

## Article

# Cultural Sustainability from the Local Perspective: The Example of Transhumance in South Tyrol

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**Abstract:** This paper seeks to contribute to a better understanding of cultural sustainability in mountain regions by offering perspectives for sustainable governance at the intersection of intangible cultural heritage preservation and local tourism development. For this purpose, the influence of tourism on intangible cultural heritage was studied in the context of the practice of transhumance, an ancient form of pastoralism. This paper focuses on the case of South Tyrol, Italy, a touristically highly developed region where cross-border transhumance was granted intangible cultural heritage status by UNESCO in 2019. Adopting a qualitative approach, 13 interviews were conducted with cattle and sheep farmers, cultural practitioners, and experts as well as tourism representatives. Highlighting the benefits of including culture in the discussion about sustainability, the paper seeks to inform local governance measures for enhanced cultural heritage preservation and sustainable tourism.

**Keywords:** cultural sustainability; intangible cultural heritage; governance; mountain areas; tourism; pastoralism; transhumance; Alps



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## 1. Introduction

Sustainability has become one of the main concerns and challenges for humankind. The climate crisis, the loss of biodiversity, and the deterioration of the environment demonstrate that human impact has reached the bearable limits of the planet [1]. As these effects concern all aspects of individual and collective life, attempts have been made to include culture into the framework of ecological, social, and economic sustainability, and to foster culture-sensitive governance strategies [2,3].

However, the conceptual conjunctions between culture and sustainability are scattered in many ways and remain a work in progress [3]. In fact, the notion of cultural sustainability has been shaped and elaborated in different manners: first, by seeking to differentiate cultural and social sustainability on a theoretical basis [2]; second, by investigating the relation between sustainability and local—and thus culturally specific—development; third, by acknowledging the role of culture for the collective wellbeing of people. Moreover, the value of cultural diversity and the importance of preserving cultural expressions have been highlighted by the UN [4]. Finally, re-articulating the framework of ecological, social, and economic sustainability by integrating culture as a fundamental element has resulted in a fruitful quest within the sustainability discourse [5].

Overall, the discourse between culture and sustainability has underpinned different thematic foci. In Asian cities, for instance, the issue emerged particularly in the field of urbanism, where Western city planning models did not suit the cultural habits and needs of locals, in contrast to Latin America, where urban planning has been reconciled with indigenous cultural knowledge as well as notions of balance and equilibrium between humans and nature. In developed countries, the greatest emphasis has been put on local governance as New Zealand's Government Act of 2002 exemplifies. In fact, culture has been integrated into New Zealand's sustainable wellbeing framework. Moreover, strategies

for cultural heritage preservation and the related importance for collective identities have also been subjects of debate in regional development studies [6].

At the intersection of cultural heritage preservation, local development, and collective wellbeing, cultural sustainability also needs to be considered in relation to tourism. The rising numbers in global tourism [7], and especially cultural tourism [8], have become critical trends that are at times considered beneficial for the preservation of cultural heritage [9] but can also be seen as a threat to the preservation of culturally specific ways of life [3]. In this context, the question of the impact of tourism on cultural traditions, practices, and knowledge systems needs to be addressed: does tourist mobility influence traditions, customs, and local dynamics, and what is the effect of tourist visitors on the way these traditions are lived by the local population? Moreover, and most importantly, what governance measures are needed to guarantee cultural sustainability?

To address these questions, we carried out a case study of transhumance in South Tyrol. This Alpine tradition is an ancient form of pastoralism also practiced in several regions around the world. Presenting the results in this paper, we aim to provide a scientific basis for government strategies for the preservation of cultural heritage and the development of sustainable local tourism. Furthermore, the case-specific insights intend to demonstrate the benefits of a thoroughly holistic approach to sustainability that includes culture as one of its fundamental pillars. Before diving into the discussion about cultural sustainability, we first clarify our use of the notions of culture and sustainability.

### 1.1. Culture, Cultural Heritage, and Its Expression

Philosophically and anthropologically speaking, culture can be described very broadly in demarcation to non-human nature, delineating the wholeness of material, intellectual, emotional, or spiritual aspects that characterize the human being. However, specific human societies differ in the way they are organized, generating specific forms of value systems, moral attitudes, knowledge production, norms, and ways of living [10].

