# Greening the commons

Alpine skiing, brown bears, and extensive husbandry in the Pyrenees

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# Abstract

In this dissertation I examine landscape transformations of two municipalities in the Catalan High Pyrenees, northeastern Spain: Naut Aran, in the district of Val d'Aran, and Alt Àneu, in the district of Pallars Sobirà. In particular, I focus on the complex articulation of the largest and most famous ski resort in Spain (Baqueira Beret) and the most important environmental conservation project in the Pyrenees (the bear reintroduction program) with the remaining presence of extensive husbandry. These three worlds coexist in space and time, but the ways in which husbandry interacts with the other two is seen as compatible or incompatible by different stakeholders. (In)compatibility turns out to be a generative lens to reveal the power relations underpinning the frictions emerged out of the rise of ski tourism and ecotourism and the decline of husbandry. The moral and territorial views of landscape serve to scrutinize the aesthetic values around the idiom of green and the bundle of rights revolving around the notion of the commons. Through this analytical combination, I argue that the complex interactions of an alpine ski resort and the bear reintroduction program with extensive husbandry in the Catalan High Pyrenees must be understood in terms of neither the replacement nor the restoration of a previous landscape. Rather, the method of an ethnographic approach to historicity of the landscape, through which the past, the present, and the future are taken as inextricably linked, allows us to see these transformations as the design of new landscapes charged with values and rights that connect them to different past times. By approaching landscape transformations as the result of the interplay between these three worlds and through this particular method, this ethnography contributes to a better understanding of the shift from farming to leisure-based societies in the mountain rural milieux of southern Europe.

# Résumé

Dans cette thèse, j'examine les transformations paysagères de deux municipalités des Hautes-Pyrénées catalanes : Naut Aran, dans le district de Val d'Aran, et Alt Àneu, dans le district de Pallars Sobirà. En particulier, je me concentre sur l'articulation complexe de la station de ski la plus grande et la plus célèbre d'Espagne (Baqueira Beret) et le projet de conservation de l'environnement le plus important des Pyrénées (le programme de réintroduction de l'ours) avec la présence restante d'un élevage extensif. Ces trois mondes coexistent dans l'espace et dans le temps, mais leurs interactions sont perçues comme compatibles ou incompatibles par les différents acteurs. L'(in)compatibilité s'avère ainsi être une perspective pour révéler des relations de pouvoir qui sous-tendent les frictions issues de l'essor du tourisme de ski, de l'écotourisme et du déclin de l'élevage. Les visions morale et territoriale du paysage servent à examiner les valeurs esthétiques autour de langage du vert et le faisceau de droits autour de la notion de commun. À travers cette combinaison, je soutiens que les interactions complexes d'une station de ski alpin et le programme de réintroduction de l'ours avec un élevage extensif dans les Hautes-Pyrénées catalanes ne doivent être comprises ni en termes de remplacement ni de restauration d'un temps passé. La méthode d'une approche ethnographique de l'historicité, à travers laquelle le passé, le présent et l'avenir sont pris comme inextricablement liés, éclaire sous un autre angle le regard porté sur les transformations paysagères. En abordant les transformations paysagères comme le résultat de l'interaction entre ces trois mondes et par cette méthode particulière, cette ethnographie contribue à mieux comprendre le passage des sociétés agricoles aux sociétés de loisirs dans les milieux ruraux montagnards du sud de l'Europe.

# Contents

# Acknowledgements

And within all this, I enrolled in a doctorate in anthropology. A major challenge, though unique experiences shaped this way. Seminars, readings, teaching assistantships, corrections and revisions, essay writing, talks, conferences… Illustrious names were made known to me: Tim Ingold, Talal Asad, and several others. All this comprised a very intense, indeed unforgettable two years of training.

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Autònoma of Barcelona and the Altaïr bookshop to Ariège and Val d'Aran, passing through Montréal. A long-shared road, recently accompanied by bears and sheep.

It was the month of May 2017 and, as the song said again, "We came back with Bru in the belly to be born in Vielha." We left Montréal behind and landed in Val d'Aran, in the unique lair of *Refugi Rosta*, sheltered, protected by Manel and Mª Àngels. Everything seemed momentary but in fact it became momentarily permanent. From "a year of fieldwork and back to Montréal," we settled down in the "field" and set out our life from the Pyrenees.

"Fieldwork" has been much more than "doing fieldwork." It has encompassed so many things that I would not know how to define. Beyond certainty, fieldwork has been "the challenge of our lives." Ours—and not mine because this has not been an individual and solitary ethnography. For about two years of research (and two more years of writing), I carried out field trips, participant observation, interviews, transcripts, the analysis and reflections, and stayed many hours in front of the laptop, writing and rewriting.

None of this has been done alone. I have never, or almost never, done it alone. Day and night, my traveling companions stay beside me. My partner and our two children have been an active part of this project, like "sang estesa," as my sister would say.

There is a fine line between doing fieldwork and feeling "part of the field," part of a place. More so, when one ends up not only doing fieldwork, but working, living in the field. Naut Aran and Alt Àneu not only became the area of study of my research, but also a place from which to project our lives. Many people have been involved in both processes. The list is long, but it cannot be eternal. General thanks to all the people who participated in this research,

helping me with expecting nothing in return. Without them, I could have written these pages; without them, fieldwork and living in the field would have been unimaginable.

I must repeat the names of Manel Rocher and Mª Àngels Ros, and add that of Jordi Abella, as the two "ports of entry" that, from the *Refugi Rosta* and the *Ecomuseu de les Valls d'Àneu*, allowed me to write down a first list of people to contact and start my research. I think of that first isolated week, around September 2017, and I realize that almost all those first contacts have lasted over time, allowing me not only to conduct research but to take roots in the places where I was doing it. Joan Abadia, Jaume Comas, Montse Barado, Víctor Rojas, Andreu Moga...

I do not have enough words of gratitude to Joan Abadia. "My grandfather" in Val d'Aran. Wise and hospitable. Source of knowledge and kindness. I feel that a lot of these pages are trying to wipe out a debt that will last forever. My debt to you in the form of infinite gratitude. Your jeep, your notebooks, our maps.

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To Montse Barado, for the magical moments, I would dare to say, spent inside and outside Casa Armengol. The simplicity of black and white quickly turned into the enriching

complexity of the grayscale palette. And in it, the three axes of my research, Baqueira Beret, the bear program, and extensive husbandry, converged harmoniously.

I could say a lot about Víctor Rojas, but I want to stick with one moment: that hug in the middle of the low clouds, capping the high peaks, when isolated chunks of snow were unexpectedly accumulated in the middle of September. That evening and that night in the Muntanyó prefabricated shelter, converted into a shepherd's hut because of the bear, made an unforgettable click on us.

I owe so much to Andreu Moga that I will never do enough. I know. I must take it on. With you, quantity has been combined with quality; hours and intensity. With or without sheep. In the meadows and in the high mountains, as well as at home, in the morning or at night. Someday all the notes, all the transcribed interviews should see the light; they should be shared. Somehow, in some format. Otherwise, I know for sure that the world will miss the richness of your words. I would not want to forget either Victoria and that fleeting and at the same time gratifying feeling of bumping into each other, driving along the Bonaigua Pass or any surrounding road, and greeting us with a horn to let us know that we feel close to each other.

To Francesc Rocher and José Luís Rufaste for all their dedication to going up and down the ski resort during the summer. Through them and thanks to them the research began to take on meaning and direction.

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To our children, Pol and Bru. I suffered from lack of sleep, but you gave me unconditional love. Life turned into something else. Something much more lovable. This dissertation has been conceived and delivered *with* you. Now that the "infinite thesis" has been completed, it is time to tell you that it has also been *for* you.

# Introduction — Landscape transformations around an alpine ski resort and a wildlife reintroduction program

In this dissertation I examine landscape transformations in two municipalities separated by a mountain pass in the Catalan High Pyrenees: Naut Aran, in the district of Val d'Aran, and Alt Àneu, in the district of Pallars Sobirà. In particular, I focus on the largest and most famous ski resort in Spain (Baqueira Beret) and the most important environmental conservation project in the Pyrenees (the bear reintroduction program), and the ways in which they interact with the remaining presence of extensive husbandry. Given the rise of ski tourism and ecotourism and the decline of farming, some stakeholders view the coexistence of these three worlds in space and time as compatible, while others view it as incompatible. Either way, frictions arise between tourism and farming at this historical conjuncture (Tsing 2005). (In)compatibility turns out to be a generative lens to reveal the hidden interactions and power relations underpinning such frictions and the resulting landscapes that emerge out of them. This ethnography contributes to the literature on the anthropology of landscape (Tilley 1994; Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995; Darby 2000; Roger 2000; W. J. T. Mitchell 2002; Jakob 2008; Olwig 2008; Cosgrove and Daniels 2013; Krauss 2013; Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017) in relation to the political ecology of both skiing (Stoddart 2012) and wildlife conservation (Neumann 1998; Bluwstein 2018). This contribution follows a political-economic approach to rurality (Wolf 1966; Williams 1975; Cloke, Marsden, and Mooney 2006; Woods 2010; 2011) and a particular understanding of modernity "as a historical regime [that] results from the implementation of a new type of governmentality associated to the simultaneous consolidation of nation-state and capitalism, with individualism as a generic behavioral framework" (Vaccaro 2010, 25). Based on a moral ecology approach

(Griffin, Jones, and Robertson 2019a; Jacoby 2019) and the analysis of property regimes through the bundle of rights schema (Schlager and Ostrom 1992; Sikor, He, and Lestrelin 2017; Vaccaro and Beltran 2019), I inquire about whose views and whose rights prevail in the analysis of the complex interactions of an alpine ski resort and the bear reintroduction program with extensive husbandry in the Catalan High Pyrenees. By approaching landscape transformations as resulting from the interplay between these two pairs (skiing—husbandry and conservation—husbandry), I aim to better understand the shift from farming to leisure-based societies in the mountain rural milieux of southern Europe.

Paying special attention to the notion of transformation and taking landscape as the main keyword, I have used an ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape (cf. Hirsch and Stewart 2005; cf. Stewart 2016) to address the following research questions:

- How are landscape transformations produced through the (in)compatible interactions of Baqueira Beret and the bear reintroduction program with extensive husbandry?
- Who is responsible for producing these transformations?
- What are the power relations, moral values, and territorial rights underpinning these interactions and the resulting landscapes?

The ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape as a method has allowed me to examine the transformations produced by the complex and sometimes counterintuitive ways skiing and conservation interact with husbandry. Both Baqueira Beret and the bear program, at different scales and with significant nuances, urbanize and naturalize a previously farming

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landscape characterized by the longstanding presence of livestock. I show how the urbanization and naturalization of the landscape are superimposed over the traces of a vanishing farming society. This method runs along two analytical planes under different theoretical frameworks. On the one hand, through a moral view of landscape I explore the production of green as improvement under the moral ecology of the Baqueira Beret Resort and the bear reintroduction program in dialogue with the anthropological literatures on infrastructure (Carse 2012; Scaramelli 2019) and heritage making (Vaccaro and Beltran 2007; Santamarina Campos 2009; Franquesa 2013; Baird 2017). On the other hand, through a territorial view of landscape (McCall 2016) I analyze how historic rights to former common lands and customary arrangements to communal collective actions within a farming society persist today within a leisure-based economy driven by an alpine ski resort under the aegis of environmental conservation, and more specifically a wildlife reintroduction program. To do so, I tackle the conception of property as a bundle of rights borrowing from de Certeau's analytics of tactics and strategies (1988) in dialogue with studies on environmentality (Agrawal 2005; Fletcher 2010), territoriality and territorialization (Sack 1986; Vandergeest and Peluso 1995; J. C. Scott 1998; Beltran and Vaccaro 2014a; Vaccaro, Dawson, and Zanotti 2014).
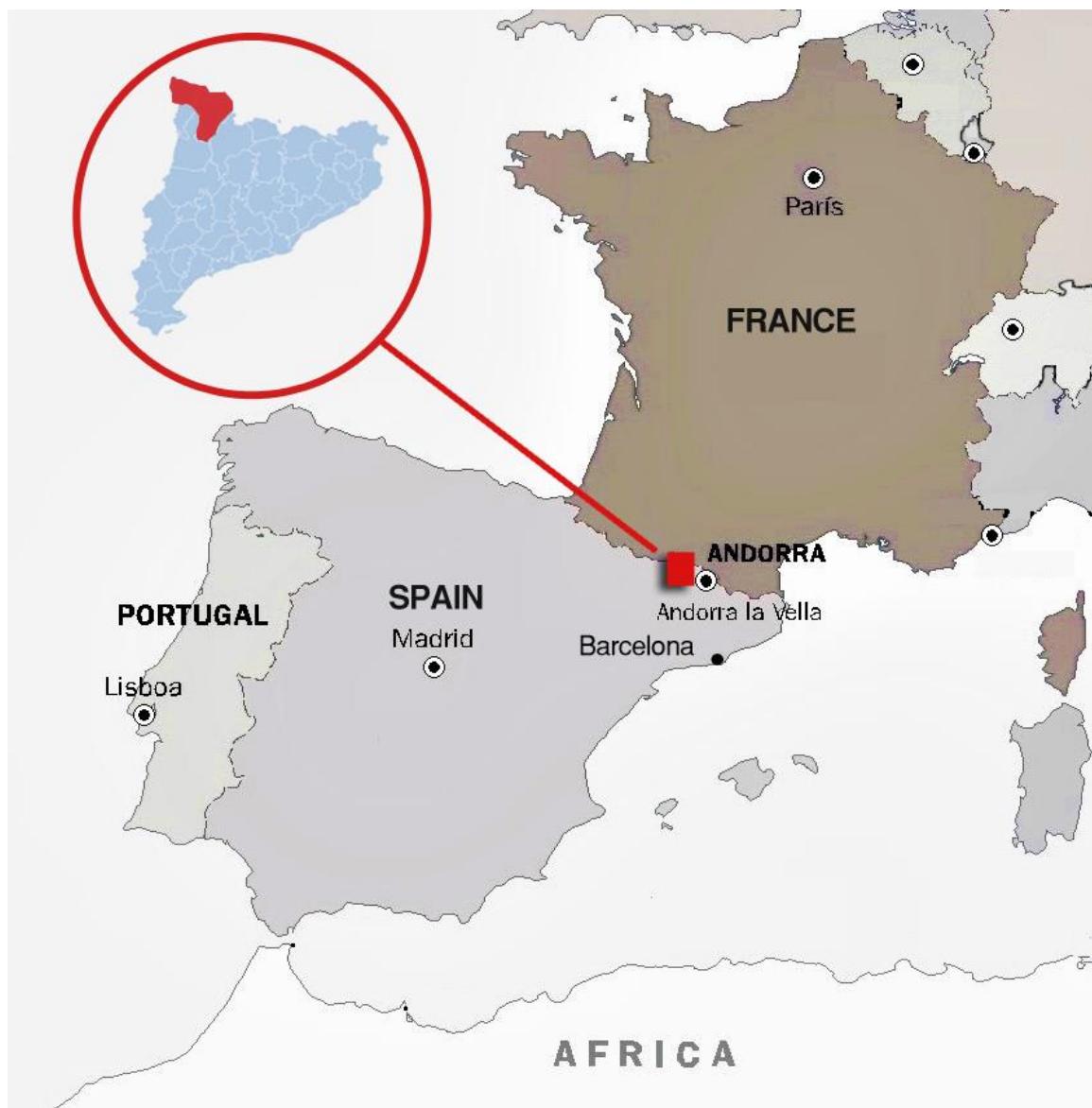
Figure 1. Map of the districts of Val d'Aran and Pallars Sobirà, within the larger context of Catalonia and Spain, in southern Europe.

Figure 2. Map of the municipalities of Naut Aran and Alt Àneu (in yellow) within the districts of Val d'Aran and Pallars Sobirà (in blue) in the Catalan High Pyrenees, northeastern Spain. The white line that separates the two districts and municipalities in the map is just a matter of design, not an actual geographical division.

# Logos and reserves: framing the geographical and thematic scope of the research

## Naut Aran: Era Reserva

The day will come, we embrace this sweet hope, when this valley [Val d'Aran] will be a meeting

point for the men who leave their homes in the summer in the search for relax and relief in the

small villages and in the free and pure environs of those fresh mountains, away from their hard

work and broken health! For this to be achieved, for the happiness of the Aran people, some

measures will need to be adopted.

(Madoz 2001 [1845], 54. My translation)[1]

Driving down the main road we come across a large billboard on the left-hand side. An electric

blue sky covers the upper half of the picture while four church towers from their respective

villages within the municipality of Naut Aran, lies at the centre of the frame. The dazzling light

of a sunny winter day shines over a snowy landscape. Trees, pastures, and roofs are covered with

powdery snow. In the background, the highest and most famous peaks adjacent to Val d'Aran

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[1] "*¡Un día llegará, abrigamos esta dulce esperanza, en que este valle sea un punto predilecto de concurrencia para los hombres que en la estación del verano abandonan sus hogares a fin de buscar en las pequeñas pobl. [poblaciónes] descanso a sus fatigas, y en el ambiente libre y puro de aquellas frescas montañas un alivio a su salud quebrantada! Para que esto se consiga, para que puedan un día ser felices los araneses, necesario será adoptar algunas medidas.*" This passage was written by Pascual Madoz, a key Spanish politician who became Minister of Finances and who also developed a crucial role for Val d'Aran when he was nominated judge and governor of this region in 1837. Under these political positions, he is famously known for having promoted a disentailment campaign that shattered the common property regimes (see Chapter 3).

jut out through the thin clouds.[2] The message, written in Occitan, the official local language, is clear… or not so much: "Naut Aran. Era Reserva [The Reserve]." Bold green capital letters are followed by thinner black ones below them. In white, half of a snowflake seems to wrap the message from the left. It is the municipality's logo.



Figure 3. Billboard "Naut Aran. Era Reserva."

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[2] Val d'Aran or Aran Valley refers both to an administrative division—a Catalan district in the High Pyrenees—and a geographical toponym. It is often called "Aran" or more colloquially as "the valley."

I moved to Salardú in July 2017—the capital of Naut Aran or "High Aran," the region that sits geographically at the highest part of the district—and have gone by this huge billboard hundreds of times over my two-years of fieldwork. And yet, it took a while for me to begin asking myself the following questions: What exactly does "reserve" refer to? Why was this picture—a depiction of a sunny snowy winter day—chosen? Why was the term "reserve" used to describe this landscape that is clearly inhabited by people? Who is the billboard addressing? And, how did this logo come about? Addressing these questions helped me frame the geographical and thematic scope of this dissertation.

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The "Bar Muralha" may look like an ordinary cafe at first glance. "The Muralha," as it is referred to in common parlance, is also the social meeting room of Salardú where most of the villagers congregate every day to have a coffee in the morning and make small talk. Half a dozen square tables with four chairs around each of them and a counter with four stools fill the premises. A couple in their late fifties waits for the customers to come in the mornings: Rosario,[3] born in Madrid and raised in Barcelona, with her perennial smile and beaming expression, and Ricardo, a quintessential native villager, always eager to chat and recall local tales despite the degenerative eye condition that has increasingly challenged his task as a bartender. The cafe was opened by his parents in the 1960s, and Ricardo's father, a man in his nineties, still sits in the cafe every day to read the newspaper. He can hardly hear or walk, but he still wants to check on his business.

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[3] All names have been changed for the sake of anonymity.

A recent refurbishment has replaced the former dim lighting and ancient dark wooden walls with white tonalities, inspiring a more joyful atmosphere. Residents mingle with tourists, attracted by the white slopes of the neighbouring ski resort in the winter and the forests, peaks, and rivers of the high-mountain landscapes in the summer. In the spring and fall, the cafe clientele is limited to local villagers. "The Muralha" is the place for bumping into neighbours and for marking one's belonging to the village of Salardú and the municipality of Naut Aran, which includes seven other historic villages—Garòs, Arties, Gessa, Unha, Bagergue, and Tredòs—plus the village of Baqueira, which was founded with the ski resort in 1964.

After a couple of months getting acquainted with my future interlocutors and other villagers, I realized that I needed to spend time at the Bar Muralha on a regular basis. Following this realization, I took it as my office in the mornings. I sat under the TV at the only table next to a wall outlet. I would order a coffee with milk and a ham sandwich and open my laptop to transcribe interviews or type field notes from my diary. Following Geertz's canonical definition of what the practice of ethnography is about (1988), "being there," at the Bar Muralha, not only allowed me to meet people and get a sense of the topics that circulated in daily informal conversations in Salardú, but also, and maybe more importantly, made me visible to local villagers and helped me gain their trust.

