

“LINKING AND GEOTAGGING PASTORALIST AND MOBILE PRODUCTION SYSTEMS” by Dario Novellino and Valentina De Marchi

Both shifting cultivation and pastoralism are essential production systems because they are a living reservoir of adaptive genes. For many traditional populations devoted to such livelihoods, mobility is still perceived as a prerequisite for conserving agrobiodiversity and animals breeds. On the other hand, governments, as well as some conservation organizations alike, tend to associate mobility with uncertainty, poverty, lack of technical skill and, overall, with a precarious life-style: “an endlessly roaming around in search of food”. As a result, in many southern countries, resettlement schemes are implemented as adjoining strategies to poverty eradication. Moreover, large-scale mining, commercial logging, biofuel and oil-palm plantations further contribute to forcefully sedentarize mobile communities, displacing them from their ancestral territories. Starting from 2009, through a Christensen Fund (TCF) grant to the Centre for Biocultural Diversity (CBCD) of the University of Kent, an attempt has been made to foster communication amongst indigenous communities across regions on perceived common themes. To pursue this objective, Dr. Dario Novellino (CEESP member and principal investigator of the CBCD project) has worked in close collaboration with other volunteers and researchers, such as Dr. Valentina de Marchi.

One of the key project’s objectives includes the building of solidarity and audiovisual exchanges between representatives of mobile indigenous communities on issues related to the maintenance of agro-biodiversity, hunting/gathering and pastoralists traditions, with a special focus on traditional varieties of crops and animal breeds. More importantly, such exchanges promote the sharing of experiences as a way of **1)** fostering reflections and joint actions through the establishment of strategic alliances against extractive-industries; and **2)** addressing common problems regarding indigenous links, rights and claims over ancestral homelands and cultural landscapes. The envisaged goal is to enable the production of jointly produced video-materials to be used for exerting pressure at the national and international policy level. Moreover, the project also aims at determining the exact location of bio-cultural diversity hotspots through geotagging and participatory mapping. In a photographic context, *geotagging* is the process of associating photos with specific geographic locations using GPS coordinates.

One of the ongoing inter-communities exchanges includes the shepherds of the Aurunci Mountains (Central Italy), those of Northern-Italy (Triveneto) and the pastoralists of the Kyrgyz Republic. At the starting, the initiative promoted informal shepherds gatherings in the communities of Maranola (Aurunci) and those of Triveneto, in order to inform local shepherds on Kyrgyz pastoralists’ livelihood and culture (this initial step was carried out through the use of videos and photographs). Thus, Italian shepherds were informed on the situation faced by traditional stewards in Kyrgyzstan, and about the impact that the political transition from the Soviet Union to an independent republic has had on the local pastoralists’ way of life. In response to the information received, the Italian shepherds decided the topics of the messages they wanted to convey to their Kyrgyz counterpart, in addition to a selection of participatory shootings portraying their everyday practices. A compilation of these participatory audiovisual messages and shootings was

edited and saved on DVDs. Between June and September 2010, such DVDs have been shown amongst Kyrgyz pastoralists in the course of Dr. Valentina De Marchi's mission in Kyrgyzstan. As of now, this grass-root audio-visual exchange has proven to be important in terms of strengthening international solidarity amongst stewards of biocultural diversity. More importantly, it has provided marginalized and isolated communities with useful information on what goes on around the world and on the different strategies employed by various communities to protect their land, resources and cultural integrity. The replies from the Kyrgyz pastoralists to the Italian shepherds, have now been taken back to the Aurunci (Italy), and will be shared with the shepherds on the month of May.

During the fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan, participatory films on Aurunci and Triveneto shepherds have been screened several times by local pastoralists, especially in Chon-Kemin and At-Bashe valleys. Most of these audio-visual projections took place in individual *yurts* (tents) or in the course of social gathering (*scerinè*). The key content of these films, with subtitles and voice-overs in Kyrgyz language, portrays modes of production and grazing systems of Italian shepherds, their livestock, cheese making processes, local criteria for breed selection, perspectives on land and resources management, with particular reference to the conflicts occurring in the context of National Parks and protected areas. On the whole, shootings on Italian shepherds were very well received by the Kyrgyz counterpart. Specifically, after watching the films, Kyrgyz pastoralists were considerably surprised in discovering that in industrialized countries, such as Italy, pastoralist modes of productions are still thriving, in spite of all challenges. Furthermore, they were surprised in learning that, in a country like Italy (idealized by Kyrgyz pastoralists as a 'problems free' Nation), shepherds livelihood and traditions are being threatened due to the implementation of culturally insensitive environmental laws. Overall, video-showing on Italian shepherds did raise, amongst Kyrgyz pastoralists, a number of crucial questions referring to gender issues, loss, transmission/revitalization of traditional knowledge, identity and ethnicity, global policies, forms of governance in different nations, etc.

For instance the film on Italian cheese making fostered a lively discussion on the recovering/revitalization of an old Kyrgyz cheese recipe (*egighei*) that – at the present - has almost disappeared. This prompted Dr. Valentina De Marchi to support Kyrgyz pastoralists in the documentation of their old *egighei* recipe. Finally, an initial documentation on the history of *egighei* was made and the video was shown in front of a diversified audience leading to important reflections on knowledge transmission and revitalization.

In the project's second phase (Spring/Summer 2011), additional steps will be made in the planning of future exchanges amongst different Kyrgyz communities, which have been separated by international boundaries over long periods of time. Each of them, in their respective host nations, has developed its own counter-strategies for preserving mobility and pastoralist traditions. Our preliminary findings indicate that different Kyrgyz communities are now found in China (Xinjiang, Wuquia, Akqi, Akto, Tekes, Zhaosu, Beicheng, Wushi regions), Tajikistan (Pamir), Turkey (Van e Kars province), Afghanistan (Pamir and Badakhshan) and Altai region (in Russia and Kazak countries). To begin with, the project aims at establishing audio-visual exchanges between those pastoralist communities found in Kyrgyzstan,

Tajikistan and Northeast Turkey. Such exchanges will focus on issues that will be regarded as relevant by the traditional custodians themselves, such as breeding and livestock knowledge, cultural loss, innovation and adaptation processes. Some of these activities will be carried out in partnership with other TCF grantees such as the Rural Development Fund (RDF).

P.S. Photo credits

Photos 1 to 5 by Valentina De Marchi

Photos 6-7 by Dario Novellino