A narrower definition of culture, however, focuses on both material and immaterial cultural expressions created and performed by humans. These include cultural and creative activities such as the arts as well as cultural heritage. Cultural heritage carries a legacy inherited from past generations which can be significant for the identity of a given society or group [11]. According to UNESCO, cultural heritage includes, on the one hand, tangible cultural heritage such as buildings and monuments, literature, artifacts, and art works, and, on the other hand, intangible heritage such as traditions, crafts, language and oral traditions, social practices, and traditional knowledge [12,13]. In this context, the importance of the free expression and experience of the manifold and diverse forms of culture is particularly stressed in Agenda 21 for Culture, which refers to culture as a human right. All individuals and collectivities should indeed be able to fully benefit from culture in order to satisfy their “*intellectual, emotional, moral, and spiritual existence*” [14] (p. 4). In this sense, and because cultural expression is intrinsically connected to being human, the preservation of diverse cultural expressions and heritage becomes extremely important [14]. Furthermore, the Florence declaration on Heritage and Landscape as Human Values goes a step further by thinking of natural and cultural heritage together, overcoming the strict culture–nature divide and integrating a biocultural understanding of conservation and heritage [15].

### 1.2. Sustainability and Culture

As to the notion of sustainability, the concept relies on the idea of a profound interconnectedness between the ecological, the social, and the economic dimensions of human life on planet Earth and seeks to re-embed human behavior into an ecologically responsible paradigm of action, requiring different forms of interaction with other non-human species and nature. A thoroughly sustainable system needs to secure the continuity of the ecosystem as well as the survival of all living species, including humanity, as well as to guarantee the satisfaction of basic needs for present and future generations. Sustainability is therefore mostly conceived in a threefold manner: it consists of the ecological, the social,

and the economic dimensions, sometimes referred to as “pillars”. While the first concerns the preservation of the ecosystem, social sustainability refers to a good and worthy life for all people, and economic sustainability seeks to maintain living standards, preserve natural, social, and human capital, and create adequate models of production and distribution of goods [16].

This three-pillar model of sustainability can, however, be extended by an additional dimension: the cultural [2,17–19]. In this regard, culture may play different roles as Dessein et al. [20] argue: culture in sustainable development promotes culture as an additional pillar of sustainability; culture for sustainable development foresees an instrumental role of culture for the enhancement of the social, economic, and ecological goals, while culture as sustainable development is framed in terms of a world view, thus providing a cognitive and behavioral basis for the achievement of sustainable goals [20].

In fact, culture understood in the very broad sense of the term may constitute the groundwork for all forms of sustainability as it represents a whole philosophical worldview that informs and shapes the relations between humans, between humans and other species, as well as between humans and the natural environment [21]. The addition of culture to the model of sustainability thus seeks to broaden its conceptual reach towards a more holistic model of sustainability as stressed also by the United Nations during the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 [22]. In this context, culture can function as the framing element holding the social, economic, and ecological aspects together without losing its own intrinsic value. Sabatini argues that “[a]culturally sustainable development is the only notion properly able to encompass all the meanings of culture and all its complex interactions with the social, economic, and environmental dimensions of human life” [19] (p. 39). Holistic approaches like these are not new and can be found in ancient traditional conceptions of indigenous people such as, for instance, the medicine wheel of North American aboriginals used to assess the quality of life and wellbeing, or the dharma-chakra, the wheel of righteousness in Buddhist spirituality. Based on such traditional frameworks, Nepal has defined sustainability as the social, economic, and ecological equilibrium that needs to be mediated and balanced through culture, embedding sustainable ways of life into a broader context of meaning [23]. A culture of sustainability is therefore a mindset, knowledge production, and a value system that many scholars plead for in light of the rising dangers emerging from the looming climate crisis and ongoing environmental degradation [24].