Ricardo is one of the most prominent figures in Naut Aran's capital. An extremely active and enthusiastic member of a local social democrat party, he kept his transistor radio nearby, using it to inform Naut Aran's villagers about local news. In May 2019, once we had already covered a wide range of topics, most connected to local, regional, and national politics, I asked him about the billboard. His answers further piqued my curiosity. First, he assured me that both

the billboard and Naut Aran's logo were recent. More specifically, he told me that the latter was launched by the town council during the current presidential term (between 2015 and 2019). Second, he related the use of the term "reserve" to two apparently disconnected origins: a) the creation in 1966, during Franco's dictatorship, of a national hunting reserve, which was later managed by the Catalan government (*Generalitat de Catalunya*) during the Democratic Transition starting in the mid-1970s and annulled by the semi-autonomous regional government of Val d'Aran (*Conselh Generau d'Aran*) in 2012 in response to a municipal request;[4] and b) the idea ingrained in the popular imagination of Val d'Aran, which views Naut Aran as a "world apart." Ricardo's words alerted me to the ways residents considered Naut Aran to be a region differentiated from the rest of Val d'Aran. A world apart from the other two main regions of the district: Mijaran or Middle Aran, where the capital town, Vielha, is placed just ten kilometres away from Salardú, and Baish Aran or Low Aran, adjacent to the French border. This logo thus helped me define one geographical boundary of my research, taking Naut Aran as a spatial unit: "a reserve."

The informal conversation with Ricardo at the Bar Muralha triggered a domino effect. Coincidentally, I had an indirect personal connection to the daughter of the photographer who took the photo for the billboard: my wife used to work in the photography studio that she runs. I approached her to ask some questions about it. She was surprised that this photograph would have awakened such interest and mentioned some details that helped me contextualize its origins. She confirmed that the picture was taken by her father, and, although she did not

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[4] The hunting reserve was called "High Pallars and Aran," and it initially covered Naut Aran and Alt Àneu municipalities, plus other northern regions in the district of Pallars Sobirà, for a total of more than 115,000 hectares. After the partial annulment, which excluded Naut Aran from its boundaries, today its area has been reduced to 81,772 hectares, but it is still the largest national hunting reserve in Catalonia and one of the largest in Spain.

remember exactly when, it must have been long before the billboard was erected. She recalled that for some time the space held a blank billboard with just a telephone number in black ink and concluded that given that no one seemed interested in it, the town council had likely decided to use this picture instead. This casual sequence of events initially indicated to me that the billboard had no underlying political significance.

However, it turned out that there was more to the billboard design than I originally imagined.

A few days later, I visited the town council to ask if I could talk to Carlos, the mayor. He was not there, but I was able to arrange a meeting for that week and to chat briefly with the town council's secretary, a public servant who ensures the smooth functioning of this local institution despite the rotation in and out of mayors in four-year election cycles. We had a quick conversation as I sat on a couch in the waiting room and he was standing in front of me. My questions seemed to spark little interest in the secretary and his slow, muted responses confirmed my impression. Like Ricardo, he wove together two narratives about the billboard and the logo. On the one hand, the annulment of the national hunting reserve seemed to have led to the creation of the logo. On the other hand, the fact that "this higher part" (referring to Naut Aran) had always been labelled by Val d'Aran's inhabitants as "The Reserve" would have been taken into consideration. Influenced by my recent reading of Franquesa's book, *Power Struggles* (2018), I was puzzled by the confluence of these statements.

Franquesa recounts how the struggles of local social movements against the capitalist dynamics of the energy sector in Southern Catalonia were sometimes expressed in stickers that read: "We are not a reservation!" (2018, 114). This claim was meant to counter the wind

developers' and the public administration's will to turn the Southern Catalans' agricultural landscape into a hub for wind power plants. As Franquesa argues, the overt opposition to the term "reserve" or "reservation" expressed by the Southern Catalans aligned with the local feeling of "being treated as … an 'internal colony'" (2018, 114–15), while more recently it has revolved around the country/city divide and rural abandonment.[5] Bearing in mind the explicitly negative connotation the term "reserve" acquired in the rural context of Southern Catalonia in the early 2000s and in current times, I wondered what sort of reserve the municipality of Naut Aran proudly claimed to be.

This question lingered as I listened to the account of the town council's secretary. I was also curious about another connection between the logo and the picture. Given that the term "reserve" is also tied to protected wildlife areas, I asked him why the picture shows an inhabited, fairly urbanized landscape on a sunny snowy day, in which four out of the total of eight villages in Naut Aran are placed at the centre of the picture: Salardú, Unha, Gessa, and Arties. Without changing his facial expression, he explained that there is also "a sense of irony" in the message, and added, with pride: "Why not… A reserve!" The photograph was picked, according to him, because snow is "the Val d'Aran's [touristic] symbol"—an asset that is usually coupled with another meteorological feature, the sunny weather, as evidenced by the name of the only food store in Salardú, "Sol y Nieve" or "Sun and Snow,"[6] which only opens during the ski and summer tourist seasons. The local perception of snow has changed from a source of misery to a valued resource, worthy of praise. Borrowing descriptors from the Snow Museum in the village of

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[5] A similar perception is reported by Tracey Heatherington in her book *Wild Sardinia* (2010) "where local residents [from Sardinia] feel themselves incorrectly blamed, overruled and treated like Indians in a reservation" (Krauss 2013, 81) in the face of the creation of a national park on the island.

[6] This slogan mirrors the most famous tourist logo in Spain: "Sol y playa [sun and beach]".

Unha, next to Salardú, Naut Aran experienced a transition from a period "when people put up with the snow" to a "golden era of snow," epitomizing the radical shift from a farming society to one built on ski tourism.

My meeting with Salardú's mayor took place a few days later. Carlos confirmed that the logo was launched between 2016 and 2017. Then, he mentioned that the logo's three colours—white, green, and blue—were supposed to symbolize the snow, mountains, and sky following the colours of the Val d'Aran's flag prior to the restitution of the regional government in 1991. "This new logo tries to highlight the features of Naut Aran as a 'reserve'… not a 'hunting reserve' anymore, but a 'snow reserve,'"[7] he asserted. This statement underlined what the town council's secretary had already hinted at, and resonated with my interest in the notion of change more generally and my focus on landscape transformations in particular. Following the mayor's words, the logo sought to account for a full-fledged transition in Naut Aran, shifting from a farming to a leisure-based society, whose economic engine was no longer the primary sector but rather a private ski resort. As our conversation ended, the mayor gave me a pile of stickers bearing the logo and advised me to contact Anselmo, the person who first conceived it.

Anselmo runs a sports management enterprise that operates regionally, nationally, and internationally. When I met him at his office in Salardú, he informed me that the idea of the new logo sprang from the aesthetic and marketing problems the former and still current official badge of Naut Aran was causing when it was printed on sportswear.

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[7] "*Aquest nou logo pretén ressaltar la qualitat del Naut Aran com una 'reserva'… ja no de la caça sinó de la neu*" (Carlos, 9/5/2019).
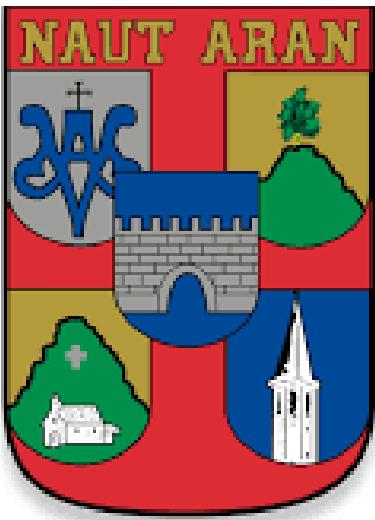
Figure 4. Naut Aran's official badge.



Figure 5. Naut Aran's current logo.

Anselmo thought that to project Naut Aran around the world, its logo needed to be re-branded. In his view, the stodgy badge, overdone with colours, should be replaced with a minimalist design. In addition to these aesthetic and marketing reasons, he also deemed, like Ricardo at the Bar Muralha and the mayor at the town council, the term "reserve" as a distinctive feature of the

municipality of Naut Aran within Val d'Aran. However, he linked it to a more concrete event, crucial for this research: the creation of the Baqueira Beret alpine ski resort in 1964. According to him, the opening of Baqueira Beret should be considered the turning point in the recent history of the municipality, insofar as prior to the ski resort Naut Aran was known as the poorest region of Val d'Aran, whereas today it is the wealthiest one.[8] Following this argument, he framed Baqueira Beret as the key to Naut Aran's prosperity, although he also cautioned about its disproportionate share in the economy: "If Baqueira failed [went bankrupt], everything [Naut Aran's economy] would sink."[9]

A seemingly apolitical billboard thus mirrored a sequence of important turns around the term "reserve," which inform some of the key questions of this dissertation. Villagers from the rest of the district used to consider Val d'Aran's poorest region, Naut Aran, to be a kind of reserve: a backward world apart. "The uncivilized world begins at the Garòs bridge [Garòs is the first village within the municipality of Naut Aran coming from the lower parts of Val d'Aran],"[10] Pau, a local historian and archaeologist once told me, reinforcing this viewpoint. In line with these considerations, the Naut Aran's new logo should be considered, I propose, as an attempt to resignify the term "reserve" with respect to both the elements that comprise it and the regimes of governance. In doing so, I claim that the underlying message raised through the logo turns into the following statement: "Maybe *we* were part of a *hunting* and *backward* reserve, the poorest region within Val d'Aran, but today it is *our* wealthy *snow* reserve managed by *ourselves.*" Therefore,

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[8] According to the official data provided by the Catalan government in 2018, Val d'Aran is the third wealthiest district in Catalonia considering the GDP per inhabitant as the unit of measurement, i.e., 38,800 €/inhabitant (http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=358).

[9] "*Si Baqueira falla, tot se'n va a pique*" (Anselmo, 28/6/2019).

[10] "*El mon incivilitzat comença al Pont de Garòs*" (Pau, 8/5/2019).

the municipality's logo hints at a complex historical conjuncture through which Naut Aran turned into a *snow reserve* partially managed and fully endorsed from within Naut Aran's boundaries and whose main asset, Baqueira Beret, has become so famous that needs not appear in the picture or logo. A hunting reserve, one of the first wildlife conservation categories implemented by the Spanish state in the 1960s and consolidated by the Catalan government since the 1980s, whose goal was "to promote, foster, conserve, and protect autochthonous wildlife species,"[11] turned into a skiing reserve, promoted by Naut Aran's local institutions. The shift seems not only to indicate an apparently full-fledged transition, from a farming to a leisure-based society since the last quarter of the twentieth century, built on a single asset and a private enterprise: snow and Baqueira Beret. It also underscores the importance of knowing *who* defines a territorial brand or *who* produces a landscape transformation, and to what extent this affects whether they are embraced by locals. The presence and success of the ski resort turned the word "reserve" from something that was backward, negative, and exogenous into something prosperous, positive, and endogenous, defined from within rather than from outside. This shift seems to fit with the measures Pascual Madoz, a key politician who became Minister of Finances in Spain and who also developed a crucial role for Val d'Aran when he was nominated judge and governor of this region in 1837, had already mentioned in 1845 (as cited at the beginning of this subsection) in the search for turning Val d'Aran into a tourist hotspot for the busy urban population that would provide happiness for the Aran people. A pair of caveats must be underlined, though. First, winter instead of summer became the season that attracted most of the tourists. And second, wealth or the increase of living standards is what Baqueira Beret

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[11] The quote is taken from a poster published by the Catalan government's Department of Environment and Biodiversity under the title "Reserves Nacionals de Caça de Catalunya". See also Beltran and Vaccaro (2019) for a further examination of the purpose and goal of the first national hunting reserves in Spain.

brought to the region while the extent to which these changes make the local population happier is a question that exceeds the purpose of this research.

The logo "Naut Aran: Era Reserva" thus helped me reformulate some of my research questions and situate the landscape transformations I was examining within the geographical and thematic boundaries of a particular reserve:

- How is a "reserve," understood as the result of landscape transformations, produced?

- Who is responsible for producing such landscape transformations?

Leaving these questions aside momentarily, we see that the definition of Naut Aran as a reserve also reveals a sense of a collective identity, which has been shaped over the years beyond the creation of a ski resort in 1964. An in-depth interview with Pau, the local archaeologist and historian, offered a broader historical view of Naut Aran's inner dynamics, as distinct from those of the rest of the valley. Sharing a mixture of academic knowledge and biographical memories, Pau told me that since he was born in 1959 the identification of Naut Aran as a reserve had always resonated in him. Like the manager of the sports enterprise, Pau saw a correlation between this collective identification and the creation of Baqueira Beret, but pointed to a much longer history: "What I do know is that Pujòlo [Naut Aran's former toponym][12] faced historical

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[12] Pujòlo is a toponym that refers to one of the three and six regions Val d'Aran was formerly split into. Taking the current administrative division in municipalities, Pujòlo would contain all Naut Aran's historic villages but Arties and Garòs: Gessa, Salardú, Unha, Bagergue, and Tredòs (see Chapter 3 for a thorough examination of this division and its effects regarding the occupation of the villages' lands by Baqueira Beret).

political conflicts apart from the rest of Val d'Aran… In every military conflict throughout history, Pujòlo always went one way and Mijaran and Baish Aran [Middle and Low Aran, the other two regions within Val d'Aran] went another."[13] Naut Aran's villages tended to support, for example, the livestock fairs held in the district of Pallars Sobirà over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in opposition to the two other regions from Val d'Aran. This political stance was reinforced by its geographical orientation. Adjacent to, although separate from, the Catalan district of Pallars Sobirà and the municipality of Alt Àneu by the Bonaigua Mountain Pass (2,072 metres), Naut Aran has, until this day, oriented toward this area rather than toward the rest of Val d'Aran to which it administratively belongs to. The longstanding kinship bonds between villagers from these two municipalities, which were highlighted by Sebastià, a Naut Aran farmer ("We are the same people")[14] as well as the Baqueira Beret's current logo (Baqueira Beret. Aran/Àneu), reassert this historical political trend and helped me frame the other geographical boundary of my research.

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[13] "*Lo que sí que sé que a tots els conflictes polítics i històrics de la Vall d'Aran, Pujòlo anava per una banda i la resta per una altra*" (Pau, 8/5/2019).

[14] "*Som els mateixos*" (Sebastià, 16/10/2017). This statement is reinforced by the high number of marriages between Naut Aran and Alt Àneu's inhabitants (Boya Ané 2021, 56).

Figure 6. Map of Val d'Aran with its three main regions (separated by white lines) and former administrative divisions (written in bold and separated by grey lines), which included Pujòlo and Aries e Garòs within today's Naut Aran boundaries, adjacent to the municipality of Alt Àneu, in the district of Pallars Sobirà, through the Bonaigua Pass.

*Baqueira Beret. Aran/Àneu*



Figure 7. Baqueira Beret's current logo.

While Naut Aran's logo serves to set one the spatial boundaries of my research, the Baqueira Beret's current logo, which includes the toponyms of two valleys, "Aran" and "Àneu," serves to sketch its other geographical end, on the other side of the Bonaigua Mountain Pass. Created in 1964 in Naut Aran, Baqueira Beret has expanded its ski areas, reaching an overall surface of more than 2,000 hectares. Among those expansions, there was a turning point. In 1993, the ski facilities reached Alt Àneu's territories. Consequently, its former logo, "Baqueira Beret. Val

d'Aran (Naut Aran)" was replaced by "Baqueira Beret. Aran/Àneu" in 1995, one year after the first chairlift within Alt Àneu was opened.[15]

My area of study has thus revolved around these two municipalities, encompassing two orographic elements, a mountain pass and a valley, that have historically bound them together partly away from the pair of districts they belong to. The road opened in 1924 to cross the Bonaigua Mountain Pass is currently the main link between these two municipalities, although it is sometimes closed in the winter because of the risk of avalanches. Naut Aran and Alt Àneu have historically also been connected through another path. Following the course of the Noguera Pallaresa river, whose springs are situated in the Beret Plain, one of Naut Aran's most emblematic sites and also one of the main entrances to the ski resort, the Bonabé valley connects the semi-deserted village of Montgarri, in Naut Aran, to the first villages in Alt Àneu: Alós d'Isil (Alós hereafter) and Isil (Company 2003). The Bonaigua Road and the Bonabé valley form a loop around the Baqueira Beret ski areas. Beyond such geographical connectivity, Bonabé has also played another crucial role in this research.

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[15] See Chapter 1 for a detailed description of Baqueira Beret origins and phases of territorial expansion.
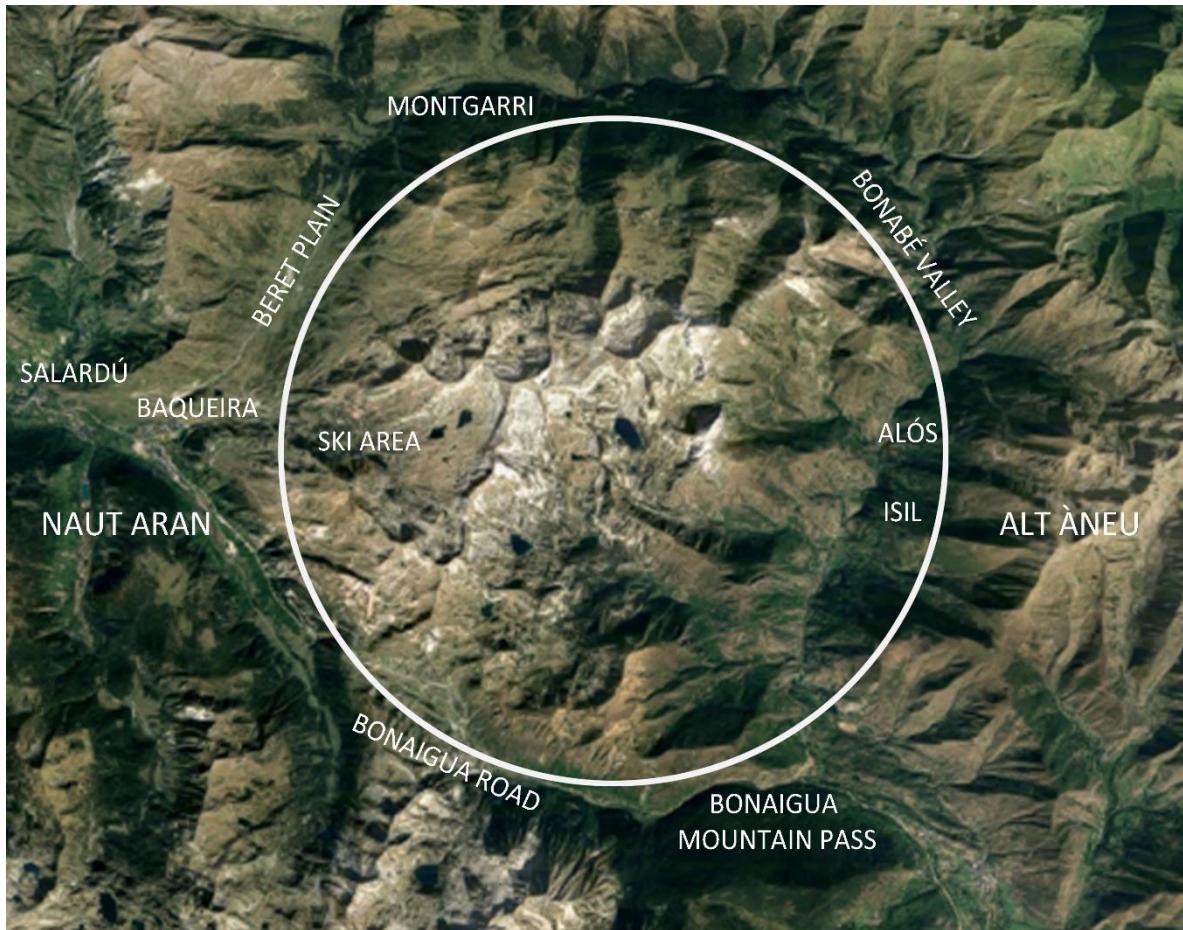
Figure 8. Map of the area of study, framed within the circle drawn by the Bonaigua road and the Bonabé valley, encompassing the Baqueira Beret ski areas, which spread over Naut Aran and Alt Àneu territories.

**Alt Àneu: the "other reserve"**

Leaving behind the ski facilities situated in the Beret Plain, a dirt track takes us down a church and a mountain refuge. They are the only two buildings still standing, just a few metres away from the dozen ruined houses of Montgarri, the deserted village that lies at one of Naut Aran's edges. A dense pine forest gives way to pastures traversed by ravines following the course of the

river and the peaks that mark the border with France. The landscape is homogeneous until a signpost designating the entrance to a natural protected area emerges on the right side: "High Pyrenees Natural Park. Alt Àneu Natural Reserve."



Figure 9. Signpost of "Alt Àneu Natural Reserve" at the entrance of the Bonabé valley.

The signpost indirectly marks the administrative boundary between two municipalities and districts, but neither the landscape nor any other official sign gives us a hint of this crossing. Almost inadvertently we are entering the Bonabé valley, in the municipality of Alt Àneu.

The geographical connection as much as the landscape that unfolds—high peaks, vast pastures, dense forests, abundant ravines—captivated me when I first discovered this valley by chance, following the dirt track in my car. My fieldwork accentuated this fascination. Bonabé reflects the coexistence of a wide array of uses and representations of natural resources since the beginning of the twentieth century. It is a palimpsest in which several layers overlap to create what could be described as a *laminated landscape* that informs us about the partial transition and the enduring coexistence between the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors of the economy. The historical farming use of the high-mountain pastures with abundant local or transhumant herds overlapped with magnificent, if short-lived, industrial projects, including the intense exploitation of the pine forests by a foreign timber enterprise at the beginning of the twentieth century and the attempt to extract tungsten by a transnational mining company more recently. Finally and more recently, the contemplative use of natural resources under the aegis of environmental conservation—with several natural protected areas[16] and the most important wildlife conservation project in the Pyrenees, the brown bear reintroduction program—has prevailed.

