of the marketing channel, rarely on authorized slaughterhouse, but rather informally by butchers, restaurants or consumers themselves. The actors of the GI building think about the potential restoration of the unused Hasi slaughterhouse and the investment on a refrigerated truck.

Goat meat, roasted or grilled, is well-liked in Albania. Hasi kid goat has a specific well establish consumer reputation in the country, and benefit from a price premium compared with kids from other breeds. While specialized farms dealing with cattle-traders or short marketing channels can take advantage of the price premium, most of the time other types of farms don’t have the possibility to valorize the breed so much. Cattle traders are able to pay a kid from pure Hasi breed more than

a kid from another breed, and butchers, restaurants or consumers also search for kid goats of Hasi breed preferentially. This premium doesn't occur on the marketplace of Kukës where Hasi goat kids are sold at almost the same price than other breeds.

Premium is a basic condition to build a GI. The one acknowledge by the market is a good starting point for a pioneer action in Albania, based on meat (with broader implications on the overall value chains of breeding activity). To consolidate this premium and the GI a sound meat traceability system had to be invented (herd book, genetic improvement, electronic registration, etc.). Strategically cattle traders have to be involved in the GI cluster. Premium enhancement and repartition along the value chain had to be defined and discussed by this same GI cluster (along with value chain support action asked to the Ministry of agriculture and agencies). Targeted marketing actions/events are scheduled in the next phase of the program.

V – Pastoral natural resources

Pastoral system in the Hasi region is not only based on pastures offered by mountainsides, uncultivated lands and meadows, but also on the use of forest resources. By covering more than half of the Hasi territory (Agolli, 2003), with almost three-quarters of oaks and a lot of beeches (according to our estimations), forests constitute a significant pastoral resource: vegetation cover under high forests, edible leaves on low forests and scrublands. Sinkholes on the perched plateau and fields on the other areas of the territory, produce a little part of animal feeding, being the third element that composes the agro-silvo-pastoral system.

Most of the pastoral areas are commons, hence the necessity of a user's dialogue. The latter already exists, but it is strengthened by the collective action around a shared project. For instance the first step of the book of requirements building was a real moment of discussion about pastoral practices and the management of commons.

Feeding strategy is, in the Hasi region, mainly based on natural forage resources such as low oak forests, scrublands and pastures. Some flocks move to summer pastures during few months, especially on the Pashtrikut Mount, but this local transhumance is less and less done. During the harshest part of winter, animals are kept indoors and fed with dried oak leafs collected during summer and autumn, hay harvested in rich pastures as well as small quantities of cereals produced on the farms or purchased in the market. Kidding period is in February-March, and goat kids come out on the pastures with their mother from May.

This kind of feeding system not only provides outstanding quality products, but it also plays an essential role for the environment. Grazing preserves open pastoral habitats with often a high level of biodiversity, and it limits flammable undergrowth by reducing bush encroachment. Agro-pastoral practices in the Hasi region are though at the origin of a particular and outstanding landscape. Scrubland and low forests are areas with a low agricultural production potential, and livestock grazing is therefore producing strong positive environmental externalities for such marginal and low productive areas. Livestock is the only way to valorize those ligneous resources, converting them into foods products and substantial farm incomes.

There is no doubt that supporting pastoral livestock breeding is a way of maintaining an agro-ecosystem which favors biodiversity and landscape ecology. However, it is important to anticipate the effects induced by the introduction of the GI, including the possibility of an increase in the goat population. This increase could be beneficial if it maintains a diverse environment and open areas. On the contrary, it could be detrimental if it results in overgrazing and impairing pasture composition and quality, which is already the case in some areas near to villages. Targeting a balance for suitable pasture carrying capacity implies a thorough study of pastoral practices.

For these reasons, the project will shortly implement, in a new phase, an eco-pastoral diagnosis produced by a Life+ program⁴. A share diagnosis between a pastoralist (livestock specialist), a naturalist and a farmer is the basic principle of this method, which aims to produce, at the farm and pastoral unit levels, an optimization (both environmental and economic) of the feeding strategy. Elements stem from this diagnosis might be integrated into the GI specification and/or for the concept of the value chain support actions.

VI – Conclusions

Geographical Indication building is a twofold process that has to combine collective action and knowledge-based product specification, if it wants to improve farming socio-economic viability while enhancing environmental efficiency of the “high nature value” of such silvo-pastoral systems. In the Hasi goat case, the collective action (creation of the cluster, shared diagnosis on the situation and its possible improvement, definition of an action plan, etc.) has been stimulated by the work of an Albanian NGO. Intimately bundled with this process of collective action, the knowledge-based elements have been built by the “reflexive pole” of the project, playing a role of “knowledge broker”. This function is decisive to bridge the gap between practical and analytical aspects of the GI building process, as a condition for its efficiency.

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⁴ European Life+ project implemented by the « Conservatoire d'Espaces Naturels – Languedoc-Roussillon ». <http://www.lifemilouv.org>

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