Adopting the narrower notion of culture, the three-pillar model of sustainability can be expanded by an additional cultural pillar which includes concerns about the preservation of cultural diversity [21]. Regarding cultural heritage, the safeguarding of material and immaterial heritage is essential because it is considered a form of “*cultural capital that has been inherited from previous generations and can be handed onto future generations*” [3] (p. 216). Culture is addressed in this sense, especially regarding the intergenerational concept of preservation, in the United Nation’s Agenda 2030 for Sustainability. In fact, the promotion of cultural diversity and intercultural exchange is mentioned in the introduction while a culture of sustainability—understood in the broad sense of the term—is mentioned in SDG 4 on education (target 4.7). Moreover, SDG 11 on urbanism mentions both cultural and natural heritage preservation. Finally, goal 8 (sustainable economic growth) and goal 12 (sustainable consumption and production patterns) refer to the necessity of putting in place “*policies to promote sustainable tourism, through local culture and products, and the need to develop suitable monitoring tools in this area*” [25] (p. 13).

Summing up, cultural heritage is believed to be strongly intertwined with landscapes, places, and collective identities, embodying traditional values and specific ways of social organization from the past while undergoing constant processes of change. Cultural heritage can be considered as a means for creating cohesion among people and even fostering social integration if the historical local knowledge is openly shared. However, for culture to be sustainable, active preservation strategies are fundamental for pursuing the collective endeavor of heritage conservation. Several global trends, including modern, new, or different ways of living, can be regarded as threats to cultural heritage [3]. Among

these perceived threats are tourism and human mobility, which will be discussed in the following section.

### 1.3. Tourism and Cultural Heritage

Heritage plays a substantial role in local regional development as it attracts cultural industries as well as tourist flows. Cultural tourism implies tourists' active will to experience and learn about the cultural heritage of a society by consuming attractions or products that can be considered intellectually, emotionally, materially, or spiritually specific. Thereby, cultural tourism extends to all aspects of tangible and intangible culture, including heritage, creative industries, traditions, and folklore, as well as to lifestyles and value systems [25]. Cultural tourism is expected to substantially grow in the coming years and is increasingly becoming a *"mass market, broadening its concept beyond sites and monuments, and towards creativity, lifestyles, traditions, and everyday culture"* [7] (p. 1). Indeed, cultural tourism has been promoted both by international organizations as a motor for economic development and intercultural exchange, and a means to foster the preservation of cultural heritage [8].

Tourism is known for its beneficial multiplier effect thanks to the involvement of many economic sectors contributing to the development of infrastructures, services, and transport. Thus, it has both a direct and an indirect impact on cultural heritage: heritage can be regarded as a resource for tourism bringing economic value to the tourist destination and increasing the monetary value of the heritage itself so that both the financial means and the public interest to preserve heritage are secured [26]. Moreover, social support for heritage preservation is expected to increase as the local quality of life improves thanks to developments in infrastructure, security, and the quality of services. Finally, tourism may play a beneficial role in the sense of local identity and cultural pride because of the interest tourists show in the local cultural characteristics. In addition, cultural tourism contributes to transformative experiences for tourists and facilitates intercultural dialogue and comprehension [27]. Several case studies have shown that not only tangible attractions, but also intangible cultural tourism can be important resources in traditionally less developed countries [9,28,29].

Nevertheless, several negative effects of tourism flows cannot be ignored. One must consider the environmental deterioration through unsustainable mass mobility or extensive resource consumption, or the negative economic effects related to the steering of local economic activity towards solely tourist-relevant products and services. Moreover, tourism may provoke changes in demographic and social structures as well as in land and soil use practices [26]. Negative effects of tourism have also been shown in relation to culture and cultural heritage. Indeed, tourism and cultural heritage can be said to have a *"love-hate relationship"* [30]. First, intangible cultural heritage such as traditional crafts, traditions, practices, and folklore are inextricably bound to the local environment and consequently very sensitive to any changes or restructuring processes occurring in the landscape [14]. For this reason, *"external interventions in local development, such as modern technology, development projects, or new livelihoods and activities such as tourism, are often seen as threat"* [3] (p. 218). Moreover, the homogenization and commercialization of culture as well as the loss of tradition and authenticity have been hugely debated [27]. In fact, the commodification of culture through tourism is decried as it is supposed to *"reduce the rituals and handicrafts for consumption, hiding the social relations that contribute to the production of commodities, such as in advertising"* [3] (p. 218). In addition, the *"souvenirization"* and *"touristification"* of material culture shows how economies and societies respond unilaterally to the common tourist imagination of what is typical, local, or traditional [31]. Issues of human rights, self-governance, identity, and control of land may sharply contrast with tourist products or tourist behavior [32,33] and have even been defined as new forms of colonialism, especially when indigenous communities are involved [34]. Critical voices also highlight a rising gap in the distribution of wealth generated from intangible cultural heritage tourism in rural or indigenous communities. As intangible cultural heritage cannot be easily protected by copyright, it is often appropriated by profit-oriented tourism organizations while little