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[16] The High Pyrenees Natural Park, which correlates to the V Protected Landscape category in the IUCN classification and spreads over 80,000 hectares, as well as other partial natural reserves, including the Alt Àneu Natural Reserve, cover much of the municipal area. Sometimes these designations overlap each other and other more general European or national protection categories, such as the Nature 2000 Network or Plan for Areas of Natural Interest (PEIN, acronym in Catalan).

The brown bear reintroduction program, a cross-border LIFE project, funded by the European Union and launched by the French government in 1996 with the support of the Spanish and Andorra states, and the regional governments of Catalonia, Aragon, and Navarra, sought to restore the brown bear population in the Pyrenees via the translocation of several individuals from Slovenia. The Bonabé valley has been targeted throughout the program's history as the territorial hub on the Spanish side of the range. In the mid-1990s, the Catalan government planned to release the first bears in Bonabé, within the boundaries of the villages of Alós and Isil in Alt Àneu, but eventually decided against it (Jiménez Setó 2003, 63). Throughout the 2010s the valley brought together several other projects related to the bear program. In 2012, the single museum devoted to the brown bear in the Spanish Pyrenees was opened in the village of Isil; in 2016, the only bear translocated by the Catalan government was released in the Bonabé valley. Around the same time, the public administration funded the construction of an energetically sustainable hut, made of wood on stilts and fitted with solar panels, to accommodate a shepherd responsible for tending the sheep in the high-mountain pastures once the increase of bear attacks was proven. Moreover, in 2018, a project that consisted of planting thousands of fruit trees to improve the bears' natural corridors also took hold here. Although extensive husbandry is still evident with the presence of 930 cows, 146 horses, and 772 sheep (according to the official data provided by the Isil and Alós municipal entity in 2018) and the material remnants of the forestry industrial project from the early twentieth century are scattered over the valley, today Bonabé is mostly assessed through the natural values contained in it. The Bonabé valley is "the Crown's little Jewel," as it was defined by Sílvia, the former mayor of the villages of Isil and Alós, alluding to its geological and ecological features—calcareous soil, maritime climate, and orientation toward the Mediterranean watershed—, which have provided

this valley with abundant high-mountain pastures and allowed, in the past and now, the most iconic fauna species, the brown bear, to thrive.

In the summer 2018, I hiked up to one of the most emblematic sites of this valley, "el Ras de Bonabé," where the high-mountain pastures are covered with bold green grass and cow bells ring incessantly. My hiking companion, Jeroni, originally from Barcelona, had been a resident in Isil since the 1980s. He was married to a person from Isil and had a strong attachment to this valley, partially derived from the fact that he used to manage a cow farm in Isil, using as his base a mountain hut in the Bonabé valley owned by his wife's family. Contemplating the mountainous landscape before us, Jeroni drew my attention to a staggering contrast: "It's incredible that two kilometres up there [behind the peaks emerging on the edge of this grazing land] there is so much bustle [referring to the Beret Plain], and nobody comes here!"[17]

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[17] "*Sembla mentida que a 2 kilómetres enllà hi hagi tan brogit i aquí no hi vingui ni déu!*" (Jeroni, 26/6/2018).

Figure 10. "Ras de Bonabé." In the background, the peaks that separate the Bonabé valley from the Beret Plain and the Baqueira Beret's ski areas.

The comparison drawn by Jeroni was revealing. The villages of Alós and Isil dismissed the possibility of hosting a ski resort in the 1960s, before Baqueira Beret was founded. At that time, the priorities were clear. Residents opposed this project, claiming that the valuable high-mountain pastures had to be kept for the livestock to graze on with no interference from a ski project promoted by foreign investors. "Livestock, livestock!", Jeroni told me that they used to cry out. Today, Jeroni considered the Bonabé valley to be "part of [his] life" and a place that he "loves so much" that when he dies, he wants "to be put up here." He deemed this corner of the Catalan High Pyrenees "a quiet place that must not be touched" and "that must be preserved

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because of the value that it has in terms of nature and landscape right now and that it will have for future generations."[18]

Bonabé's quietness contrasts with the bustling atmosphere in Baqueira Beret. This contrast compelled me to consider this valley and the municipality it belongs to (Alt Àneu) as the reverse side of Naut Aran's reserve or as the "other reserve." This categorization helped me examine the production of landscape transformations in these two municipalities in the Catalan High Pyrenees through a comparative approach. The comparison is also warranted by geographical and administrative similarities. Naut Aran and Alt Àneu cover a similar area— around 255 and 217 square kilometres, respectively— and they used to contain the same number of historic villages (eight, not including the village of Baqueira, which was erected in 1964), which were aggregated in two municipalities between 1967 and 1970:

- Naut Aran: Garòs, Arties, Gessa, Salardú, Unha, Bagergue, Tredòs, and Montgarri (semi-deserted).
- Alt Àneu: Alós, Isil, Sorpe, València d'Àneu, Son, Borén, Isavarre, and Àrreu (semi-deserted).

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[18] "*Bonabé és part de la meva vida… és un lloc que me l'estimo molt… quan me morga foteu-me aquí dalt…un lloc que s'ha de deixar tranquil*"; "*que cal preservar pel valor a nivell natural i paisatgístic que té ara mateix i que tindrà per a les properes generacions.*" (Jeroni, 26/6/2018).
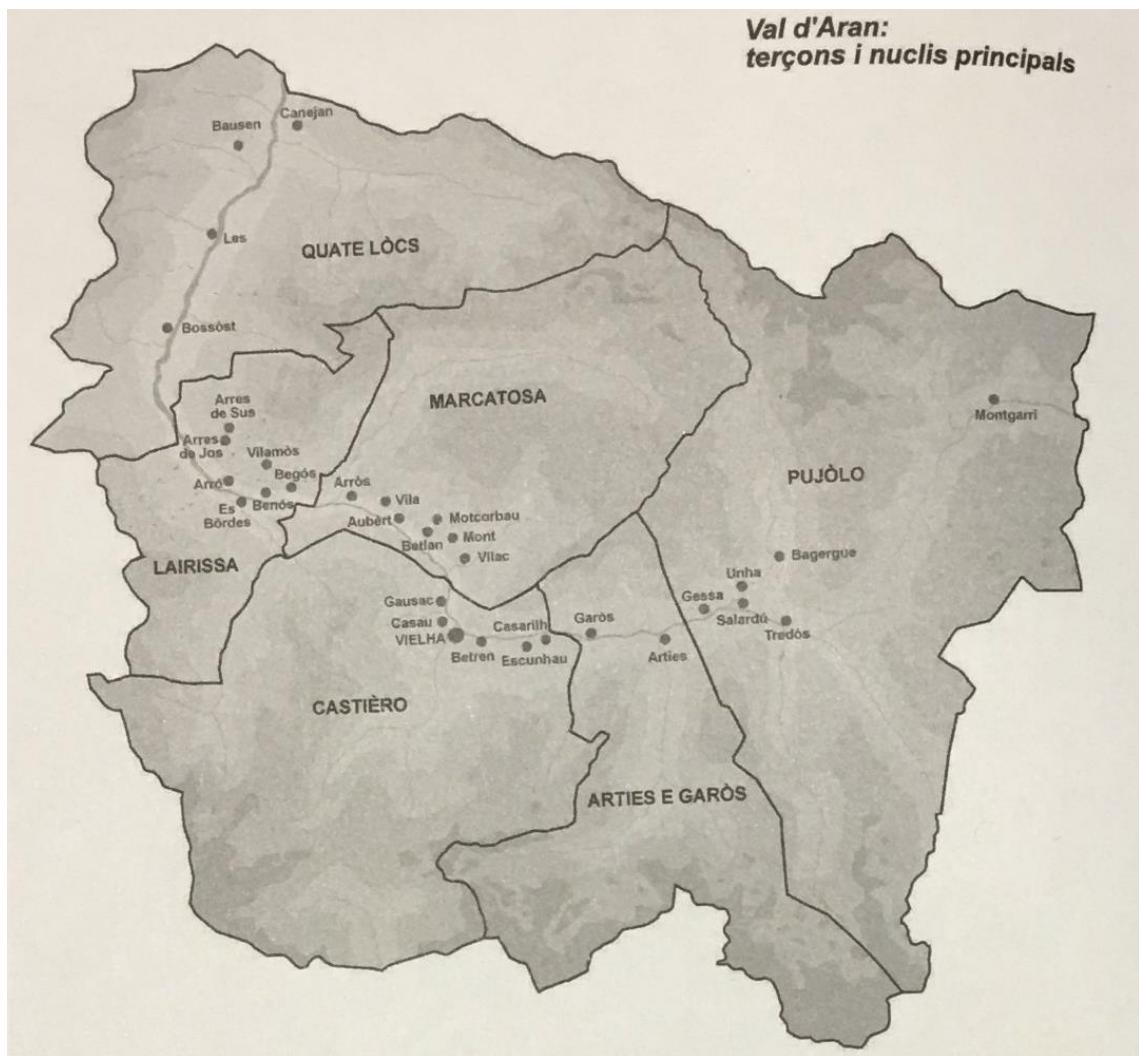
Figure 11. Map of Val d'Aran with its main villages and historic administrative boundaries, *terçons* (see Chapter 3). Naut Aran includes "Pujòlo" and "Arties e Garòs" (Sanllehy i Sabi 2014, 136).

Figure 12. Map of Naut Aran, including Pujòlo and Arties e Garòs, with its villages. Source: Author, based on (Sanllehy i Sabi 2014, 136).

Figure 13. Map of Alt Àneu with its villages in the district of Pallars Sobirà and adjacent to Val d'Aran.

Source: Author, based on Montori (n.d.).

Despite these similarities, there are important demographic differences between the two municipalities. Whereas Naut Aran had 1,836 residents in 2020, Alt Àneu had only 414. Besides the administrative category of "resident," which implies living permanently in a certain village, the housing stock of each municipality illustrates the striking difference in the number of tourists each region receives during every ski season. Whereas Naut Aran has around 3,734 housing units (743 main residences, 2,590 vacation homes, and 401 uninhabited apartments), Alt Àneu has only 718 housing units (199 main residences, 461 vacation homes, and 58 uninhabited apartments).[19] This demographic snapshot is reinforced by Naut Aran's speedier population growth over recent decades. In 2011, the overall population growth was 292 in Naut Aran and 27 in Alt Àneu, while the average overall growth per 1,000 inhabitants during 2001-2011 was of 18.35 and 6.35, respectively. As shown through the following map (Ganau 2019), this difference has been exacerbated between 2010 and 2018, when the population annual growth in Naut Aran has been positive (between 26 and 100) whereas in Alt Àneu has been negative (between -400 and -100).

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[19] Data from the year 2011 from Statistics Institute of Catalonia (IDESCAT): https://www.idescat.cat/.
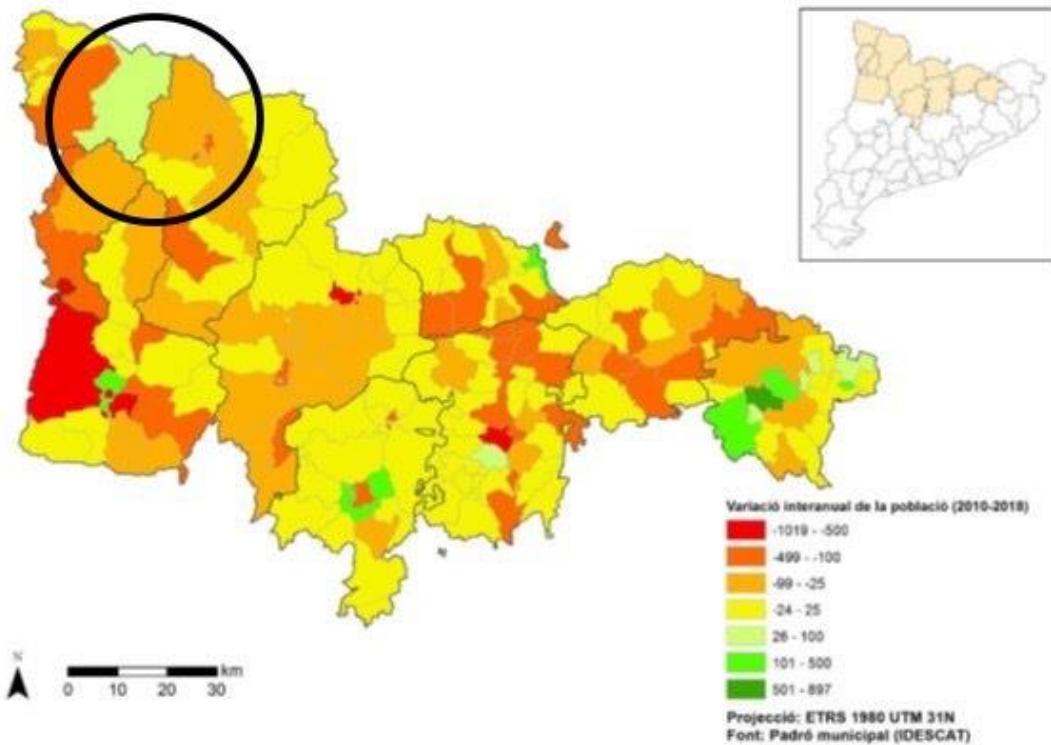
Figure 14. Map of population annual growth between 2010 and 2018 in the municipalities of the Catalan High Pyrenees. In red, the municipalities where numbers undergone the most drastic decline; in dark green, those where the population has risen the most. While Naut Aran stays in light green on the upper left corner of the map, Alt Àneu remains in orange (Ganau 2019, 35).

Given the similarities and differences between the two municipalities, what kind of reserve have Alt Àneu and Bonabé become? Although the Baqueira Beret ski areas cover part of the municipality's lands, neither the entirety of Alt Àneu nor one of its most emblematic sites, the Bonabé valley, could be defined as a "snow reserve." Likewise, the signpost that sets the administrative boundary between the two districts and municipalities defines Alt Àneu and the

Bonabé valley as a "natural reserve." However, what comprises this natural reserve, and under what regimes of governance does it fall? The following set of ethnographic excerpts serve to address this crucial question.

In the summer 2019, an unexpected conversation at the Alt Àneu's town council with Elsa, the municipal architect, set me on this path. I had gone to the municipal archive to review the urban plans that were approved in the early 2000s, when Baqueira Beret was considering installing a chairlift in Sorpe, the first village in Alt Àneu after crossing the Bonaigua Mountain Pass and had already purchased rural lands to develop housing in Isil. The receptionist suggested that I talk to the municipal architect, who happened to be on the premises that day.[20] Coincidentally, our conversation took place just one month after an urban ordinance, issued by the Urban Territorial Committee of the Catalan government, had nullified a series of urban plans in the Alt Àneu's villages that were approved by the very same committee between 1998 and 2006.[21] She expressed bitterness about what she viewed as unfair treatment received by Alt Àneu. Catalan government's differential response seemed especially obvious given the recent approval of a new water reservoir for making snow in the Beret Plain, the housing plans to expand the village of Bagergue in Naut Aran, and the construction of new housing units at the foot of the ski resort in the village of Baqueira. The rationale behind the Catalan government's rejection of plans for the Alt Àneu's villages was their lack of sustainability. In the face of this new set of directives, Elsa wondered: "They want us to be a *park*?! Then they have to tell us, and they have

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[20] The urban plans, approved in 2006, consisted of constructing 379 apartments in the village of Sorpe, which is currently inhabited by only 30 residents from around 10 households.
[21] "Pla director urbanístic dels sectors no sostenibles de l'Alt Pirineu", issued by the High Pyrenees Urban Territorial Committee, 25/7/2019.

to pay us to maintain the land [to keep it pristine]."[22] These measures seemed underpinned by the idea that "Alt Àneu should remain untouched to preserve its essence."[23] Implementing the previously approved plans would have disturbed what others referred to as the Alt Àneu's "picturesque villages." As a result, the contrast between the quiet and the bustling atmospheres, which Jeroni linked and limited to the Bonabé valley and the Beret Plain, respectively, took a broader geographical scope, contrasting the supposed pristineness of Alt Àneu with the urban and economic development of Naut Aran, as if each gained definition and value through comparison with the other. The Catalan government seemed inclined, according to the municipal architect, to expand Bonabé's quietness to the rest of the municipality of Alt Àneu. Given the contrasting institutional stance toward the two regions, Naut Aran and Alt Àneu, Elsa asked with a touch of sarcasm: "What do they want us to live off? Making jam?!"[24]

The use of the term "park" coupled with the image of gathering berries from the forest to make jam aligned with the meaning endowed on the word "reserve" by Jan, the anthropologist and manager of the *Ecomuseu de les Valls d'Àneu*. This museum, created in 1993 in Esterri d'Àneu, the largest village near the municipality of Alt Àneu, has turned into one of the most important cultural museums in the Catalan High Pyrenees. Jan and I engaged in a long informal conversation about what these mountain regions are expected to be in the near future. "If the High Pyrenees has to become a kind of reserve, they should let us know and we'll dress for the occasion," he told me, with a hint of sarcasm, like that of the municipal architect.[25] Here we see the term "reserve" again, but it is charged with a different connotation from the one conveyed

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[22] "*Volen que siguem un 'parque'?! Doncs que ens ho diguin i que ens paguin per 'mantenir el territori'*" (Elsa, 21/8/2019).
[23] "*Concebre l'Alt Àneu com un lloc que no s'ha de tocar per tal que preservi l'essència*" (Elsa, 21/8/2019).
[24] "*De què volen que vivim?! … Fent melmelades.*" (Elsa, 21/8/2019).
[25] "*Si l'Alt Pirineu ha de convertir-se en una mena de Reserva, que ens ho diguin i ja ens vestirem per a l'ocasió*" (Jan, 21/11/2018).

in Naut Aran's logo. In Alt Àneu the reserve is imposed from outside and mostly questioned by the local population, and the object being "reserved" remains unclear, unlike in Naut Aran's snow reserve, which is clearly defined and underpinned from within, embraced by most of the residents.

The negative connotation Jan gave to the word "reserve" was not a coincidence. Rather, it resonated with Franquesa's analysis, previously mentioned, on the local social movements against the urban-centred energy sector in southern Catalonia. The negative connotation thus emerged from the political struggles between the urban centres of power and rural inhabitants in the use and management of natural resources. These struggles also reminded me of a story I came across while scrutinizing the press news that covered the beginnings of the bear program. In the 1990s a demonstration against the bear program had cut the Bonaigua Road, in Alt Àneu. At the head of the protest, the following slogan could be read: "Bears to the Parliament, politicians to the reserve."[26] Through the transposition of terms, which meant to revert the order of things, "politicians at the Parliament" and "bears in the reserve," the underlying message was clear: protesters did not want Alt Àneu to be a [bear] reserve imposed from outside. Back to the ethnographic present, some months after my encounter with the municipal architect, I came across the term "reserve," again laden with the same negative connotation, as I read a quote from one of the text panels of an exhibition in the main town of Pallars Sobirà devoted to the historically hidden role of women in the Pyrenees. A farmer was quoted as saying: "They want

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[26] Taken from a set of interviews from 2009 around the bear program in the Catalan Pyrenees.

to create a [natural] reserve. You already have it [the natural reserve], and everything will be lost: knowledge, conservation, forests, pastures, landscapes."[27]

We can see a stark contrast between the term "reserve" in Naut Aran and Alt Àneu. A snow reserve around a private ski resort imbued with a sense of a collective pride contrasts with a natural reserve focused on the bear program as part of an environmental conservation mindset. A narrative organized around gain and pride enforced by local institutions contrasts with another organized around loss, imposition, and opposition between *us* and *them*. Despite the support from some local institutions, such as the Alós and Isil municipal entity, residents' opposition to a reserve in Alt Àneu has been coupled with their rejection of the bear program, as it has been viewed as "an example of alienation of rights to [the] territory and the legitimacy of its management" (Jiménez Setó 2003, 64. My translation).[28] In short, *their* will to turn this region into a natural reserve is imposed upon *us* resulting in a hierarchical "*they>us*" in Alt Àneu that contrasts with the "*we-us*" reserve in Naut Aran. Whereas Naut Aran would fit in the characterization developed by Keith Halfacree as a congruent, unified, and hegemonic reserve (2006, 55), in which the three elements that define a rural space (what is conceived as the rural locality, what is perceived through the representation of the rural, and what is experienced based on the everyday lives of the rural) cohere in a consistent way, Alt Àneu would fall into a different type of rural space. A rural space featured by tension and contradiction between and within the elements that define it resulting in a less hegemonic reserve. Throughout the chapters of this

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[27] "*Volen crear una reserva. Ja la teniu i tot es perdrà: el coneixement, la conservació, els boscos, les pastures, els paisatges*" (from the exhibition "Dones i Muntanyes en moviment [Women and Mountains on the Move]," held in Sort, 6/12/2019).
[28] An analysis on how the bear program should be conceived as part of a territorialization process in Spain and Catalonia, fostered by the state since the nineteenth century, has been developed elsewhere (Pons-Raga et al. 2021).

dissertation, I will delve into this analysis as I examine the complex interactions of Baqueira Beret and the bear program with extensive husbandry.