of the generated wealth benefits locals who are “*the actual creators and owners of the local culture*”, as claimed by George [35] (p. 376), thus emphasizing the controversial notion of “cultural appropriation”. These aspects lead, moreover, to the animated debate about “authenticity” of cultural heritage in relation to touristic commercialization. Although the discussion about authenticity exceeds the scope of this paper, it should be mentioned that authenticity requires profound tolerance for cultural diversity as well as local community participation and representation in order to guarantee the emotional resonance of the collective identity of a people [36].

#### 1.4. Governance of Tourism for Cultural Sustainability

In light of these considerations, the need to assess the “carrying capacity of tourism” [30] (p. 302) arises, requiring regulation and control of tourism flows through multidimensional policy strategies. In fact, “governance related to safeguarding, protecting and managing cultural heritage sites within tourist destinations requires a holistic set of integrated plans, policies, regulations and practices that embrace but go beyond conservation planning” [15] (p. 4). Ciminaghi and Mussini plead for an active tourism governance that involves different stakeholders constantly monitoring and assessing the environmental, social, economic, and cultural effects of cultural tourism on the destination. The UNWTO guidelines for intangible cultural heritage tourism are another instrument that tries to softly steer and regulate cultural tourism. In the context of these governance instruments, the need to involve local key players and create partnerships has been stressed, as well as the necessity of balancing the commodification of intangible heritage. Communicating with local communities in order to set limits for touristic development and interference with the environment seems highly desirable as the negotiation about “local space versus tourist space” should be based on participatory and bottom-up approaches. Furthermore, not only the entertainment aspects of intangible cultural heritage should be offered to tourists but also their educational value in order to spread awareness and knowledge about local cultures and their specific and precious heritage [28]. Sustainability certification systems such as the GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) and INSTO (International network of sustainable tourism observatories) have recently also started including cultural indicators.

Generally speaking, culture is currently rarely considered in frameworks for tourism management or local policy development [20]. However, cultural tourism is sometimes considered an ideal strategy to counter mass tourism and seasonality and is therefore promoted [37]. Informal governance strategies such as Codes of Conduct have been increasingly adopted in many tourist destinations that offer rich and interesting cultural or natural heritage hotspots. Codes of Conduct are soft approaches to visitor management, based on voluntary action and self-regulatory behavior. Having a strong educational component, they intend to raise tourists’ awareness about cultural and historical characteristics and seek to foster shared responsibility based on ethical values [38–40]. Particular attention is dedicated to intangible cultural heritage, which seems to be threatened on several levels. How does tourism influence intangible cultural heritage and how does the local population deal with cultural tourism? The case study conducted on the example of transhumance in South Tyrol investigates these questions.

#### 1.5. Case Study

The Autonomous Province of Bolzano/Bozen, South Tyrol, is Italy’s most northern province, located in the middle of the Alps and characterized not only by its geographical but also by its cultural and historical closeness to the bordering Germanophone countries. In fact, German is spoken by roughly 70% of the population, while 25% speak Italian and roughly 5% speak Ladin, an ancient Rhaeto-Romanic language [41]. The province is well-known as a tourist destination mostly because of its landscapes and recreational activities but also because of its specific culture and heritage [42]. Cultural heritage protection in South Tyrol is carried out both by local associations and by a provincial platform (see [43]), scientifically documenting and researching local cultural heritage. A large-scale



cataloguing process has been digitally documenting cultural heritage since 2003 [44], and culture-specific heritage studies have been conducted in the contexts of the Ladin-speaking minority (see [45]) and of specific valleys such as Venosta-Vinschgau [46]. The province has a 200-year tourism history reaching dynamic growth rates from the 1960s up to the present day [47]. Tourism plays a major role in South Tyrol's economy, contributing to 11.2% of the local GDP in 2018 with direct effects only [48]. In 2019, more than 7.7 million tourist arrivals and 33.7 million overnight stays were registered in South Tyrol. The local tourism destination management is organized by IDM South Tyrol (abbreviation for innovation, development, and marketing), with three regional management organizations enforcing the sustainable and innovative vision of the region by stating culture as one of the main characteristics of South Tyrol. However, while the relationship of tourism and heritage has been critically assessed by a few studies focusing on landscape [49] or language [50], the present case study is the first to address cultural sustainability of immaterial cultural heritage in light of the growing touristic development in the region.

The case study presented in the context of this paper focuses on transhumance—the seasonal movement of livestock from one region to another for climatic reasons. Early instances of transhumance can be traced back approximately 6000 years as archeological findings indicate that transhumance was practiced in South Tyrol in the late Bronze Age [51–54]. This type of nomadism has been used all over the world, in the Americas, western Asia, and in Europe, especially in the Mediterranean regions. The core principle of transhumance has remained similar over time with few cultural and technological variations observable between the regions. Transhumance consists of taking advantage of pastures located in different climatic zones to ensure year-round grazing without having to resort to the necessity of stabling the animals. One can distinguish between horizontal transhumance practiced in plain regions and vertical transhumance practiced in mountainous areas. Transhumance in the Alps, in South Tyrol, is vertical, meaning that during the warmer season, the livestock remains in summer mountain pastures called “Almen” and is then returned to the farms for the cold season. This allows animals to feed on the nutrient-rich grasslands in the mountains, freeing space in the valleys for other rural activities. Every year, once in spring and again in autumn (exact dates vary according to the weather), thousands of animals are transferred on fixed routes between one region and another. These routes have been used by shepherds for centuries. The transfer is quite a challenge as it sometimes leads the animals and their herdsman across snowy passes and steep rocky areas, always exposed to the rough mountain weather. It is therefore essential for shepherds to have profound knowledge of the environment as they must know the paths across the glaciers, they must handle fearful animals, and they must be attentive to the weather as well as to dangers from predators. Each autumn, a successful summer pasture is celebrated in the valleys, not only by the shepherds and farmers, but also by their families and the entire village. In recent years, visitors and tourists from afar have increasingly started taking part in the celebrations.

To date, this nomadic grazing tradition contributes substantially to the ecological balance in the respective regions. Transhumance is one of the most efficient and sustainable livestock farming systems in terms of land management. Furthermore, it has had a lasting historic influence on economic, social, ethical, and cultural aspects of life in Alpine regions. Transhumance reinforces the bond between nature and humans, and it keeps alive a set of traditional practices, knowledge, and crafting skills such as shearing, songs, dances, tales, and anecdotes. That is why in 2019 the centuries-old tradition was included in the UNESCO Representative List of Intangible Cultural Heritage [55].

Existing literature shows that most studies on transhumance focus on a description of the practice in different countries. Bunce et al. [56] and Liechti and Biber [57] give good overviews of the specificities from all around the world. O'Flanagan et al. [58] go into detail into transhumance as practiced in the Ebro valley in Spain, not only describing the custom but also delving deeper into the ecological and cultural implications transhumance has on the valley and its inhabitants. Cox et al. [59] similarly focus on transhumance in a specific region, namely the central Italian region of Abruzzo. They look at this custom from an