**Reshaping the units of study and the research questions**

My questions—how is a "reserve," understood as the result of landscape transformations, produced, and who is responsible for producing such transformations—are thus posed not in isolation but through a relational approach within which Baqueira Beret and the bear reintroduction program are two touchstones. The former has fostered a transition toward a snow reserve in Naut Aran, in which a ski-driven development model runs in parallel with major urban plans (Lasanta, Beltran, and Vaccaro 2013; Beltran and Vaccaro 2020). The latter epitomizes the ongoing transition toward a natural or conservation-driven reserve in the Bonabé valley and the municipality of Alt Àneu, whose origins were partially meant to counter the expansion of Baqueira Beret toward Alt Àneu. Hiking and environmental associations promoted a campaign for the creation of a natural park adjacent to the ski areas in 1999 that would stop the ski-driven development model from spreading toward Alt Àneu (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014b, 285–87). In contrast, the fierce opposition to the bear program upheld by the local population in Alt Àneu in the 1990s was partly connected to the local expectations around "the Baqueira Beret's expansion [toward Alt Àneu] and all the ensuing [urban] projects," given that "[t]he 'great white hope' of the winter made inconceivable any attempt at fauna recovery that jeopardized even remotely the future of this desired activity" (Jiménez Setó 2003, 66. My translation). Numerous documents from the Alt Àneu Municipal Archive prove that both the town council and the local population were overtly in favour of Baqueira Beret's expansion toward their lands, whereas

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Catalan and international environmental NGOs, including Greenpeace, opposed the expansion project and proposed alternatives that were dismissed by the ski resort. This local political stance in Alt Àneu was seconded by Naut Aran's town council in 1998, when its former mayor explicitly connected "its opposition to the [bear] program to the Baqueira Beret expansion projects" (Jiménez Setó 2003, 67 f. n. 14. My translation). Finally, the Catalan government responded positively to the demands of hiking and environmental associations located in Barcelona (the Catalan Hiking Centre, CEC, and the League for the Defense of the Natural Heritage, DEPANA). In 2003, a few years after the bear program was launched, the High Pyrenees Natural Park was created. The park is the largest natural protected area in Catalonia and includes much of Alt Àneu's lands. The local population felt that their demands around the expansion of Baqueira Beret had been unheard and that decisions had been imposed from outside:

> We have been talking about this topic in the Àneu Valleys for too long…[29] It seems that what the residents think (at least most of them) does not interest the people who will decide… We want better infrastructure, which will not happen if no company invests a good amount of money, and at the moment the only one interested is Baqueira Beret. There is a sector of the Catalan population…, mostly members of environmental groups, who put as many obstacles as they can to the project to expand the ski resort [to the Alt Àneu]… I want to ask the people responsible for the Catalan government, and especially for the Department of the Environment, to decide once and for all and

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[29] The Àneu valleys is a toponym that stands for a subregion at the northwestern end of Pallars Sobirà, which includes three municipalities besides Alt Àneu: Esterri d'Àneu, la Guingueta d'Àneu, and Espot.

not make us waste more time with this uncertainty. We must know at once whether we must leave or not.[30]

Resident of Isil (Salaet Caballé 2001).

The clash between these two development models, bolstered respectively by alpine ski resorts and environmental conservation projects (including the bear reintroduction program), was explained by a recently retired anthropologist who participated in the founding of the *Ecomuseu* in a talk in September 2017 in Alt Àneu. The talk was entitled "Tourism in Pallars and Àneu valleys: Past, present, and future," and it revisited a text written and published more than twenty years ago coinciding with the opening of the museum (Prats 1993). The key question, addressed in that paper and in the talk I attended, was the opposition of two development models that the author deemed, then and today, as "mutually exclusive." He described a contrast between a faster, but unsustainable ski-based economy promoted in Val d'Aran and a slower, but sustainable heritage-based economy proposed for the district of Pallars Sobirà:

To put it bluntly, right from the beginning there were two models at stake. An intensive model that was inclined to exploit the snow … to take the maximum profit from the natural resources, squeezing them even at the expense of destroying the landscape and

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[30] "*Ja fa massa temps que parlem d'aquest tema a les Valls d'Àneu… Sembla que el que pensem els veïns (si més no la majoria) no interessi a la gent que ha de decidir… Volem millors infraestructures, que no tindrem si cap empresa inverteix una bona quantitat de milions, i de moment l'única interessada és Baquèira-Beret. Hi ha un sector de la població catalana…, la majoria membres de grups ecologistes, que posen tantes traves com poden al projecte d'ampliació de l'estació d'esquí… Vull demanar als senyors responsables del govern de la Generalitat de Catalunya, i sobretot al Departament de Medi Ambient, que es decideixin d'una vegada i no ens facin passar més temps amb aquesta incertesa. Hem de saber d'una vegada si hem de marxar o no.*"

cultural richness, as has occurred in Val d'Aran. And another model that wanted to activate all this natural and cultural heritage to achieve a slower but sustainable development that would be stable throughout the years.[31]

Although using this binary approach would lead us to insightful reflections about the conflicts between these two worlds, alpine skiing (Baqueira Beret) and environmental conservation (the bear program), I have followed Lefèbre's warnings about the reductionism inherent in binary analysis and his remarks on the advantages of using a triadic approach to study social space: "Triad: three terms and not two. A relation of two terms reduces itself to an opposition, to a contrast, to an antagonism" (2013, 98). If we look closely, we see a third element: extensive husbandry. When we take this triadic approach, we see that Baqueira Beret and the bear program are two sides of the same coin, or a "differentiated unity" (Hall 2003), that contrast with the historical use of natural resources through extensive husbandry. "One discourse [the one articulated by the ski industry]," as sharply noted by Mark Stoddart, "links skiing, nature, animals, and environmental values," whereas "the other [threaded by environmental groups and conservation institutions] uses wilderness to redefine skiing as an environmental problem, wherein the sport is linked to technology, society, and mass tourism in opposition to wildlife, nature, and environmental values" (Stoddart 2012, 56). Alpine skiing and wildlife conservation become, however, mutually reinforcing, and hence consonant domains through a discursive

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[31] "*Per dir-ho breument, des del primer moment es plantejaven dos models, un model intensiu que pretenia explotar la neu … per aprofitar al màxim els recursos naturals, expreme'ls encara que fos a costa de destruir la riquesa paisatgística i cultural del país, com ha passat a la Val d'Aran. I un altre model que volia activar tot aquest patrimoni natural i cultural aconseguint així un desenvolupament més lent, però sostenible i estable al llarg de l'any.*"

conflation: "Environmentalists' use of wilderness and wildlife discourse is ironically similar to the mountainous sublime produced by ski magazines and resort websites" (2012, 56). Marx's words shed light on this paradox: "It is now possible that consonance may be reached only by passing through the most extreme dissonance" (in Hall 2003, 125).

Approached in this way, alpine skiing and wildlife conservation are indeed two differentiated expressions of the alpine development model (Campillo and Font 2004), which combines ski tourism in the winter with ecotourism in the summer under the frame of leisure-based capitalism (Walker 2003). Walker argues that a more recent "amenity-based 'consumption' economy" clashes in the Western rural milieux with an "older resource-based 'production' economy." Contrasting activities and divergent economic models lead to conflict about access to, control and exploitation of natural resources, once "Western landscapes shifted from landscapes of natural resource production [farming landscapes] to landscapes of aesthetic consumption [leisurescapes]". In this sense, the apparent clash between two worlds turns into a more complex interplay among three components: alpine skiing, wildlife conservation, and extensive husbandry, which seems to "reflect underlying tensions between competing capitalisms that commodify nature in incompatible ways" (2003, 17). This approach draws from Raymond Williams's definition of the rural and the urban as intrinsically and historically related categories under the cloak of capitalism: "capitalism, as a mode of production, is the basic process of most what we know as the history of country and city" (1975, 302).

Extensive husbandry was the main productive activity of both Naut Aran and Alt Àneu until the last third of the twentieth century. In the wake of the rise of alpine skiing and environmental conservation programs and the decline of farming, Naut Aran's and Alt Àneu's

farming landscapes have undergone a double urbanization, literally and metaphorically, in the process of becoming a leisurescape (Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017). Through this process, the rural lands tend to be valued less for its productive potential and more for their capacity to present opportunities in accordance with a "tourist gaze" of the rural landscapes (Urry 1990; Woods 2011). Considering that "all [ski] resorts have acted as nodes of urban development, job creation, real estate appreciation (and speculation), and infrastructure growth" (Lasanta, Beltran, and Vaccaro 2013, 108), Baqueira Beret represents the literal side of this urbanization, coupling its expansion with housing development in Naut Aran to produce a skiing landscape (Stoddart 2012), in which houses have been built literally on top of the fields where the livestock used to graze to make a private ski resort viable and profitable. At the same time, given that "urban society needs to keep its natural hallmarks" and the High Pyrenees should be considered a "natural museum,"[32] the bear reintroduction program emerges as the quintessential element of the metaphorical side of this urbanization via the production of a wild heritage landscape (Baird 2017). A translocation rewilding project of an emblematic large carnivore such as the brown bear aligns with urban-based tourists' values concerning the appearance of the mountain rural landscapes, but it has dubious acceptance among the local population, and more specifically among local farmers. However, in the chapters that follow I will show that the managers of Baqueira Beret also intend to naturalize the landscape they reshape by making it "greener." The production of green landscapes carried out by either an alpine ski resort or a wildlife conservation program, must cope, though, with the remaining presence of extensive husbandry. In both cases, the naturalization and urbanization of the landscape promoted by either Baqueira Beret or the

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[32] "*la societat urbana necessita tenir els seus referents naturals*" (Vicenç, the Catalan government's general subdirector of biodiversity and natural protected areas, 14/2/2019).

bear program have shaped the current herding practices, while they have also been shaped by the remaining presence of extensive husbandry, customary practices, and historic rights to former common lands. Although Tilley and Cameron-Daum divide their book *Anthropology of Landscape* into two main parts, one devoted to those who see the landscape as workers (taskscapes) and the other to those who use it as tourists (leisurescape), I approach a leisurecape built upon an alpine ski resort and a wildlife reintroduction program through three key social groups: Baqueira Beret's employees, the bear program's specialist team, and the local farmers and shepherds. Therefore, my analysis of this leisurecape has foregrounded those who work and produce rather than only enjoy and consume the landscape. In a way, this might be framed as the analysis of a leisurescape through the articulation of different taskscapes, which "inevitably produces conflicts of purpose and value" (Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017, 10). Thus, the complex interactions under the double urbanization of a previous farming landscape led me to pose a third research question:

- What are the power relations, moral values, and territorial rights underpinning the interactions between, on the one hand, Baqueira Beret and the bear program (framed within leisure-based capitalism) and, on the other hand, extensive husbandry, as an illustrative example of production-based capitalism?

# Toward an ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape

"The landscape becomes a medium for telling stories of oneself and others… The narration of personal history through landscape has been an ordinary genre for speaking about one's past"

(Tsing 2005, 201).

"Landscapes and time can never be 'out there': they are always subjective"

(Bender 2002, 103).

"Look, tourism and farming are incompatible!" exclaimed Edgar, a local farmer from Naut Aran, as he was selecting sheep from his flock that were ready to be taken down from the high-mountain pastures to the farm to give birth. At the beginning of my fieldwork, his assertion made me wonder whether extensive husbandry was indeed incompatible with either Baqueira Beret or the bear program.

In fact, this ethnography reveals unexpected compatibilities of Baqueira Beret and the bear program with extensive husbandry, uncovering both the ways in which alpine skiing and wildlife conservation articulate with farming, and the power relations hidden behind the scenes. I examine these complex relationships in terms of a process rather than an end. In other words, the ethnographic findings pressed me to inquire about how compatibility or incompatibility were achieved, rather than assessing whether these worlds were "really" compatible or incompatible.

Approaching (in)compatibility as a process aligns with my interest in historical transformations. While questions of compatibility and incompatibility lead us to explore the interactions between two variables looking forward, from present to future, the issue of historical transformation seems to make us look backward, from present to past.[33] This past-future oscillation from a present standpoint has been a recurrent feature of my fieldwork. References to the past through the prompting sentence "before we/they used to do…" abound as much as references to the future, through which mountain interventions carried out by the ski resort or the bear program were meant to "improve the landscape." Building on these ethnographic pillars and following a Marxian historical epistemology, my approach to history has been both retrospective and prospective, given that the elements of any historical conjuncture "foreclose some pathways and open others" (Li 2014, 149). This insight aligns with a specific formulation of historicity, which "focuses on the complex temporal nexus of past-present-future" and is concerned with "the ongoing social production of accounts of pasts and futures" (Hirsch and Stewart 2005, 262). Defined as the "reciprocal formation of subjects and objects and the relationship of being to time" outside the linear expectations of historicism, which separates the past from the present (Stewart 2016, 80), historicity enables us to examine the ways in which compatibility and incompatibility are achieved, as well as what kind of landscape transformations they produce. I contend that the notion of transformation requires knowledge of the past,

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[33] This perspective aligns with what Evans-Pritchard remarked half a century ago with regards to how anthropologists tend to address and write about history, which in this case equates to landscape, given that it is often attached to places: "Historians write history, as it were, forwards and [anthropologists] would tend to write backwards… We [anthropologists] … would be inclined … in light of what we have learnt about the present to interpret … the past" (1962, 186).

looking backward, as well as an insight into the future, looking forward, both from an ethnographic present.[34]

Following the proposal of doing ethnographies of historicity to "draw attention to the social molding of perceptions of the past and the political contests between competing versions of the pasts" (Stewart 2016, 89) and given that the perception of a landscape can be an idiom through which "a community or individual is … contemplating the past and producing knowledge about it" (Hirsch and Stewart 2005, 266), I have taken the ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape as the method through which to examine the overarching transformations produced by Baqueira Beret and the bear program over previous farming societies in Naut Aran and Alt Àneu. In doing so, the ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape turns into an analytical toolkit for: a) scrutinizing how landscape transformations are morally valued and territorially contested through the nexus past-present-future; b) questioning the notion of improvement coupled with the production of green landscapes,[35] and c) engaging critically with the notion of the commons in a leisurescape composed by an alpine ski resort and a wildlife conservation program. The dialogue between the moral and the territorial views of the landscape—how the landscape is valued as an aesthetic product and how it is contested as a political process charged with historic rights—has allowed me to develop this twofold analysis about the interactions of Baqueira Beret and the bear program with extensive

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[34] This perspective connects to Bruce Braun's warning statement in the era of the Anthropocene, within which "time might come toward us from the future, [but] the past continues to haunt the present and … ignoring this leaves us poorly equipped to address crucial social differences in how we face the future" (2015, 240).

[35] The coupling between greening and improving the landscape is claimed not only by Baqueira Beret and the bear program, but also by local farmers. However, in this research, I narrowed down the scope of my inquiries with regard to this question to the first two.

husbandry. Concretely, my analysis centres, on the one hand, on the production of green landscapes underpinned by the moral ecology of Baqueira Beret and the bear program, and, on the other, on the persistence of historic rights and customary practices via the notion of the commons and the conception of property as a bundle of rights.

In landscape, places, time, and people become entwined. People and places are woven together through a phenomenological approach to historicity, which understands that "[t]he knowing subject does not stand apart from the object but is already a part of it" (Stewart 2016, 80). Making a case for a transposition of "object" for "place," I argue that subjects and places would then be embraced by *embedded biographies*, giving way to a simultaneous multivocality through which different social actors speak differently about landscape transformations depending on political, economic, moral, and aesthetic values by recalling the past, seeing the present, and projecting the future in different ways (cf. Berleant 1995; D. Moore 1998; Raffles 1999; Vaccaro 2006; Bender 2002; Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017) in accordance with their taskscapes or patterns of dwelling activities (Ingold 1993). Embedded biographies would tie into the approach to landscape developed by Tilley and Cameron-Daum as they "examine the biographies of persons and the manner in which the landscape become parts of whom they are, what they do and how they feel" (2017, 2) In this vein, I consider landscape as being *not only* "a set of relationships between places" but also between the *history of places* and *personal biographies*, given that these "relate individuals to the landscape, so much so that they can trace out part of their lives in terms of the places they have been and the work or activities that they have been involved with" (Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017, 2; 291). Baqueira Beret's workers, the bear program's experts, local farmers, shepherds, and local politicians speak differently and simultaneously about the *same* landscape. Approaching landscape transformations through these

embedded biographies and the simultaneous multivocality that springs from them allows for an ethnographic analysis that focuses on the value attached to what is shown (and hence becomes visible) and what is veiled (and hence becomes invisible).[36]

The anthropology of infrastructure inspired me to examine both the visible and the invisible. This literature highlights that infrastructure is a special object of study that requires an analytical inversion because infrastructure is usually invisible, unless it stops working: "This [infrastructural] inversion is a struggle against the tendency of infrastructure to disappear (except when breaking down). It means learning to look closely at technologies and arrangements that, by design and by habit, tend to fade into the woodwork… Infrastructural inversion means recognizing the depths of interdependence of technical networks and standards, … and [of] the real work of politics and knowledge production" (Bowker and Star 1999, 34). The etymology of the term sheds light on what lays "before" or "under" what is seen as material structures: "Infrastructure was initially an organizational and accounting term used to distinguish the construction work that was literally conducted beneath unlaid tracks (roadbeds) or was otherwise organizationally prior to them (surveys, plans, bridges, tunnels, embankments) from the superstructure of roads, train stations, and workshops that was situated above or constructed after the tracks" (Carse 2017, 41). From Stoddart's work on the political ecology of skiing I learned that "[m]uch of the 'technonatural' creation of the skiing landscape occurs off-stage, so that skiers arrive at a mountain that is performed for their recreation," including "[t]rees cut outside the ski season" or "snow grooming … during the night," resulting in a "process of

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[36] See below the subsection on "Methods" for a more detailed explanation on how this ethnographic analysis has been methodologically developed.

transformation" that "is black-boxed, so the skiing landscape appears natural, rather than the result of active construction by ski resort companies" (Stoddart 2012, 75–76). Most of my participant observation has focused on the black-boxed technological operations carried out by the ski resort as well as the bear program's staff, as an ethnographic attempt to counter the epistemological process through which the historical construction of the Western notion of landscape managed to hide from the scenes, both aesthetically and physically, the labour required for its production and transformation (cf. Bender 2002, 105). Although at a different scale from the work carried out at Baqueira Beret on the mountain slopes, the bear program's experts also conduct work behind the scenes, such as setting cages to catch bears for monitoring purposes, releasing bears translocated in vans from Slovenia, and gathering visual samples from cameras and fur samples from wires tied to trees. These invisible activities caught my attention. Likewise, achieving a mosaic landscape composed by forests, fields, and pastures requires mowing those fields with tractors and grazing those pastures with livestock. Following such seasonal tasks carried out by the local farmers has proved crucial for this ethnography on landscape transformations. Conceiving the landscape as "an old palimpsest composed of centennial layers," which correspond to "the historical legacies, the continuities, the permanencies, the superimposed layers of the remnants of ancient landscapes" (Nogué 2007, 20. My translation), offers a scaffold for approaching the visible and the invisible within "the historical sedimentation of symbolic and material processes" to "assert resource rights" (Moore 1998, 379). The ethnography consequently unfolds in two intertwined planes—the moral and the territorial—as I consider the landscape as both an aesthetic product and a political process (Darby 2000; Roger 2000).

Through his historical approach, Roger demonstrates that the notion of landscape is a cultural acquisition and argues that to fully understand the concept, we must examine its genesis (2000, 7). In line with this perspective, Darby stresses that the notion of modern landscapes originated in the fifteenth century Flemish and Italian art (2000, 13). In those early stages of the genealogy of the concept, although the paintings dealt with productive landscapes, the very idea of a landscape steadily required both detachment from and subsequent insight into nature, the object of representation. Following Raymond Williams' canonical work, this genesis sprang from the Western historical distinction between the land as a means of production and the land as landscape, or an artistic object of representation. Williams synthesized this idea in what is probably his most famous quote: "A working country is hardly ever a landscape. The very idea of landscape implies separation and observation" (Williams 1975, 120). In the eighteenth century, the ways in which European elites intellectualized the notion of landscape in art and literature gave way to the conflation of "landscape" with a concept that had previously been separate: "nature." "When landscape and nature become one with a physical environment, this environment does not cease to bear value-laden, normative meanings concerning the natural. On the contrary, those meanings become even more naturalized because they no longer appear to derive from an artistic scene composed by a subject, an author or artist, but from objective physical reality itself" (Olwig in Darby 2000, 28). The production of green landscapes through interventions on the mountains carried out by the ski resort or the bear program aligns with this vision of the *natural landscape* as an object of representation whose elements cannot be separated. The production of green landscapes is usually thought about in terms of improvement and presented from a "perspectival gaze in which the observer is always outside and above the action" (Bender in Darby 2000, 13). However, "mak[ing] improvement strange" (Li 2007, 3)

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becomes a generative epistemological standpoint to shed light on the ways in which landscape transformations are always valued situationally and multivocally (cf. Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017, 7). Or, as Barbara Bender put it, "different people, differently placed, engage with the world [or the landscape, in this case] in different ways" (2002, 106).