agrotourism perspective and describe how marketing and publicity have a positive effect on the preservation of transhumance in the region. The connection between transhumance and tourism was also taken up at the IPAC Symposium in Quebec (CAN) where Amat-Montesinos [60] gave an overview of the historical development of transhumance in Spain and also talked about how touristic interest in transhumance in Spain has increased in recent years. In another study about transhumance in the Himalayas, it was underlined that due to increased touristic activities, many have reduced their herds or even abandoned transhumance to focus more on tourism [60]. All these examples show that tourism can have (and has) an effect on transhumance. It seems therefore desirable to think about a sustainable and responsible way to link them. Therefore, this paper takes a look at transhumance in the Italian region of South Tyrol and analyzes the effects of tourism on the custom, in particular on the associated festivities in autumn.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study focuses on two South Tyrolean municipalities: Wolkenstein-Selva di Val Gardena and Schnals-Senales. In both municipalities transhumance is still practiced to this day and the return of the animals is still celebrated with festivities. These festivities happen at local fairgrounds and usually offer live music, food and drink, and space to either sit or observe the herds. Many local traditional associations take an active part in organizing and accompanying the festivities. Wolkenstein-Selva di Val Gardena is a small town with 2560 inhabitants in the east of the province of South Tyrol, in the Gardena valley [61]. Despite its small size, the municipality is one of the touristic centers in South Tyrol with 246,470 arrivals and 1,294,036 overnight stays in 2019. This is largely due to its beautiful landscape as it lies in the middle of the Dolomites. Tourists and hotels shape the municipality's landscape in summer when people hike, as well as in winter, as the valley offers many possibilities for skiing.

The other municipality this study focuses on is located in the western part of the province. Schnals-Senales is a side valley of the Venosta valley and has 1278 inhabitants [62]. With 74,412 arrivals and 326,406 overnight stays in 2019, it is not as touristically developed as Wolkenstein-Selva di Val Gardena [61]. The municipality largely relies on agriculture, with tourism only playing a secondary role. While in Wolkenstein-Selva di Val Gardena transhumance concerns mainly cattle, in Schnals-Senales, mainly sheep and goats are central.

For each municipality, we identified local stakeholders who are connected to transhumance or the festivities around it. A snowball system was used after an initial contact was established to recruit interviewees from each area. In total, 13 interviews were conducted between August and September 2020 with important stakeholders from the fields of culture, agriculture, and tourism (see Table 1). Six interviews were conducted with representatives from Wolkenstein-Selva di Val Gardena and seven with stakeholders from Schnals-Senales. The following table gives an overview of the interviewees.

**Table 1.** Overview of interview participants.

Interviewee	Field of Expertise	Municipality	Gender
1	Tourism	Schnals-Senales	M
2	Culture	Wolkenstein-Selva di Val Gardena	M
3	Agriculture	Wolkenstein-Selva di Val Gardena	M
4	Agriculture	Schnals-Senales	F

Table 1. Cont.

Interviewee	Field of Expertise	Municipality	Gender
5	Culture	Schnals-Senales	F
6	Culture	Schnals-Senales	F
7	Agriculture	Schnals-Senales	M
8	Culture	Schnals-Senales	F
9	Culture	Wolkenstein-Selva di Val Gardena	F
10	Tourism	Wolkenstein-Selva di Val Gardena	F
11	Culture	Wolkenstein-Selva di Val Gardena	M
12	Agriculture	Wolkenstein-Selva di Val Gardena	F
13	Tourism	Schnals-Senales	M

The intention was to find out if and how tourism and increasing numbers of visitors impact the local practice of transhumance, with a particular focus on the drive from the mountain pastures in late autumn. An interview guideline was created and tested before being applied. The interviews were conducted with online tools such as Microsoft Teams and Skype. They were recorded with the agreement of the interviewees, transcribed in their entirety, coded, and analyzed using the software GABEK. GABEK is a tool for “Holistic Management of Complexity” and is particularly suitable as an analysis method when open, unstructured data material is available [63].

### 3. Results

People not directly involved mostly know of transhumance because of the festivities that follow the successful ending of the transfer. Especially for tourists, this is the occasion to learn about the tradition and come into contact with the farmers and shepherds. For this reason, analyzing the homecoming from summer pastures and the following festivity is a useful way to explore its impact on culture and tourism. The results of the interviews we carried out are presented in this section. Before talking about the festivities, interviewees shared their thoughts on the custom itself. Overwhelmingly, transhumance was seen as “*a very important event*”. Farmers in particular referred more to the actual practice itself and underlined the traditional importance it had for their ancestors. In the past, the South Tyrolean population was composed mainly of farmers. Therefore, animal husbandry was one of the most important sources of income: “*This is important not only for the farmers but also for the community itself*”, stated one interviewee, for instance.

Historically, the festivities at the end of a transhumance were celebrated only within the farming and shepherd community. The shepherds or cowherds brought the animals back from the summer meadows and returned the animals to their respective owners. This was accompanied by casual, informal celebrations. However, in recent years and with the increase of tourism in the Schnals Valley and Wolkenstein, the celebration has expanded both in size and attendance, and has turned into a touristic event. Although locals continue to attend the festivities, most interviewees agreed that tourists were the main reason for the rapid growth of the event in both valleys.

These developments have had effects on the perceived authenticity of the transhumance celebration by local stakeholders. Many respondents agreed that the festivities around transhumance have been de-linked from the tradition itself as well as from the local community. For example, some stated that modern music and non-local food is now served at the event, while others expressed their displeasure about the fact that the celebration has gained much more importance than the practice itself. One interviewee summed it up this



way: *“Well, I would say that this is more, if I may use the word, a Punch and Judy show, it’s not really an Almabtrieb [bringing the cows down from mountain pastures] in the real sense.”*

Tourists seem very interested in the festivities following the transhumance practice, both in Wolkenstein and in Schnals. On the one hand, most respondents agreed that it is nice to see tourists admiring the farmers and shepherds or cowherds at work: visible and *“certainly authentic is the pride of the mountain farmers who show their animals, and quasi showcase them”*. Indeed, the crowning of the “best cow” with a floral wreath is mentioned as a source of pride. On the other hand, interviewees from the agricultural and cultural sector tended to underline the importance of preserving the authenticity of the custom. In their opinion, the festivities should not mainly cater to touristic interests. Although it is true that the presence of tourists provides an opportunity to earn some extra income for farmers, the tradition itself should not “suffer” because of that the high touristic presence. Some interviewees stated that local stakeholders, mainly shepherds and farmers, are already aware of this problem and that a certain “countermovement” is underway, focusing on what is truly local such as local food, traditional music, etc.: *“The most important event in terms of tradition and customs is the transhumance. This is lived by the entire population. This is nothing staged, only [in earlier days] it was so that it catered to mass tourism.”*

Talking about transhumance and its challenges, one respondent pointed at the decline of farmers practicing transhumance with actual numbers: *“So in the Niedertal [Side-valley in Schnals] there are also goats, there must be about 300 goats and then something like 1500 sheep. Yes, it has decreased a little. Niedertal certainly once had about 2000 sheep.”* All interviewees agreed that efforts must be made to keep the tradition alive, also for future generations. They observed an increased interest in the matter as many cultural and agricultural associations are concerned with preserving old farming practices as well as the social and cultural aspects connected to them. Interviewees observed this interest especially among young people: *“Where many young ones are also active, that is the sheep breeding association, goat breeding association [ . . . ] this is faring quite well at the moment.”* Most respondents expressed a positive vision for the future of transhumance in South Tyrol. Economic feasibility was mentioned as a crucial factor. Some even stated that without additional EU subsidies, this form of animal husbandry would not be feasible anymore: *“At the moment, the financial incentive is certainly decisive.”* Sideline earnings, often gained through tourism, are very important. Another factor is the enormous workload connected to transhumance which many farmers and shepherds today do not want to take upon themselves anymore: *“[I]t is partly also associated with a lot of work and effort. And if you don’t have the option of somehow earning a little extra income [ . . . ]. As long as this works, one will also still be able to maintain these old customs somehow”*. Natural challenges, such as wolves and bears, are other issues that were mentioned by the interviewees.

The effects of increased tourism on transhumance influences cultural heritage as a whole, both in a negative as well as in a positive way. The interviewees observed increasing interest in local culture both by the population and among tourists. As mentioned in the paragraphs above, cultural associations have a growing number of members who actively partake in the activities. Many of these associations are engaged in the field of cultural heritage such as, for example, the “Trachtenverein”: *“[T]here is hardly a family where someone is not in an association. The Trachtenverein [Traditional costume association], music association, these are the associations that find members most easily. Music, there are also some choirs, many bands and so on, also more modern things, those work quite well”*. These activities raise awareness of cultural heritage within the local community as well as among tourists. Moreover, tourism itself may increase the appreciation of traditional customs among locals: *“Tourism is always, or mostly only seen negatively, by farmers for example. But I think that it has also helped to strengthen our identity”*. Therefore, tourism may help to preserve certain traditions because the locals proudly display their rich heritage. On the other hand, many interviewees criticized the “spectacularization” of such traditional or folklore events. Therefore, in the long term, interviewees expressed their fear about mass tourism, stating that too many tourists may not be sustainable for events such as transhumance.