Given that the production of landscapes "is not innocent of a politics" (Darby 2000, 9), I draw from political ecology to complement the articulation of the aesthetic and the political through a territorial view of the landscape, which sets at the forefront "issues of power … related to belonging, ownership, and responsibilities, embodying the control of space" (McCall 2016, 58). The territorial approach to landscape dovetails with the definition of the environment as "an arena where different social actors with asymmetrical political power are competing for access to and control of natural resources" (Vaccaro, Beltran, and Paquet 2013, 255). Instead of insisting on an "imperative" return to the notion of "territory" beyond landscape approaches (see McCall 2016), I advocate for a territorial view of the landscape to complement the analysis of the moral values attached to it. This approach would allow us to examine the aesthetic moral values and the legal territorial rights as interwoven political aspects of any given landscape. If landscape is thick with politics (cf. Bijker 2007), politics unfolds onto landscapes through moral values and territorial rights. As a result, although "territory" may be defined as "a geographic space where a society or political entity shapes, influences and controls social activities and access to resources" (McCall 2016, 60), and consequently as "the expression of power that performs through [a concrete spatial configuration] under the aspect of landscape" (Folch and Bru 2017, 49. My translation) both "landscape and territory are embedded in relations of power and knowledge" (Darby 2000, 15). From the moral and territorial perspectives, landscapes constantly speak to us through their centennial layers, in which yesterday and today, past and present,

converge. Given this laminated understanding of the landscape (see Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017), it is thus crucial to conceive this palimpsest as a set of superimposed layers that connect the present not only to the past but also to the future. In other words, any landscape is a palimpsest that informs us about the resource struggles of the past and the resource projections of the future through the micro-politics of the present (see Moore 1998). Thus, the landscape is composed of two types of layers at any given time: the vanishing and the emerging. The former conjures the evanescence of the elements from the past in the present, while the latter refers to imaginaries that project futures that are different from the present.

**Theoretical frameworks: moral ecology and property as a bundle of rights**

*The moral ecology of skiing and wildlife conservation*

The term "moral ecology" was coined by Karl Jacoby in the book *Crimes against nature* (2001), which was inspired by works on rural resistance, environmental history, and the subaltern studies movement. Jacoby wrote in response to the archival asymmetries that he encountered in "how to understand the rise of the conservation movement in the United States" (Jacoby 2019, 290). The concept of moral ecology thus "emerge[d] … as a specific attempt to explain the dwelt experience of conservation as locally practised and to write an environmental history [of the United States] from below" (Griffin, Jones, and Robertson 2019a, 7). While the word "moral" aimed to conjure "an ethical universe animating the actions of those who opposed conservation rather than mere greed, deviance, or incomprehension," the word "ecology" "sought to restore a comprehension of the natural world to rural people in place of ceding all knowledge of the

environment to conservationists" (Jacoby 2019, 291). "Moral ecology" thus referred to the vernacular values, beliefs, practices, and traditions that "governed how rural folk interacted with their local environments" (Griffin, Jones, and Robertson 2019a, 10) to counter the elite discourse about conservation, or what later has been called "mainstream conservation" (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008). However, in line with the modification proposed almost twenty years later by the Jacoby himself, I use moral ecology in the plural form, "moral ecologies," not only to challenge the existence of "a unitary moral ecology that all rural folk participated in equally," (Jacoby 2019, 292), but also and foremost to stress that all values attached to landscape transformations are also imbued with a moral ecology. In other words, if "all economies, including the near-to-pervasive-market economies, are moral economies, embedded in the (ethical) framework of their communities," as William James Booth poignantly argued (1994, 662), all ecologies, including the ones resulting from the Baqueira Beret's works in the mountains and from the renewed presence of the bear in the Pyrenees through a reintroduction program, must be also understood as moral ecologies. Moral ecology "is [thus] not only about taking into account the values and norms that might lead to political action against the dominant powers or ideology but also those that might underpin positive visions of private property, the institutions of the market…, and that might be invoked to legitimate actions" (Palomera and Vetta 2016, 426). Following these authors, my approach to moral ecology is parallel to their approach to moral economy. Moral economy is not opposed to a dominant political economy, the so-called "political economy's 'other'." Rather, moral economy and hence moral ecology is "the anthropological way to study the political economy [and ecology]" (Palomera and Vetta 2016, 428). In line with this perspective, I follow Caterina Scaramelli, who argues for the need to expand "the concept of moral ecology beyond its previous meaning as, broadly, resistance to

capitalist processes and dispossession" (2019, 390). A moral ecology approach to landscape transformations allows us to zoom in, analyzing at a more detailed scale the traditional objects of political ecology—that is, the political dimensions and the power imbalances in environmental issues that lead to landscape transformations having "winners" and "losers" (Neumann 1992; Vaccaro, Beltran, and Paquet 2013; Clay 2016), given that "the landscape provides different possibilities and potentialities for different groups and that which is good for one is not necessary so for another (Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017, 10). In this sense, a moral ecology approach to the interplay of Baqueira Beret and the bear program with extensive husbandry stems from the political ecology of both skiing (Stoddart 2012) and wildlife conservation (Neumann 1998; Bluwstein 2018).

### Property as a bundle of rights

The second main theoretical framework I employ is the notion of the commons, both as land and as collective action, via the conception of property as a bundle of rights, proposed by Schlager and Ostrom (1992) and revisited by Sikor et al. (2017). These scholars build upon the premise that property is divided into ownership, management, and use of a particular asset, and they are interested in how these layers intersect with the dissonance caused by the interaction between different stakeholders within a complex institutional scaffold. This complexity becomes crucial to distinguish between levels of rights. While Schlager and Ostrom pointed out the distinction between "rights at an operational-level and rights at a collective-choice level," thus stressing the difference between exercising a right and participating in the decision of future rights to be exercised" (1992, 251), Sikor et al. (2017) remarked that rights are usually

hierarchized in two major orders: use rights, on the one hand, and control and authoritative rights, on the other.

Building on this schema, the social significance of common lands has been mobilized through tactics and strategies, using de Certeau's terminology (1988), by local institutions and by the Catalan and Aran governments. The local institutions have claimed their historical right to benefit from the exploitation of collective natural resources in the wake of the occupation of the villages' uplands by Baqueira Beret. The Catalan and Aran governments have implemented a regrouping policy to protect the sheep from bear attacks as a way of restoring old communal shepherding practices while framing them under a new environmentality (Agrawal 2005) and high-modernist territoriality (Scott 1998) conditioned by the renewed presence of bears.

**Methods: archives, museums, and going walkabout**

*Archives and museums in a family ethnography*

For over two years, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork between two municipalities separated by a mountain pass. Having settled down in Salardú, the capital of Naut Aran, I crossed several times a week to the municipality of Alt Àneu, weather and road conditions permitting. Canonically, ethnography has focused on solitary adventures in remote areas since Malinowski's masterpiece in 1922: "Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical beach close to a native village" (1922, 3). My fieldwork was of another kind: it was a

familial ethnographic journey shared with my wife and two children at the northwestern edge of the Catalan High Pyrenees, only a four-hour drive from my hometown, Barcelona.[37]

Being a husband and father provided me with fieldwork opportunities but also time constraints. Social networks were easier to develop; field notes and interviews were harder to write down. This balance ran in parallel with that between excitement and anxiety. "Being there," following Geertz's classical dictum (1988), turned out to be fruitful and fun. I wanted to be *there* all the time, though: in the field the night before the ski resort opened, on the path as a flock of sheep ascended to the high-mountain pastures, at a symposium on the return of large carnivores in Europe held in Alt Àneu, on the mountain when a hidden cage was moved to catch a bear, on the fields when farmers were mowing the grass. Most of these events were condensed into the summer, while the snow made the winter a season to focus on archival research as well as to conduct participant observation in the ski resort. However, the timing was not always smooth. I began my fieldwork in the fall, a month before our second child was born. A few weeks after he was born, our three-year-old was hit by a car, suffering minor injuries. I was eager to be *there* in the field, but ethnographic priorities were counterbalanced with personal ones. I stayed home caring for our son as he recovered from his injuries. Winter set in, and my fieldwork about the production of green landscapes had to wait for the snow to melt.

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[37] This fieldwork would fit, to some extent, with the label of "anthropology at home" (Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017, 18).

Figure 15. Seasonal views of the landscape through one of the windows from our apartment in Salardú.

When personal and seasonal constraints kept me from the mountains, I collected key data in archives and museums. The manager of the *PyrenMuseu*, created in 2010 in Salardú and the

manager of the *Ecomuseu de les Valls d'Àneu*, created in 1993 in Esterri d'Àneu, next to the municipality of Alt Àneu, were the pair of interlocutors I initially contacted in 2015 prior to beginning my fieldwork. Crucially, they helped me identify key interlocutors for my research. When I started fieldwork in 2017 I conducted snowball sampling based on these first contacts. Two other museums, the *Musèu dera Nhèu* [Snow Museum] opened in 2006 in the village of Unha (Naut Aran) and the *Casa de l'Os* [House of the Bear] created in 2012 in the village of Isil (Alt Àneu), allowed me to delve into the institutional discourses on Baqueira Beret and the bear program, respectively.

In addition to museums, public and domestic archives were also paramount in the search for written documents that would provide me with data to substantiate the oral sources gathered through participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and informal conversations. The documents from the Aran General Archive (AGA), the Naut Aran Municipal Archive (NAMA), the Alt Àneu Municipal Archive (AAMA), and the Property Registry in Vielha were supplemented by handwritten notebooks stored in the participants' households. Demographic data, livestock censuses, historical legal rights to natural resources, old pictures and maps, reports signed by forestry engineers, housing plans, environmental conflicts, offered a complex picture that accounted for the changes in local livelihoods in the wake of the creation and expansion of the ski resort in parallel with the rise of environmental conservation policies. Looking up those historic documents was an endless, often-frustrating task. This general experience was exacerbated by some particularities in the classification of documents in the Val d'Aran's public archives. While the AGA is a tidy and well-classified archive where many documents have been scanned by a professional archivist, whose knowledge and devotion is limitless, and thus are accessible in the archive's website, the NAMA cannot be considered an

actual archive but rather a storage of unclassified historic documents in the basement of Naut Aran's town council. In addition to this structural challenge, my archival research coincided with the retirement of the officer with most knowledge about cadastral issues, the lease of pastures, and other aspects I was interested in.

### *Going walkabout, photo elicitation, and cultural mapping*

I used three ethnographic techniques to address the production of landscapes through their moral and territorial components from a historical perspective. Going walkabout (Strang 2010), photo elicitation (Zanotti, Glover, and Sepez 2010), and cultural mapping (Strang 2010) allowed me to inquire about the landscape transformations derived from the complex interplay of Baqueira Beret and the bear program with extensive husbandry. In doing so, I was, in companionship with my interlocutors, *producing landscapes* about those landscape transformations. I used these three techniques for most of my participant observation and recurrent in-depth interviews.

Following the sequence of going walkabout, photo elicitation, and cultural mapping, I attempted to delaminate the layers of landscape through the participants' eyes, divided into three main categories—a) Baqueira Beret's workers (8 people); b) the bear program's experts, natural scientists, and representatives of environmental NGOs (14 people); and c) local farmers and shepherds (22 people)—plus local politicians and public officers (17 people), local scholars (3 people), and members of the "local population," which included stakeholders characterized by their deep attachment to the places I was studying (11 people).

Strang defines walkabout as an ethnographic technique that "explores people's historical and contemporary relationships with local environments," and which "entails 'going walkabout' with informants in the places that they consider to be important, and collecting social, historical and ecological data *in situ*" (2010, 132). In other words, it consists of encountering and walking with local inhabitants to know and understand their territories through their steps, eyes, and voices. Such "peripatetic ethnography," using Darby's term, makes it possible to "examine how social relations are spatialized and how spatial relations are socialized" (2000, 4). Considering that "the engagement with landscape and time is historically particular, imbricated in social relations and deeply political (Bender 2002, 104), walkabout methods thus aligns with the ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape by bridging the gaps between past, present, and future, and between time and space. In this sense, going walkabout is a good fit for my approach to landscape as a palimpsest in which space and time are analyzed as entwined categories. Time is then spatialized, and space is temporalized through the eyes, voices, memories, and knowledge of the interlocutors who fit in the three key categories of this ethnography: Baqueira Beret's workers, the bear program's experts, and local farmers and shepherds. Going walkabout took shape as part of the participant observation of black-boxed technological operations, in which I accompanied key interlocutors as they told me about the landscape transformations we witnessed together.

After going walkabout in the field with my interlocutors, the next step in my methodology was photo elicitation. On the walkabout expeditions I took photographs that I later used as prompts, asking my interlocutor to comment on each one and provide a caption for it. This technique becomes very helpful for the ethnographer in recalling topographic names, and stories, memories, feelings, and knowledge attached to them, while it also fosters the

emergence of "different attitudes and values ... and stories about the landscape" through images (Zanotti, Glover, and Sepez 2010, 121).

Finally, I conducted cultural mapping, which "often intersect[s] with related methods such as 'counter-mapping' and participatory action research (PAR)" (Strang 2010, 133) to acquire knowledge about property regimes, land rights, and current and previous uses of natural resources. This technique had several phases: First, I obtained detailed topographic maps (1: 3,000 scale) that included cadastral information and printed them on A3 paper. Second, I hand-traced the cadastral plots and the main geographical features onto tracing paper. Third, I filmed participants as they added toponymic information to the traced maps. Fourth, I transcribed the relevant fragments of conversation that emerged during the previous phase. Fifth, I used Photoshop to insert a legend and polish the design of the maps prior to scanning and digitalizing them.

Borrowing Olwig's terminology, this sequence of ethnographic techniques (going walkabout, photo elicitation, and cultural mapping) allows for a binocular rather than monocular view of the landscape. This view is concerned with fields and pastures instead of abstract space, through which "movement and knowledge gained from a coordinated use of the senses in carrying out various tasks, ... engenders a sense of belonging that generates landscape as the place of dwelling and doing in the body politic of a community (Olwig 2008, 81). By going walkabout *in situ*, eliciting pictures taken on the ground, and drawing conceptual cultural maps, landscape is not only seen but also lived through the participants' eyes, memories, and knowledge.

The combination of these techniques forms three epistemological layers, in which multiple viewpoints of the same landscape navigate from what is lived and experienced to what is gazed from afar or seen as a picture on a laptop screen, providing me with a fruitful balance between *showing* and *telling about* the landscape. In doing so, these techniques manage to uncover layers of the palimpsest through the participants' taskscapes, that is the patterns of dwelling activities (Ingold 1993). Embedded biographies, simultaneous multivocality, and landscape as a palimpsest thus compose an epistemological totality through which transformations are spatialized and temporalized multivocally. I have complemented this totality, especially for the discursive analysis around the bear program, by attending talks and conferences as well as conducting a comprehensive review of newspaper articles, TV shows and documentaries.

## The dissertation at a glance: structure and chapters

This dissertation is divided into two parts, one devoted to Baqueira Beret and the other to the bear program. Each part is composed of three chapters that run along a parallel structure based on the production of green landscapes over previous local territorialities derived from the (in)compatible interplay of alpine skiing and wildlife conservation with extensive husbandry. The first chapters of each part (1 and 4) trace the differentiated transformations of Naut Aran and Alt Àneu in the aftermath of the creation of an alpine ski resort and the implementation of a wildlife conservation program, respectively. Change only makes sense when past-present continuities can be traced, and those traces have been experienced and embodied by the local farmers that still live off their fields and livestock today. In the initial two chapters of each part, the ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape becomes explicit, as I examine

landscape transformations through the eyes, voices, memories, and knowledge of the remaining local farmers in Naut Aran and Alt Àneu. I investigate the replacement of fields with housing developments and the restoration of old shepherding practices pressed by the increase of bear attacks on livestock through "the lives and works" of those who "have dwelt within [these landscapes], and in doing so, have left there something of themselves" (Ingold 1993, 152). These two initial chapters also serve to introduce Baqueira Beret and the bear program through the concepts of primitive accumulation (Marx 1967) and anti-politics machine (Ferguson 1990), respectively.

In the intermediate chapters of each part (2 and 5), the scope moves to the production of green landscapes in the Baqueira Beret's ski areas and the Bonabé valley through the moral ecology of skiing and wildlife conservation. Both Baqueira Beret and the bear program claim to improve the landscape by making it "greener." Through heavy work in the mountains every summer in the case of the ski resort or the release of bears and the planting of fruit trees in the case of the bear program, nature is designed and shaped as either an infrastructure that presses us to look forward (Carse 2012; Scaramelli 2019) or a set of heritage values to be restored, making us look backward (Vaccaro and Beltran 2007). In Chapter 2, Baqueira Beret's staff account for the black-boxed engineering production of green landscapes on the slopes where the ski facilities lie (Stoddart 2012), while in Chapter 5 the bear program's experts describe the production of a wild heritage landscape (Baird 2017), despite the moral ambiguities brought about by the renewed presence of bears.

Finally, in the last chapters of each part (3 and 6), I shift to analyzing property as a bundle of rights, and more specifically to examining the troubling persistence of previous territorialities

in the face of Baqueira Beret's plans to stretch its boundaries over the villages' lands and the changes in shepherding practices insidiously imposed by the bear program over the local farmers. In Chapter 3, I analyze the hegemony of Baqueira Beret as channelled through Naut Aran's villagers' economic dependence on it and its sacralization. To do so, I study the primitive accumulation of private lands and the negotiations with Naut Aran's town council on the occupation of previously common lands. In Chapter 6, I consider the failure of the bear program to gain acceptance among the local population based on the overlapping of environmentalities (Agrawal 2005; Fletcher 2010) and territorialities (Vaccaro, Dawson, and Zanotti 2014) awakened by the renewed presence of bears. The idea of the commons, whether as land or practice, has been mobilized using different tactics and strategies (de Certeau 1988) by different stakeholders in the face of Baqueira Beret's ongoing will to expand its ski areas toward new territories and the growth of the bear population and the ensuing rise of bear attacks on livestock. In sum, previous local territorialities that hinge upon the notion of the commons make us aware of the degree to which the past still haunts the present and future. Historic bundles of rights and customary collective practices under previous local territorialities thus persist in and partially condition the design of green landscapes for tourists.

# Chapter 1 — Where does Baqueira (Beret) come from? From fields, pastures, barns, and kitchen gardens to hotels, apartments, restaurants, and garages

In 1962, a modest enterprise comprising a small group of shareholders, mostly local villagers from the region, was founded to open a ski resort on the Vaquèira mountain. The project was inaugurated in December 1964, but it had to wait for more than a decade before it began to flourish. Soon after, the investment of *Catalana Occidente*, a famous insurance company with its roots in Spain's main cities (Madrid and Barcelona), coupled with the first land deals and the ensuing construction of hotels and apartments at the foot of the mountain, triggered this venture. Baqueira, a new ski resort and village, was created. Initially known as TEVASA (acronym in Spanish that stands for "Ski Lifts of Val d'Aran Limited Company"), the enterprise's name changed to Baqueira Beret in 1977, coinciding with the sprawl of housing developments and its growing reputation as the most famous, elite ski resort in Spain.[38] Baqueira Beret became a magnet for the elites and national frontline politicians, especially once Juan Carlos I, the former Spanish monarch, established his winter residence next to the ski resort.

Before describing the chronological development of the ski resort, a distinction between two toponyms, Vaquèira and Baqueira, must be made as they convey different meanings. I use Vaquèira to refer to the name previously given to the mountain where the ski facilities were built.

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[38] Receiving an average of 700,000 skiers per year between 1993 and 2018 (Baqueira Beret nonpublished), Baqueira Beret has hosted almost half of the skiers visiting the twelve alpine ski resorts in the Catalan Pyrenees (López Palomeque 1996; Beltran and Vaccaro 2020).

The Aranese (the Occitan dialect spoken in Val d'Aran) spelling is probably etymologically linked to the historically abundant presence of livestock, and specifically of cows (Vaquèira derives from "vaca" or "cow" in Aranese, Catalan, and Spanish). In turn, Baqueira, written with a B, has multiple meanings, but all of them relate to the creation of the ski resort. Baqueira is thus the name of the ski resort village, home to 222 permanent residents in 2021 but filled with many more second-home apartments used during a few days a year in the winter.[39] Baqueira also refers to the ski resort itself and some of its most emblematic sites on the Vaquèira mountain: Baqueira 1,500, Baqueira 1,800, Baqueira 2,200, and Baqueira 2,500, indicating the different altitudes.

The ski project quickly reached the highest point of the Vaquèira mountain at 2,500 metres in the late 1960s, whereas the expansion to the Beret Plain, an emblematic vast high plateau situated at 1,800 metres next to Vaquèira and marking the watershed between the Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Ocean, was the resort's first major lateral territorial expansion in the early 1980s. The allegedly smooth establishment of this private company under the Franco dictatorship in the mid-1960s gave way to a period of contested negotiations with the town council during the Democratic Transition from the late 1970s onwards. After fierce debates over the conditions that would allow the company to continue occupying the lands owned by the municipality,[40] the ski resort expanded its facilities despite the denial of the planned urban developments toward the Beret Plain. In 1993, the Baqueira Beret ski areas reached the

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[39] Data from IDESCAT (https://www.idescat.cat/poblacio/?q=Baqueira). It is noteworthy mentioning that there were around 400 and 2,500 empty and second-home apartments, respectively, in Naut Aran of a total of fewer than 4,000 apartments in 2011 (https://www.idescat.cat/emex/?id=250254#t116). Furthermore, those second-home apartments represented 20% in the entire Catalan Pyrenees and 60% of the overall number of apartments in Val d'Aran in the early 1990s (López Palomeque 1996).

[40] See Chapter 3 for a detailed explanation about the process through which a tax to Baqueira Beret, commonly known as "the canon," was established by the town council.

municipality of Alt Àneu, on the other side of the Bonaigua mountain pass, in the district of Pallars Sobirà. This expansion was important enough to change the enterprise's logo from "Baqueira Beret. Val d'Aran" to "Baqueira Beret. Aran/Àneu."[41] Since then, Baqueira's ski areas and facilities, divided into three sectors, have asymmetrically covered two municipalities from two different districts in the Catalan Pyrenees, northeastern Spain: Naut Aran, in Val d'Aran district where the Baqueira and Beret sectors are located, and Alt Àneu, in Pallars Sobirà district with the Bonaigua sector. Accessibility and services illustrate this asymmetry. Out of the six access points to Baqueira Beret and the overall capacity for around 10,000 vehicles, four parking lots were built in Naut Aran and two in Alt Àneu. The difference in the number of lots is accentuated by their size and accessibility. The lots in Alt Àneu can only accommodate a few dozen visitors and their access may be compromised by the risk of avalanches on the Bonaigua Road.

In 2002, the expansion toward Alt Àneu was partially consolidated with the construction of a new chairlift, but the resort's plans to build new housing developments in the nearby villages were thwarted by strong opposition from environmental conservation movements and the subsequent creation of the High Pyrenees Natural Park in 2003. Finally, three luxury hotels, around 600 apartments and underground parking lots for 5,000 vehicles were constructed in the 2000s next to the village of Baqueira, at the entrance of the Ruda valley.

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[41] See Introduction to track the changes of this logo and their importance for the geographical scope of this research.
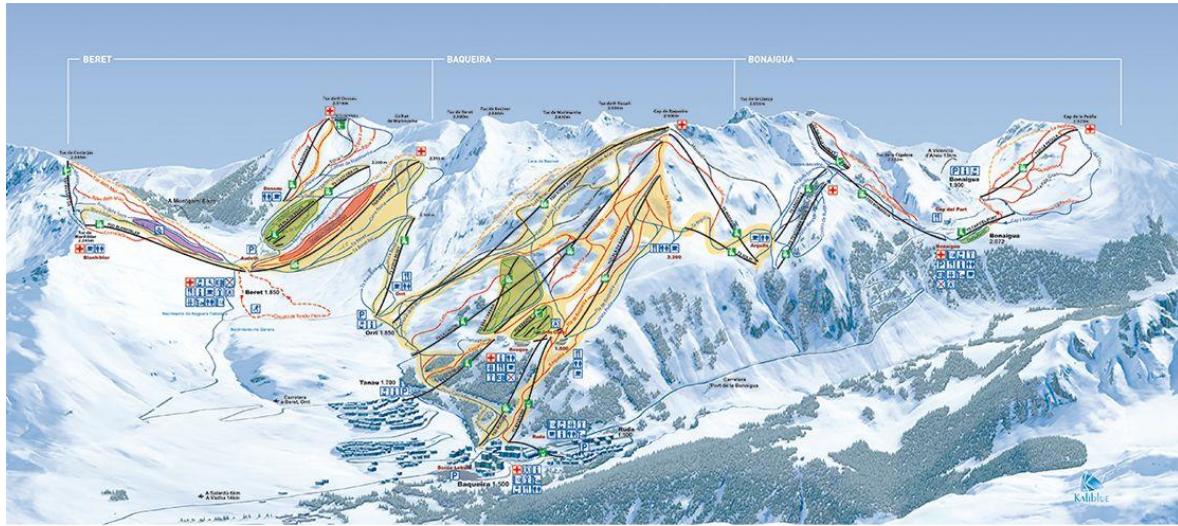
Figure 16. Map of the Baqueira Beret slopes with the three sectors: Beret (left), Baqueira (centre), and Bonaigua (right). The village of Baqueira is situated at the bottom of the Vaquèira mountain, while the Ruda valley runs toward the meeting point of the Baqueira and Bonaigua sectors. The Beret high plateau is linked to Alt Àneu through the Bonabé valley, behind the mountain peaks that mark the limits of the ski areas.

The Ruda Complex was built before the Spanish economy collapsed in the world financial crisis of 2008.[42] Although Isidre, a former mayor of Naut Aran, told me that this major urban project was completely unrelated to the ski resort's previous attempt to build 3,000 apartments over 400 hectares in order to accommodate around 8,000 tourists in the Beret Plain ("Aucupacion deth

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[42] Construction works began in 2004, although the underground parking lot with a capacity for around 3,000 vehicles and the inauguration of the three hotels did not take place until the 2008-2009 ski season (Basora 2008).

Monte 297 'Bandolèrs, Dossau, Beret, Ruda, Aiguamòg...', Salardú e Tredòs" 1973; Baqueira Beret 1978),[43] Lluís, a former councillor of Naut Aran, painted a different picture. Baqueira's failed attempt in the late 1970s to develop housing in the Beret Plain provided the ski resort with a favorable context to push forward a big urban project next to the village of Baqueira—the Ruda Complex—in the early 2000s as a sort of a political compensation in connivance with the Naut Aran town council. This interpretation aligns with Gili's analysis, according to which the Baqueira Beret strategy at the turn of the twenty-first century would have consisted of "paving the way to undertake urban projects at lower levels, 'in exchange', 'in compensation', or 'as an alternative' to an urbanization in Beret" (2003: 240).

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[43] This urban complex was meant to offer the opportunity to leave and return to the apartments with the skis on, while its failure was defined as "the worst mistake in history" by the Baqueira Beret's former general manager (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015). The data gathered from official documents contrasts with other sources, which frame the project within a much broader context. Following Gili (2003), Beltran and Vaccaro assert that the housing development was expected to build around 18,000 beds (2014b, 288), which approximately equated to 13,000 apartments, while Sebastià enlarged this number up to 50,000 beds (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015) or 35,000 apartments.

Figure 17. Volumetric representation of the Beret Plain, including housing and ski lifts, from the *Plan Parcial Ordenación Núcleo Beret* (1978).

Figure 18. Partial view of the Beret Plain, site of the urban complex planned in the late 1970s that was not built (23/6/2018).

In 2020, Baqueira Beret is still recognized as by far the most important ski resort in Spain, with 160 kilometres of marked ski runs and 1,000 metres overall drop. As I witnessed on December 30, 2017, when the resort registered its second highest number of visitors in one day (21,305 people), Baqueira Beret now has the capacity to receive about 25,000 visitors per day.

## Skiers and visitors in Baqueira Beret (1993-2019)

| Season | Number of skiers (including ski pass) | Maximum number of visitors on one day |
|---|---|---|
| 1993/94 | 581,347 | |
| 1994/95 | 623,747 | |
| 1995/96 | 646,279 | |
| 1996/97 | 536,262 | |
| 1997/98 | 678,917 | |
| 1998/99 | 799,467 | |
| 1999/00 | 889,201 | |
| 2000/01 | 552,315 | |
| 2001/02 | 853,924 | 14,357 |
| 2002/03 | 763,912 | 13,338 |
| 2003/04 | 763,912 | 13,921 |
| 2004/05 | 907,310 | 21,357 |
| 2005/06 | 894,173 | 15,374 |
| 2006/07 | 555,643 | 14,081 |
| 2007/08 | 750,501 | 17,224 |
| 2008/09 | 813,226 | 19,540 |
| 2009/10 | 768,151 | 17,586 |
| 2010/11 | 776,274 | 15,799 |
| 2011/12 | 765,191 | 18,121 |
| 2012/13 | 784,339 | 19,309 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2013/14 | 772,645 | 19,868 |
| 2014/15 | 793,822 | 20,557 |
| 2015/16 | 888,775 | 17,058 |
| 2016/17 | 808,120 | 17,516 |
| 2017/18 | 668,377 | 21,305 |
| 2018/19 | 639,948 | 18,607 |

Figure 19. Table of skiers and visitors in Baqueira Beret (1993-2019). Data taken from a file provided by the Baqueira Beret marketing manager (Baqueira Beret, nonpublished).

## The Spanish royal family and the snowball effect: "This is like the Bernabéu VIP box"[44]

According to a detailed description by Aureliano, one of the ski resort's first employees, the rudimentary and precarious beginnings in the 1960s and early 1970s—when rocks were removed from the ski runs in wheelbarrows,[45] concrete was made on the spot, and donkeys, instead of sophisticated topographical devices, were used to mark out the routes for new ski runs—gave way to the boom and success of Baqueira Beret from the late 1970s onwards. The creation of

[44] "*Això és com el palco del Bernabéu.*" Bernabéu is the name given to Real Madrid's soccer stadium, famous to be not only the place where the main team from the capital of Spain plays its home games, but also to be a meeting point for the most powerful representatives of the Spanish society, whether politicians or businesspeople.

[45] This employee recalled some anecdotes that perfectly illustrate the unsophisticated procedures from those early times: "And one year it didn't snow until after Christmas… There were already the [chairlift] 1, 2 and 3. We are talking about the year 1970-1971-1972… And we moved small stone by small stone… breaking all the stones that came out of the ground with a hammer or taking them with wheelbarrows… out the slopes" [*I un any no va nevar fins després Nadal... Ja hi havia l'1, el 2 i el 3. Estem parlant de l'any 1970-1971-1972... I vam anar pedra petita per pedra petita... totes les pedres que sortien del terra amb un martell trencar-les o agafar-les amb carretillos i portar-les a... treure-les de les pistes*] (Aureliano, 3/10/2018).

an elite skiing landscape put Val d'Aran on the map and reversed the deep and long-standing internal, political-economic hierarchies in the district. Overnight, Naut Aran turned into a "snow reserve," the wealthiest region not only in Val d'Aran but in the entire Spanish Pyrenees.[46] The former president of the Aran government or *Síndic d'Aran*, who had held the position for the fifteen years between 1995 and 2019, summarized the economic reversal in Val d'Aran between the lowest region (Baish Aran) close to France and the highest region (Naut Aran) where Baqueira Beret was created: "The phenomenon witnessed in Val d'Aran could be considered a reversal, since in the seventies, the main economic engine was in Baish Aran [Low Aran], where trade in the towns of Les and Bossòst was oriented exclusively to French customers. It was unimaginable that today, after only twenty years [1996], progress would have shifted toward the other end of the valley, that is, Naut Aran" (Barrera 1996, 4. My translation).[47]

One factor is assumed to explain this historical switch between Naut Aran and the rest of Val d'Aran. The turning point came when the royal family settled in one of the urban developments, commonly known as *pletes*, built in the late 1970s coinciding with the Democratic Transition in Spain after a forty-year dictatorship under Franco. Their presence in the winter triggered a real estate domino effect. The "Baqueira phenomenon," which recently shifted to the "Baqueira spirit" as the company's trademark, had been born. The former Director of the Val d'Aran Ski Club succinctly described this process:

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[46] In current times and according to the official data provided by the Catalan government in 2019, Val d'Aran is the third wealthiest district in Catalonia considering the GDP per inhabitant as the unit of measurement, i.e., 36,600 €/inhabitant (http://www.idescat.cat/pub/?id=aec&n=358).

[47] "*El fenomen que ha patit la Vall d'Aran es podria considerar d'inversió, ja que a la dècada dels setanta, el màxim motor econòmic estava centrat en el Baix Aran, on el comerç de les poblacions de Lés i Bossost, orientat exclusivament cap al client francès, feia inimaginable que avui dia, passats només vint anys, el progrés es decantés cap a l'altre extrem de la Vall d'Aran, això és, l'Alt Aran*".
.

The boom [of Baqueira] truly started when the King came… Newspapers were commenting that the King had been in Val d'Aran. And people started to come from Madrid, Barcelona… High class and high-income people would come to Baqueira because of the King… And they would buy apartments, houses… Some houses began to be built in the *pletes*… They were quickly sold and little by little Baqueira was taking shape.

(in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015).

This was not a straightforward and foreseeable process, however. Several factors might have presented insurmountable hurdles to the project's success. Among them, the distance from the Spain's main cities and the outdated road network in the late twentieth century. Even today, in European geographical terms, it takes a four-hour drive from Barcelona and twice as long from Madrid to reach Baqueira Beret. And these times were considerably shortened by crucial road improvements undertaken in the 2000s: the refurbishment of the Vielha Tunnel, which connects Val d'Aran with the rest of Spain, and improved safety of the Bonaigua Road, which connects Val d'Aran with Pallars Sobirà and other districts of the Catalan Pyrenees. Yet, Baqueira Beret has managed to hold onto its elite status as a winter resort since the late 1970s, not only for the populations of Spain's two largest cities—Madrid and Barcelona—but also for those crossing over from France. Because its northern orientation toward the northern face of the Pyrenees, Val d'Aran has always received tourists from France as well as from the Cantabrian coast, specifically the Basque Country, in the northwestern edge of the Iberian Peninsula. In this context, geopolitical features are worth mentioning. Val d'Aran is a peculiar district lying within

the Spanish and Catalan boundaries. It holds dual partial political autonomy within Catalonia

and Spain, ruled by the Aran government (*Conselh Generau d'Aran*), while geographically it faces

France.[48]

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[48] The contrast between the political and natural orientation of Val d'Aran was already described by Pascual Madoz in 1845: "The Spanish citizens who live in the Aran valley deserve, with no doubt, the protection of their Queen, despite they ended up being located out of the natural boundaries of Spain" (2001, 58. My translation).
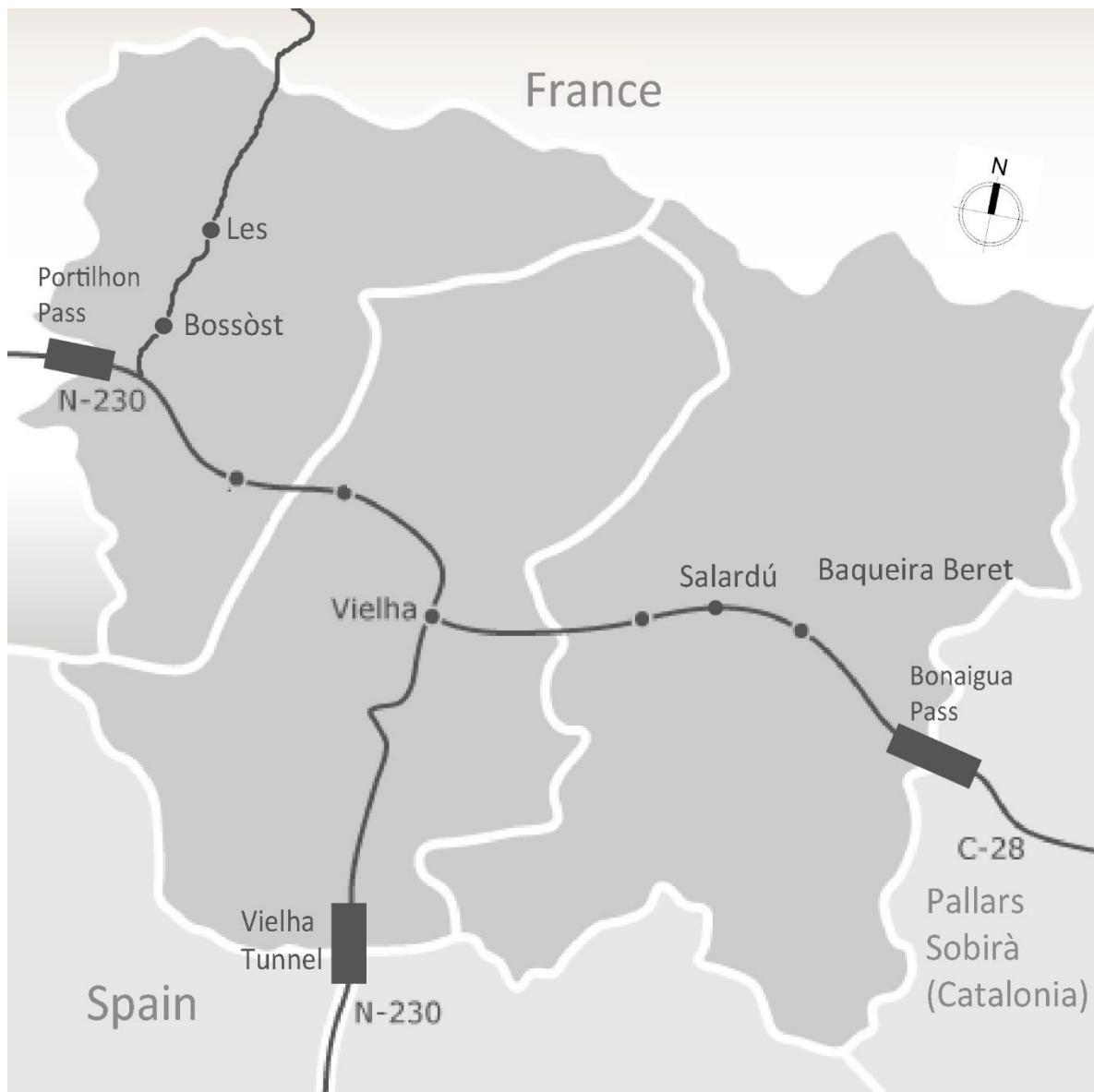
Figure 20. Map of Val d'Aran, a district within Catalonia and Spain, with its main road connections to adjacent regions: France to the west through the Portilhon Pass and to the north following the smooth course of the Garona River; the district of Pallars Sobirà in Catalonia to the east through the Bonaigua Pass; and other Spanish regions to the south through the Vielha Tunnel.

This of what Baqueira Beret has turned into since the late 1970s was enlivened through a casual conversation that took place at an outdoor playground in one of the Naut Aran villages. It was January 5, the last day of the peak tourism Christmas holidays in Spain, which began on December 26. My wife and I were out with our two children and started chatting with Ori, a man whose child was around the same age as ours. While we were talking, María, a friend of ours, showed up. María was conducting intense anthropological fieldwork over the fall and winter for a project on the production of locality in mountainous areas shaped by the presence of alpine ski resorts in the Catalan Pyrenees and the Swiss Alps. The two of us anthropologists were perplexed about the "Baqueira phenomenon" and this perplexity took a much more current, detailed, and experiential tone. Just the day before, María had visited the Möet Winter Lounge, a well-known spot situated in the Beret Plain where members of the elite gather and mingle as they uncork, but do not always drink, the most expensive bottles of this world-famous champagne.[49]

She conveyed her experience with an air of intrigue: "Yesterday we actually *saw* it."

Ori then jumped into the conversation between these two novice ethnographers. "You don't get it, do you?"[50] he said, showing off his experience as a resident in Naut Aran since 2005 and a Baqueira Beret employee since 2009. "This is like the Bernabéu VIP box." We both got the sense of what he meant with that poignant remark, but María, like all good ethnographers, did not want to make any assumptions. Rather, she invited him to proceed in his own words. "In what sense?"[51] María then asked him. "Look, Baqueira is not like the other ski resorts in the

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[49] See Chapter 2 for an ethnographic description of this site.
[50] "*És que no enteneu res, home...*"
[51] "*En qué sentido?!*"

Catalan Pyrenees",[52] Ori explained, immediately adding: "Baqueira is a hotspot for businesspeople in Spain. The "jet-set" come here to get acquainted, do business and network. I've even seen deals arranged up there, on a chairlift."[53] In other words, Baqueira's high quality ski runs are just the public face of its role as a Spanish society elite business and networking hub.

Comparing Baqueira with the Bernabéu VIP box and considering it first and foremost as an elite hub for businesspeople leads me to make another crucial link. Since its very beginnings, the steadily upward and lateral territorial expansions of the Baqueira Beret ski areas have gone hand in hand with real estate investment plans. The profitability of snow extends beyond the resort's revenues through seasonal and daily ski passes. Multiple investments, mainly in building projects, provide the necessary short-term income to compensate the high long-term investments needed to establish very expensive high-tech ski facilities. "All [ski] resorts," as Lasanta et al. noted astutely, "have acted as nodes of urban development, job creation, real estate appreciation (and speculation)" (2013, 108), while the general manager of Baqueira Beret admitted that "[c]hairlifts usually make a loss and the significant turnover comes from hotels and shops" (Bisbe 1996, 64. My translation).[54] My field notes endorsed these statements. Frederic, a longstanding Baqueira Beret employee assured me that "ski resorts lose money. Here business

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[52] The comparison is pertinent for several reasons, since most of the ski resorts in Catalonia are currently owned by the Catalan government, whereas Baqueira Beret is one of the few that remains a private venture (Beltran and Vaccaro 2020). Ori's observation also draws from another relevant biographical aspect considering that before coming to Val d'Aran he used to work in one of those Catalan public ski resorts.