Some interviewees pointed out the time-consuming nature of spectacular events created primarily for the benefit of tourists and the tourism industry. The time devoted to such events is time which the farmers cannot devote to their farms. However, this does not apply only to the farmers and the tourism sector, but to all possible participants. Everybody who is working for a living and must balance family life at the same time has limited resources to care for cultural heritage: *“The big difficulties are that young people no longer agree that if you want to run a farm, you need two separate jobs, since you can’t survive only by farming anymore. You have to work pretty hard.”*

#### 4. Discussion

Transhumance is a nomadic livestock farming practice that dates to pre-historic times. Originated as an economic necessity due to climatic conditions, it has acquired a cultural dimension over time. The agrarian practice includes traditional knowledge of the natural environment and the difficult mountain crossings, the usage of land and meadows, and the safe accompaniment of cattle and sheep. Moreover, as the shepherds’ or cowherds’ responsibility is to safely escort the animals across the mountains, a deep connection between humans, animals, and the environment is established. Emphasizing this interconnection between humans, nature, and animals, one could argue that transhumance represents a sustainable form of livestock farming as well as a cultural worldview, engendering values, moral attitudes, and beliefs. Understood according to the broad definition of culture, transhumance could be seen as a tradition that represents an ancient culture of sustainability. On the other hand, in a narrower cultural understanding, transhumance is conceived primarily as a distinct intangible heritage tradition, connected to the history of certain places and their identity. In the context of this paper, this dimension of transhumance was studied in relation to tourism and its impact on culture. The discussion about the sustainability of the tradition thereby led to questions about the preservation of cultural diversity, evoking issues such as authenticity and cultural change and highlighting structural as well as pragmatic difficulties for the preservation and maintenance of the tradition.

Since the public discussion primarily focuses on the ecological, economic, and social dimensions of sustainability, and the extension of this three-pillar model to include cultural sustainability is not yet generally recognized, the findings of this case study on transhumance show the importance of considering sustainability from a cultural point of view. Tourism has indeed been shown to have considerable influence on cultural traditions and local practices. In the case of Schnals and Wolkenstein, the effect was estimated as rather beneficial for the local development of the municipalities as well as for the preservation of cultural heritage and the sharing of knowledge. In this sense, it could be stressed that the practice of transhumance in Wolkenstein and Schnals is culturally sustainable. The present study has shown that local stakeholders are aware of the fact that increased mass tourism could negatively influence culture and traditional agrarian practices by hindering the farmers’ work and rendering culture a mere marketing product.

Informed governance strategies aiming at the maintenance of the cultural sustainability of tourist destinations are therefore critical to avoid the risks associated with intensive intangible cultural heritage tourism. In this context, one of the main outcomes of this explorative study is the practical implementation of a Code of Conduct in the community of Schnals that will be elaborated on the basis of the interviewees’ perspectives and distributed to visitors in collaboration with the local tourism association. The Code of Conduct shall thus inform tourists about the historic tradition of transhumance and suggest appropriate behavior in the presence of animals and shepherds, promoting a responsible approach to intangible cultural heritage.

The present study not only represents an attempt to raise awareness of the importance of culture as a pillar of sustainability, ultimately seeking to stimulate discussions and insights on the topic, but also hopes to contribute to the practical improvement of intangible cultural heritage preservation in South Tyrol, thanks to informal governance measures. Further research will be needed to assess the impact of the Code of Conduct on the

practice of transhumance as well as on tourist behavior, stakeholder perception, and local satisfaction. Moreover, more structured governance processes could aim at a constant monitoring of the cultural sustainability of transhumance, for example, in the form of repeated surveys on the perception of the influence of tourism on cultural heritage sites or specific customs. As a result, these studies could provide detailed insight into the dynamics of tourism and culture, offering concrete policy recommendations to establish governance mechanisms aimed at fostering cultural sustainability.

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