[53] "*Baqueira és un lloc que atrau i mou la gent de negocis d'Espanya. La 'Jet Set', la qual es va presentant entre sí per anar movent i ampliant els seus negocis a través de contactes que es fan a l'estació. Jo he vist com es tancaven negocis 'dalt d'una [tele]cadira'.*"

[54] "*Els remuntadors mecànics són habitualment deficitaris i el volum de negoci important prové de l'hoteleria i dels diferents comerços.*"

lies in quick bucks from real-estate dealings [*pelotazos urbanísticos*], basically acquiring and rezoning rural land so it can be built on."[55] In a nutshell, skiing never exist on its own.

The mutual dependence between ski enterprises and real estate companies brought about a landscape transformation that, following Beltran and Vaccaro (2014b, 188; 2020) and López Palomeque (1996), must be seen as a twofold urbanization process: on the one hand, the housing development proposals, in the form of new urban centres (Baqueira village) or to reshape the historic villages (Garòs, Arties, Gessa, Salardú, Unha, Bagergue, and Tredòs); on the other, the production of green landscapes for the enjoyment of an essentially urban population. This dual urbanization of the landscape around the ski resort has unfolded in two spatial planes—villages and mountains—following a chronological sequence. Housing developments on former rural land and historic villages were followed by interventions to green the mountain slopes.

"Where does Baqueira come from?" is the question that prompts me to report the landscape transformations in Naut Aran. Approaching landscape as a locus of power in which space and time become inseparable (Darby 2000), in this chapter I focus on the urban transformations in the former rural lands situated at the foot of the Vaquèira mountain (Baqueira village) and Salardú, the main village in the Naut Aran district, in the wake of the creation and expansion of Baqueira Beret. Inspired by an ethnographic approach to historicity (cf. Hirsch and Stewart 2005; cf. Stewart 2016), a thick description of Baqueira's and Salardú's urban transformations through the farmers' taskscapes (Ingold 1993), eyes, memories, and knowledge, reveals the transformations undergone in the Naut Aran villages and their populations'

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[55] *Les estacions d'esquí són deficitàries. Aquí el negoci està amb els 'pelotazos urbanístics' basats en l'adquisició i requalificació de terrenys rústics que passen a ser declarats com a urbanitzables … edificables*" (Frederic, 27/7/2017).

livelihoods through the lenses of change rather than of replacement. In the next chapter, I draw attention to how the ski resort produces green landscapes underpinned by a certain moral ecology that frames interventions in the mountain as proof of improvement. Finally, in the third chapter devoted to Baqueira Beret, I scrutinize the political-economic hegemony underpinning these landscape transformations by examining how the territorial expansion and consolidation of Baqueira Beret was shaped by the emergence and persistence of the historic land rights under the distinction between strategies and tactics (de Certeau 1988).

## Baqueira and Salardú before *Baqueira* through a ramshackle jeep, old memories, and going walkabout

Just a few weeks after I met Sebastià, I got into his old-fashioned ramshackle grey jeep. His inseparable companion lay in the back—a dog named Turco whose energy is measured by his incessant barking. Sitting in the driver's seat, Sebastià stretched his right arm to open the door and let me in. He was wearing clothes that seemed to mimic the colours of the environs on those late October days. Dark green boots, light brown corduroy pants, grey wool vest and pullover. He welcomed me in with a beaming smile that, along with the memorable moments we would experience together, became one of the key features I associated with him. Working on and living off the land has not dimmed his vitality.

Sebastià is an erudite farmer whose priceless knowledge is in evidence outdoors walking in the fields and mountains, as well as indoors, in his apartment, talking about livestock censuses

or the shifting uses and rights to former common pastures. A sharp memory backed up by old handwritten notebooks stored in dusty drawers, unclassified folders.

One single artifice allows him to switch states, outwardly, inwardly.

Around his neck, a cord holds his maroon two-piece glasses. In the fields, they hang down on his grey wool vest, bouncing softly on his chest; at home, he connects the two parts, held together by a magnet that keeps them on his wide nose. His glassy eyes, ironic gaze, hardened hands, hunched back, cheerful appearance are full of energy and wisdom. Crow's feet and his tanned, ruddy complexion—who knows whether from the hours spent in the fields exposed to the sun rays, or the sessions in the bar, warming the soul with red wine—are concealed and revealed as he alternately joins and separates his magnetic reading glasses.

Born in 1956 and, in the last decade, the only cow farmer left in Tredòs—the historic village closest to Baqueira Beret—with a farm surrounded by rural new-build estates next to the village of Baqueira, Sebastià's biography is woven into the history of Baqueira Beret and the overarching transformations in the Naut Aran landscapes. When he had not yet turned eighteen, he began to work as a ski instructor and some years later, from 1993 to 2002, he became the director of the only ski school at that time. In between he was also involved in local politics as one of the councillors of the governing party during the 1980s. Finally, since 2006 he has combined his farming activities with running a restaurant with his wife, offering homemade Aran cuisine right next to their house.

Those formal biographical notes were accompanied by other, and maybe more important for my research, personal features. Right from the beginning of my fieldwork, I was told that

Sebastià was one of the few people I could easily approach straight away, with no need for a prior "warm-up." Our first incidental encounter, when I was following other local farmers from Alt Àneu moving their cows down the Ruda valley next to the villages of Tredòs and Baqueira, confirmed this. After quickly introducing ourselves, on my solitary drive back home I received a phone call. He was inviting me to have lunch at his house with the rest of the farmers who were enjoying a break in that long day of transhumance.

In this easy and friendly way, I got to know Sebastià. And through a set of ethnographic techniques—going walkabout, photo elicitation, cultural mapping, in-depth interviews, and archival research based on his notebooks with local livestock censuses—Sebastià's outdoor and indoor knowledge of the Baqueira and Naut Aran landscape transformations flowed through his sparkling eyes, alternately concealed and revealed by his magnetic maroon glasses.

**Delaminating the Baqueira landscape in a ramshackle jeep**

Before arriving at the village of Baqueira and taking the road that soon turns into a dirt track leading to the Ruda valley, Sebastià is naming the fields on both sides. Today, we plan to drive along this valley to find out the toponyms of the mountains, cliffs, streams, forests, and pastures through his knowledge, memories, and experiences.

Almost coinciding with the boundary marked by a ravine whose waters pour down into the Garona River, the landmark flowing through the district's axial valley, a roundabout lies at the crossroads where the village of Baqueira was constructed. Up on a pillar of beige concrete, we are welcomed by a dark grey iron sculpture of a skier leaning to the left. Behind it, the

grandiloquent four-star *Hotel Montarto* with its old-style construction dating back to 1972 epitomizes the first wave of urbanization in Baqueira. Its sharp-edged façade, brickwork alternating with four horizontal strips of grey concrete, and the yellow, green, and white sign in old-fashioned letters, in which a cluster of capital "Ms" are stacked to resemble the snowy slopes of a mountain, all serve to illustrate this early ski-driven model of urbanization.



Figure 21. View of the first constructions in Baqueira around the *Hotel Montarto* (1972-1973) and *Hotel Tuc Blanc* (1982-1983), archetypes of the initial urban model around the ski resort carried out in the 1970s and 1980s following the style of the French resorts in the Alps, taking Courchevel as the model (29/7/2017).

On the left, the Beret Road gives way to another type of housing development that started in the late 1970s following the expansion of the ski resort linked to the acquisition of second-home

apartments by the Spanish royal family, national frontline politicians, and the elite: the *Pletes de Baqueira*. Following the traditional Aran architectural style, the sloping slate roofs and the stone-clad façades of the three-storey semi-detached apartments are the two main idiosyncratic features of this handful of gated condos.

The term *pleta* literally means "sheepfold," but in the common parlance it refers now to this type of housing. Interestingly, as Sebastià told me, it received this designation because the first urban complex of this sort was built in 1973 on the former sheepfold of Garòs—the furthest village from Baqueira Beret within the municipality of Naut Aran—where the *village flock*, made up of sheep from all the households in the village and tended by a shepherd, used to stay after returning from the surrounding pastures in spring and fall while they waited for the farmers to take them to their respective *bordes* or farm barns inside the village.[56] Later developments that followed this urban model took the same name, although they were not constructed where old sheepfolds used to be. *Pletes de Baqueira*, built in the late 1970s and early 1980s following the winding road that leads to the Beret Plain, would be a paradigmatic example of this transposition of terms, from the farming lexicon to the jargon of ski-based urban developments. Today, this urbanization is still expanding up from the Baqueira village to the Beret Plain.

On the right, following the road that leads to the Ruda valley is the site of a deserted cement esplanade, the large, square parking lot of Baqueira, which is crammed with cars during the winter season; in front of this esplanade lies a refurbished old construction, whose triangular

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[56] See Chapter 6 for a thorough examination of the term "village flock" and how its meaning has been reshaped through the renewed presence of bears.

shape seems to hide the rest of its structure beneath the ground. *Borda Lobató* is one of the few original buildings still standing today, although its function has changed completely.

Following the farming-leisure lexical transposition mentioned above, a *borda* used to be a barn for stabling livestock and storing the hay mowed in the surrounding mountain meadows, but today it often refers to a restaurant. *Borda Lobató* is the most emblematic case of this transposition since it shifted from the only barn in those former rural lands at the foot of the Vaquèira mountain to one of the most famous restaurants where the well-known, well-heeled visitors gathered in the village of Baqueira.



Figure 22. *Borda Lobató*, on the right, and *Hotel Montarto*, in the centre, in the 1970s ("Colleccion Javier Hospital" 1970).

Returning to the Baqueira urban estates after a long drive along the Ruda valley, Sebastià pointed to the first land acquired by the ski resort and the first housing developments built straight afterwards. Among those initial land deals, his family holds the "strange honour," in his own words, of having sold one of those first small plots to the ski resort: *Prat de Naut de Coeilàs* (see below Figure 23). A three-hectare field sold for 100,000 *pesetas* (around 600€)—4/5 in cash and 1/5 in shares. As we drove past in his jeep and I filmed the surroundings through the wide-open window, he explained that "they took the parts closest to the resort [ski runs] … and they started to buy this [referring to his family's land] … It was next to a *cabanera* [drove road] … [I]t was the first thing they bought."[57] On that previously rural land, only crossed by bridle paths, another four-star hotel and a group of tourist condos with a private supermarket, known as *Multipropietat* or *Multibaqueira*, has stood since 1977.

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[57] "*Van agafar, lo més proper a l'estació… van anar comprant… i això d'aquí com que era cabanera… És lo primer que van comprar. I després ja van començar a comprar aquí… [a l'alçada de l'Hotel Montarto].*"
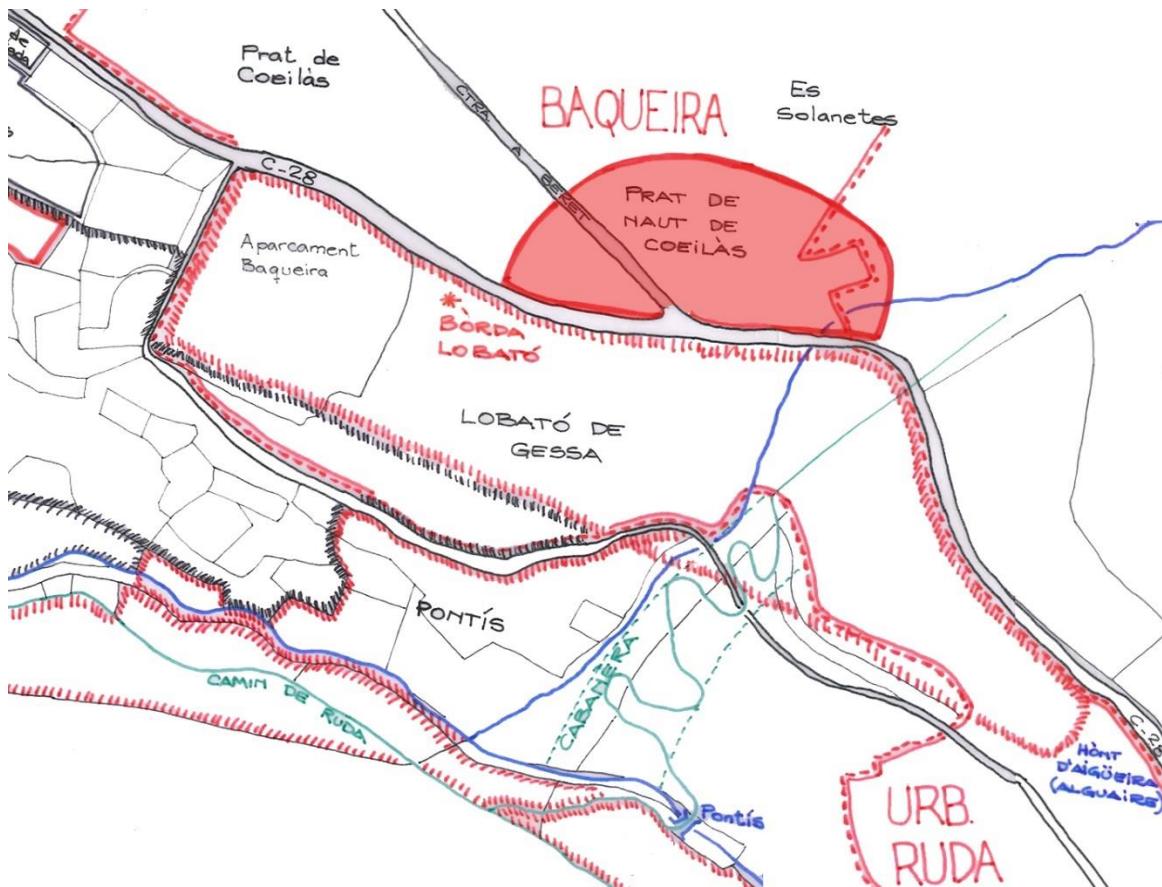
Figure 23. Participatory Map of the surroundings of the villages of Tredòs and Baqueira, at the foot of the main access to Baqueira Beret. "Prat de Naut de Coeilàs" [in red] refers to Sebastià's family's field situated at what would be the crossroads and sold to Baqueira, while "Aparcament Baqueira" is now the parking lot next to *Borda Lobató*.

Drove roads and fields quickly turned into an urban complex and the Beret Road, built some years later when the resort reached this high plateau of mountain pastures.[58] Those initial land

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[58] Road works had already started a few years after the ski resort opened in 1964, but it was not until the early 1970s that the road was planned to reach the Beret Plain. However, a document from the Aran General Archive, signed

deals must be read as Baqueira Beret's primitive accumulation required for the resort to thrive (Marx 1967; Li 2007).[59]



Figure 24. The Vaquèira mountain, viewed from the site where the parking lot was being constructed in the 1970s, with the *Hotel Montarto* on the right ("Colleccion Javier Hospital" 1970).

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by a state engineer, indicates that those road works had only went halfway in 1980 ("Aucupacion des Montes 262, 297 e 298" 1973).

[59] The process of primitive accumulation of private lands undertaken by Baqueira Beret in the 1960s and 1970s will be furthered explained in Chapter 3.
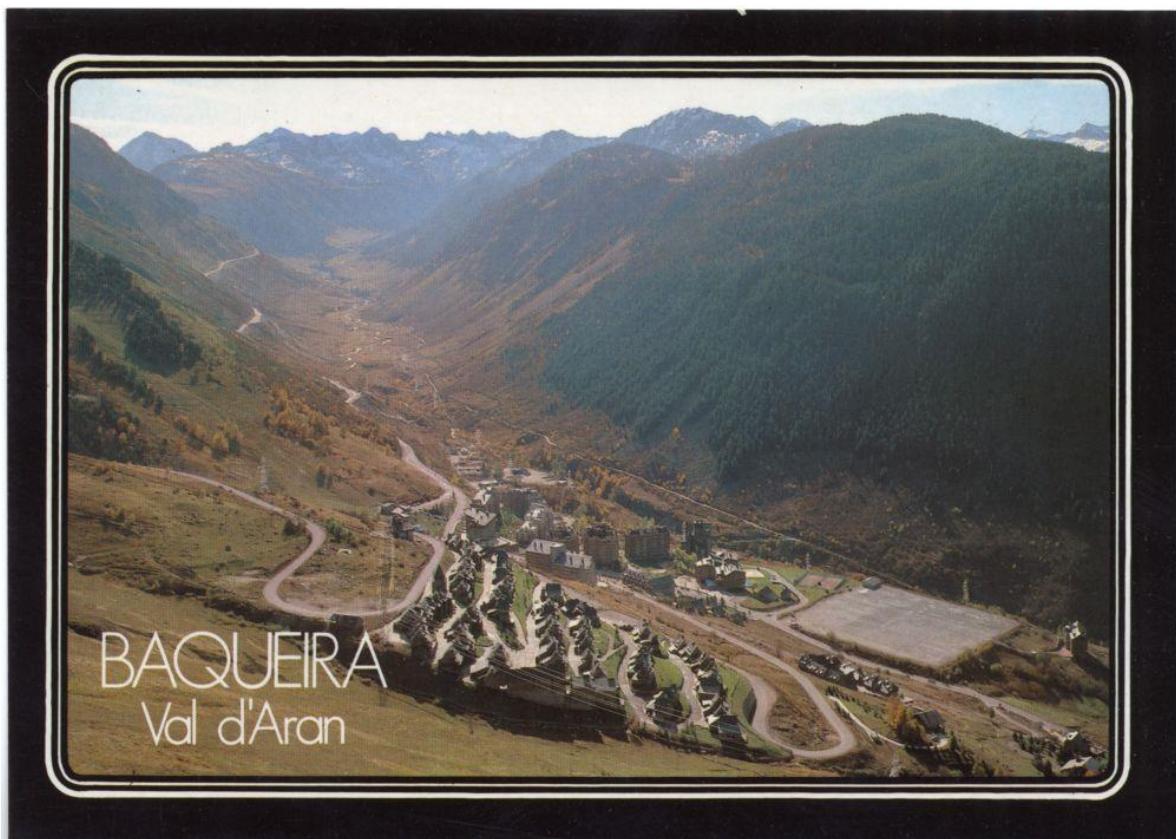
Figure 25. Panoramic view of the Ruda valley from the Beret Road in the early 1980s, when the *Pletes de Baqueira* began to be built, and the village of Baqueira was growing next to *Borda Lobató* and the parking lot ("Colleccion Javier Hospital" 1970).

Figure 26. Panoramic view of the Ruda valley from the Beret Road in 2018. The Ruda Complex has extended the growth of the village of Baqueira toward the valley entrance while the Pletes de Baqueira have spread to fill the first curves on the Beret Road.



Figure 27. Panoramic view of the Vaquèira mountain with the *Pletes de Baqueira* built along the Beret Road and the Ruda Complex at the entrance to the Ruda valley (lower right corner of the picture), 23/6/2019.

Agrarian terms and usages contrast with the current skiing landscape of Baqueira. And Sebastià's farm epitomizes the remnants of the former within the context of the latter today. As such, his memories and experiences allow us to better understand the changes Naut Aran has witnessed through the continuities between two worlds, farming and skiing, which seem to belong to two different times. Keeping in mind this underlying purpose and having learned that his farm and fields were situated right below the Baqueira parking lot, at the lowest end of the ski resort, I asked Sebastià if he had met with offers to sell more land in the context of the urban boom after the creation of the ski resort.

To address this question, Sebastià went back to 1969 when "The General Urban Development Plan for the High Aran"[60] declared the surroundings of the ski resort a "Centre of National Interest for Tourism." This political and administrative process classified the properties surrounding his farm, previously recognized as farmlands, as "public gardens" and as such, urban land. This change was meant to smooth the way for the ski resort to extend its housing developments within the political context of Franco's dictatorship at a time when local dissent was overtly censored. As Ricardo from the Bar Muralha once told me,[61] before this urban development plan was signed, the ski resort had already begun to buy up rural land at very low rates—17 pesetas/m²—from several owners under the threat of extortion. In the early 1980s, during the Democratic Transition in Spain, urban regulations were thoroughly revisited. In the meantime, Sebastià and his family continued to use their fields for grazing and hay meadows, given that no housing development took off. Following from inside the revision of the Urban

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[60] *Pla General d'Ordenació Urbana de l'Alt Aran* (PGOUAA).
[61] See *Introduction* for a description of this café situated in Salardú and the importance of Ricardo for my research.

Development Plan from 1969, as Sebastià had been elected councillor for Naut Aran in the first democratic municipal elections in 1979, he made a somewhat unorthodox request to the village council. Instead of rezoning land, a process that had already affected many kitchen gardens in the villages and other fields on the outskirts, he pushed in the opposite direction: that the lands surrounding his farm be returned to their original rural status. As he told me, the application was received with bewilderment by the municipal officer, and the answer he received was extremely revealing of the pattern followed so far by most of the villagers: "We've done it from rural to urban many times, but we've never done it from urban to rural!" "So, do it!" he immediately replied, pointing out that it was just a bureaucratic procedure. In his eyes, the reasons behind the request were straight and clear: "If I'm a farmer I need meadows, and those meadows are the flattest I have... So [if I sell the lands next to my farm and they get urbanized] do I have to stop farming?!"[62]

The use and exchange value of the land are clearly illustrated through this passage. An agricultural and farming production-based economy, which was predominant until the mid-twentieth century, was displaced by a consumption leisure-based economy (see Walker 2003), in which rural lands were mostly no longer perceived as just means of production, but rather as a product in themselves or as "fictitious commodities," to use Polanyi's expression (2001).[63] Perhaps the municipal officer's incredulity in the face of such an unexpected land rezoning

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[62] Municipal Officer: *Passar de rústic a urbà ho hem fet moltes vegades, però d'urbà a rústic no ho hem fet mai!*
Sebastià: *Doncs, feu-ho! Si jo sóc pagès necessito prats, i aquells prats són els més plans que tinc… Llavors [si venc els terrenys de les set capeles i s'urbanitzen] tinc que deixar de fer de pagès.*
[63] According to Polanyi, in a self-regulated market system "there are markets for all elements of industry, not only for goods (always including services) but also for labor, land, and money" (2001, 72). The crucial point, though, is that all these three elements "are obviously *not* commodities; the postulate that anything that is bought and sold must have been produced for sale is emphatically untrue in regard to them," and, therefore, "the commodity description of labour, land, and money is entirely fictitious"; a fiction through which, nonetheless, "the actual markets of labour, land, and money are organized" (2001, 75–76).

request sprang from the fact that Sebastià's motives—wanting to keep on farming—fell outside the mainstream mindset at those times, when almost everybody got rid of their livestock and ran headlong into the ski-driven tourism boom following early stages of success in and around Baqueira.



Figure 28. A panoramic view of Baqueira today. Sebastià's farm and his green fields, just below the square cement parking lot, are followed by the village of Baqueira on the same level and the *pletes* built on the steep slope by the road leading to the Beret Plain next to the Vaquèira mountain (November 2020).

Figure 29. Sebastià's farm beside three green fields and just below the Baqueira parking lot (March 2018).

Instead of erasing the past, Sebastià strove to keep on farming. However, his struggle and determination must not be understood as being separate from the development associated with the ski resort. Like most of the dwindling numbers of local farmers in Naut Aran, Sebastià benefitted from the creation and success of Baqueira Beret, whether through part-time work as a ski instructor or, later on, running a restaurant with his wife in the village of Tredòs. Breeding cattle, making hay and following the transhumance tradition of moving his cattle up to higher pastures have remained constant, however. It is precisely through the permanencies embodied in Sebastià's and other local farmers' taskscapes, or the "pattern of dwelling activities" (Ingold 1993, 153), that the socioeconomic transition bolstered by the ski resort and the ensuing landscape transformations are better framed and grasped. In other words, it is through the

ethnographic revelation of some continuities between past and present that the notion of change and transformation makes sense.

The rapid urbanization in Baqueira was a process Sebastià experienced fully, but he identified one single family as key to understanding the transformation from a farming to a skiing landscape. Sebastià told me that most of the lands on which Baqueira was constructed had belonged to the Lobató family from the village of Gessa. Interviewing the estate's current successor was indeed crucial to understand the overarching urban transformation in Baqueira and the rest of Naut Aran.

**Old memories before Baqueira**

On a crisp evening in early October, one year after visiting the village of Baqueira in Sebastià's ramshackle grey jeep, I had the opportunity to meet and talk to Pep, the current owner of the Lobató estate. We were not on our own in this encounter, however. The meeting was organized by Esteve, the only remaining cattle farmer in the village of Bagergue, with whom I already had a close relationship after conducting a couple of in-depth interviews, doing participant observation as he tended to his cattle in the mountain pastures, and we had spent hours chatting after our children came out of school in the afternoons. Like Sebastià, Esteve had mentioned that I might be interested in speaking with the Lobató owner. That day he picked me up on the main road at the Salardú bus stop and drove me to the historic Lobató house, which dates back to the fifteenth century, in the nearby village of Gessa, just one kilometre away. His company was meant to smooth my introduction to Pep. His presence would go far beyond that role.

Pep was recovering from pneumonia and still felt a bit weak that day. Aurora, his wife, younger and healthier than him, opened the door and welcomed us in. He was sitting on one of the two couches arranged in an L-shape with a little space between them. The four of us sat on the two couches: Pep and Esteve on one, Aurora and I on the other. The conversation got started once I placed my cell phone on the table having obtained their consent to record. Given Pep's age and position, before this encounter I had considered two potential interconnected interests for this interview. First, born in 1929, he had witnessed and experienced the major transformations Naut Aran had undergone since the mid-twentieth century. And second, he is the current successor of one of the former powerful families (*cases fortes*) in Val d'Aran that owned the land upon which the village of Baqueira was constructed at the bottom of the ski resort in the late 1960s.

Once I had briefly introduced myself and explained my research interests, Pep's first reply fulfilled my expectations right from the beginning. "I can tell you the story of Baqueira," he assured me with confidence and sagacity, "from start to finish."[64] Yet, before delving into Baqueira Beret's road to progress and development, Pep looked further back. A long time before skiing arrived and transformed the landscape at the foot of the Vaquèira mountain, "there is so much history to be told," he announced.[65] Those fields were originally owned by different smallholders, and Pep's great-grandfather began to acquire them in the 1910s, even before the dirt road that crosses the Bonaigua mountain pass was opened in 1923. Having bought the fields, his great-grandfather had no option but to build a barn to store hay, since the five-kilometre

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[64] "*Jo la marxa de Baqueira te la puc explicar de pe a pa*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).
[65] "*Història d'això se'n pot dir molta... sense parlar de Baqueira, que es pot dir molta història*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).

journey between this area at 1,500 metres above sea level and the village of Gessa, at 1,200 metres, was too arduous to transport it by mule, donkey, or horse.

"Then," I proceeded to turn our conversation toward the former agrarian usages and practices, "were those lands [in Vaquèira] good for hay and grazing?" He paid attention to my question and paused for a while.

Memories gave way to a long silence.

Sitting on his couch, he looked like he was travelling through time. His wife's voice broke the quiet moment. "Look," Aurora said, the silence possibly stretching too long for her, "here's an example!",[66] pointing to a framed black and white picture on the wall. Half a dozen horses were depicted grazing at the back of a barn on extensive and fairly flat pastures. There were no other buildings in the picture, and it was difficult to imagine any nearby. It showed *Borda Lobató* and the vast meadows around it at the foot of the Vaquèira mountain before *Baqueira* was even dreamed of.

Pep came out of his silence.

He remembered how he was tasked with taking a mule laden with two panniers full of hay mown from the fields. Once he arrived at the house in Gessa, he would deliver and pile up the hay as his father waited for him. Pep's first memories went back to when he was only nine years old, in 1938, coinciding with the death of his great-grandfather. Recalling those early times of his childhood, Pep's life story mirrored, although from a particular high social class position,

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[66] "*Mira, aquí tens una mostra*" (Aurora, 4/10/2018).

that of most Naut Aran villagers before and after the creation of the ski resort and the ensuing urbanization of those lands.

"That land was so good for us…," he recalled with a touch of nostalgia. "In July," he went on, "we did this first [haymaking around Gessa] … and then, when we finished it off, we had that land [in Baqueira] where the grass came later… We'd spend all August there, in the small house, right next to the barn. We'd harvest high-quality hay, not too high, thick and tender."[67]

From this small-scale biographical account, Pep inadvertently transitioned toward a broader picture by describing how most of households used to eke out a living in Val d'Aran: "The entire [Aran] valley used the meadows to raise animals, livestock. And the more livestock you had… the better you lived… At that time, everyone lived off livestock, but we were the ones who had the most farmland and the most animals in the entire Val d'Aran."[68] Here, Pep was referring to the 1950s, when the Lobatós had around 60 horses and mules. A few of them were used to work their land, while the majority were sold at high prices to farmers from other Spanish regions. "They gave you what you asked for," he assured me, "since they couldn't cross the border" in the aftermath of the Spanish Civil War and the period of economic autarchy under Franco. The family business was thus so profitable that they could even afford to hire a couple of farm labourers, a real privilege at a time when most households had to get by with just

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[67] "*A nosaltres ens anava molt bé aquella propietat perquè al mes de juliol fèiem això [prats de Gessa]... que això ve més aviat... i llavors en acabar això, teníem aquella [Baqueira] que ens venia més tard, a l'agost. Tot el mes d'agost el passaven allí. Ja hi teníem una caseta, també. Al costat d'aquesta quadra [borda Lobató] … ja es veu [assenyalant al quadre] … una caseta*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).

[68] "*És que tota la vall [d'Aran] feia servir la pradera per fer animals, ganaderia. I quant més ganaderia tenies, les cases, millor vivies… perquè llavors es vivia de la ramaderia però els que més ganaderia de tota la Vall d'Aran érem nosaltres. Nosaltres érem els que més terreno teníem agrícola*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).

the labour provided by members of their own family. The Lobatós also had a second source of income: they were the only household in the region, from Vielha to the Bonaigua mountain pass, with a stallion, which according to Esteve, meant "they controlled the covering of all the mares."[69]

In non-mechanized agricultural system this abundance of working horses and mules was highly prized, but in the 1960s they became almost worthless overnight. Coinciding with the creation of the ski resort, the arrival of tractors marked a crucial turning point for the farms in the Catalan High Pyrenees. In the case of Lobató, horses were replaced with cows, at a time when sheep transhumance was still commonplace across the Naut Aran pastures, accounting for thousands of animals on each mountain, as local farmers born in the 1950s still remember very well and numerous documents from the Naut Aran Municipal Archive (NAMA) testify to. Sebastià, for instance, told me to keep in mind that "there was a [sheep] flock going to each mountain… 6,000 sheep would go to all Vaquèira [mountain] and the slopes toward Ruda [valley]."[70] Although we cannot know whether the number of livestock reported in the official documents for the lease of pastures from the mid-twentieth century is an accurate representation of the actual number of transhumant animals grazing on the Naut Aran pastures, documents from the NAMA hint at an overall number in the Naut Aran mountains of 36,800 sheep in 1959. According to Solé i Sabarís (1964, 33), there were 40,000 animals grazing on just the Beret Plain, counting transhumant and local herds during the summers of the 1960s, and this number was much lower than in the previous decades. The same author provides the following number of

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[69] "*Tenien la monta dels cavalls*" (Esteve, 4/10/2018).
[70] *Pensa que hi havia un ramat [d'ovelles] que anava a Vaquèira… Tot Vaquèira i vessants cap a Ruda hi anaven 6.000 ovelles… I a Porera.*

transhumant flocks and herds in the Val d'Aran pastures over the summer season in the early 1960s: 7,000 sheep, between 1,500 and 2,000 cows, and 500 horses (Solé i Sabarís 1964, 38). Pèir Còts, a local historian and archaeologist,[71] confirmed that until the 1960s there were 60,000 sheep grazing on the Beret Plain, whereas in 2019 there were fewer than 2,000. Although a total of 500 and 1,500 large livestock—cows and horses—from local and transhumant farmers, respectively, must be added today to the number of sheep, the overall difference is staggering.

Recalling the crucial turning point from horses and mules to tractors, Pep made an important observation: "Before Baqueira [referring to the ski resort], people from Val d'Aran enjoyed twenty very good years with the hydroelectric works. Six or seven hydropower stations were built. And all these mountains are riddled with holes. There was so much work. Many people from Galicia, Extremadura, Andalusia… from everywhere [in Spain] came here."[72] In effect, several power stations were built in the district between 1940 and 1960, and the region received a considerable wave of migrant workers from other Spanish regions. What was considered "good years" was based on very low expectations, however. "People thrived," Pep assured me, "some with livestock, others working [in the power stations]. No one had to emigrate from Val d'Aran."[73] Considering the historical socioeconomic pressure to emigrate and find a job elsewhere, whether to earn money or sometimes simply to alleviate the economic burden on households in the winter (Beltran 1994; Sanllehy i Sabi 2007), the fact that the Naut Aran villagers did not have to emigrate and could make a living by working in the power stations

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[71] See Introduction for more information about him.
[72] "*perquè abans de Baqueira, a la Vall d'Aran van existir 20 anys molts bons, amb obra hidràulica. Perquè s'han fet 6 o 7 centrals. I totes aquestes muntanyes són foradades totes. Hi ha hagut molta feina. Aquí van venir molts gallegos, extremeños, andalusos, de tot...*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).
[73] "*I el país vivia bé... uns amb ganaderia i els altres anaven a treball tots. No havia d'emigrar ningú de la Vall d'Aran!*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).

or from horses or cows meant these years were seen as golden days. Power stations were built over the period between 1940 and 1965, but technological advances in the late twentieth century led to a drastic reduction in the number of employees, from 153 in 1976 to 30 today (*Aran, Istòria Grafica* 2014, 161–62). Òscar, a member of the Val d'Aran's Ethnological Museum Foundation, succinctly explained the historical importance of the dam constructions: "Later, when the [Vielha] tunnel was finished [1948], hydroelectric companies came, and so did 3,000 labourers with their families [approximately half of the population in Val d'Aran at that time], which also represented a very important social change. It meant that the people from the country, the people from the valley, gradually dropped their farming and livestock activities" (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015). "Fortunately," picking up Pep's account of the socioeconomic phases in Naut Aran, "once the works for the power station were done, Baqueira [ski resort] got started, and then the good times came round again."[74] At that time, in the mid-1960s, Lobató was still thriving with a herd of up to forty cows, first for milk but soon after for beef production.

Pep's life story depicts a *farming society*, which opened a window to me onto the transformations in that world before it began to vanish in the wake of and in parallel with the Baqueira boom. Although the decline of the farming sector is a widespread phenomenon across all the districts of the Catalan Pyrenees, according to a veterinarian from the Aran government the creation and success of Baqueira Beret would have accelerated this process in comparison with the adjacent district of Pallars Sobirà.

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[74] "*Llavors va durar 20 anys allò. Llavors quan es va acabar allò, mira, la sort va ser que, al cap d'un any o dos va començar Baqueira. I llavors va venir una altra vegada una bona època*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).

Figure 30. Table of livestock census in Val d'Aran, Naut Aran, Pujòlo,[75] Salardú, and Tredòs (1950-2019).

Livestock census in Val d'Aran, Naut Aran, Pujòlo, Salardú, and Tredòs (1950-2019)

| Year | HORSES | | | | | COWS | | | | | SHEEP | | | | | GOATS | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Val d'ARAN | Naut ARAN | PUJÒLO | SALARDÚ | TREDÒS | Val d'ARAN | Naut ARAN | PUJÒLO | SALARDÚ | TREDÒS | Val d'ARAN | Naut ARAN | PUJÒLO | SALARDÚ | TREDÒS | Val d'ARAN | Naut ARAN | PUJÒLO | SALARDÚ | TREDÒS |
| 1950 | | | | 268 # | 147 # | | | | | | | | | 274 | 184 | | | | 56 | 58 |
| 1962 | 1000 | | | 292 # | | 8000 | | | | | 10,000 * | | | 219 | | | | | 157 | |
| 1970 | 420 | | | | | 2,905 | | | | | 3,959 * | | | | | | | | | |
| 1979 | 151 | | | 140 # | | 1,797 | | | | 43 | 1,416 * | | | | | | | | | |
| 1989 | 265 | | | | | 931 | | | 104 | | 3,991 * | | | 180 | | | | | | |
| 1995 | 205 | | | | | 530 | | | | | 4,721 * | | | | | | | | | |
| 2007 | 582 | | | | | 702 | | | | | 3,483 * | | | | | | | | | |
| 2012 | 894 | | 199 | 109 | | 800 | | 216 | 85 | 34 | 2634 | | 1,015 | 662 | | 516 | | 79 | 21 | |
| 2015 | 1038 | | 162 | 145 | | 914 | | 249 | 106 | 35 | 3367 | | 1,451 | 997 | | 507 | | 89 | 41 | |
| 2018 | 1038 | | 162 | 145 | | 1109 | | 310 | 131 | 41 | 4287* | | 2,066 * | 1,110 * | 21 * | | | | | |
| 2019 | | | 161 | 120 | | | | 245 | 100 | 35 | | | 1,645 | 1,500 * | 25 * | | | | | |

\* SHEEP AND GOATS TOGETHER
\# COWS AND HORSES TOGETHER

[75] Naut Aran former toponym, which did not include the villages of Arties and Garòs since the sixteenth century (see Chapter 3).

If alpine skiing never exists on its own, in the sense that ski projects always involve and require land rezoning to make them viable and profitable, the wave of urban development following the first housing plans in Baqueira was coupled with another interlinked process. Most of the households sold their livestock, and the few remaining farmers gradually began to build farms near the villages to stable their animals. The rise of skiing and the decline of farming were perfectly illustrated by the shifting numbers of Lobató livestock. "Instead of fifty [cows]," Pep informed me, "I was left with only thirteen," once his family sold their Vaquèira lands to the ski resort.[76] The impossibility of accessing those fields for grazing and haymaking with the aid of two labourers gave way to a rapid and drastic reduction in their herd size. Beyond social class differences, this process was neither unique nor isolated.

Examining the livestock census in the village of Tredòs over a six-year period (1975-1981) in one of the handwritten notebooks stored in Sebastià's apartment, I was able to verify the extent to which the massive decline of farm units and livestock in the villages of Naut Aran ran in parallel with the boom of the ski resort in the late 1970s. Although the demand for labour to build the dams between 1940 and 1960 had already enticed some villagers away from their farming activities, when Baqueira opened in 1964 "people stopped working as farmers,"[77] giving way to a full-fledged transition in which just a few held on to some livestock. In Tredòs, this overarching transformation is reflected in the sharp reduction in the number of both farms— from 14 to seven—and cows—from around 90 to less than 40—over those six years (1975-1981) coinciding with the boom of the ski resort (see below Figure 31). Interestingly, today one

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[76] "*Enlloc de 50 a mi me'n van deixar 13*" (Pep, 4/10/2018). See below in this subsection and Chapter 3 for a detailed examination of the process of primitive accumulation, triggered through the acquisition of Lobatós' lands by Baqueira Beret.

[77] "*la gent va deixar de fer de pagès*" (Sebastià, 5/10/2018).

single farmer owns almost the same number of cows as seven farms did in 1981 (35 and 45, respectively), whereas when Sebastià was a child in the 1960s, he told me there used to be around twenty farmers with 150 cows in the village.[78]

The cattle sector in Tredòs (1975-1981)

| Year | Cows (adult) | Cows (young) | Total | Farm Units | Max. number/farm | Average number/farm |
|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1975 | 89 | 24 | 113 | 14 | 12 | |
| 1976 | 86 | 5 | 91 | 13 | 12 | 7 |
| 1977 | 61 | 8 | 69 | 10 | 11 | 6.9 |
| 1978 | 45 | 3 | 48 | 9 | 14 | 5.3 |
| 1979 | 43 | 8 | 51 | 8 | 10 | 5.3 |
| 1980 | 40 | 9 | 49 | 8 | 11 | 3.9 |
| 1981 | 37 | ? | 45 | 7 | 10 | 5.3 |

Figure 31. The cattle in Tredòs (1975-1981). Data from a handwritten notebook in Sebastià's home archive. The table not only shows the evolution in the total number of cows and farms in Tredòs, but also the maximum and average number of cows on those farms in the late 1970s (two columns on the right). During that period, the maximum number of cows per farm was 14, whereas seven was the highest

[78] The individual and community processes undergone by the Lobató House and Tredòs' farmers also resemble the experiences lived by Ernest, one of the few remaining cattle farmers in Salardú (see below subsection "Going walkabout through the streets of Salardú").

average number. These numbers contrast with the livestock count in Tredòs today, with a single farm with more than 30 cows. Source: Author based on Sebastià's notebooks.

Once Pep had provided me with a lively depiction of the ways of life in Naut Aran in the mid-twentieth century before the arrival of the ski resort, I shifted our conversation toward the origins of the resort and the role his family played as the owner of most of the land where the village of Baqueira stands today. Clarifying the boundaries of those properties and the land deals between the ski resort and the Lobató family were two key elements that, together with Pep's explanations, shed light on the rapid urbanization, not only at the foot of the Vaquèira mountain but also throughout the other historic villages of Naut Aran.

Turning back to the picture of the *Borda Lobató* with the horses and grazing lands beside the barn and recalling the participatory map through which Sebastià drew the boundaries of the Lobató properties, from the Baqueira parking lot to a spring called Hònt d'Aigüeira next to the current Ruda Complex (see below Figure 32), I wanted to clarify the actual boundaries of the rural land surrounding the barn in Baqueira owned by the Lobatós.
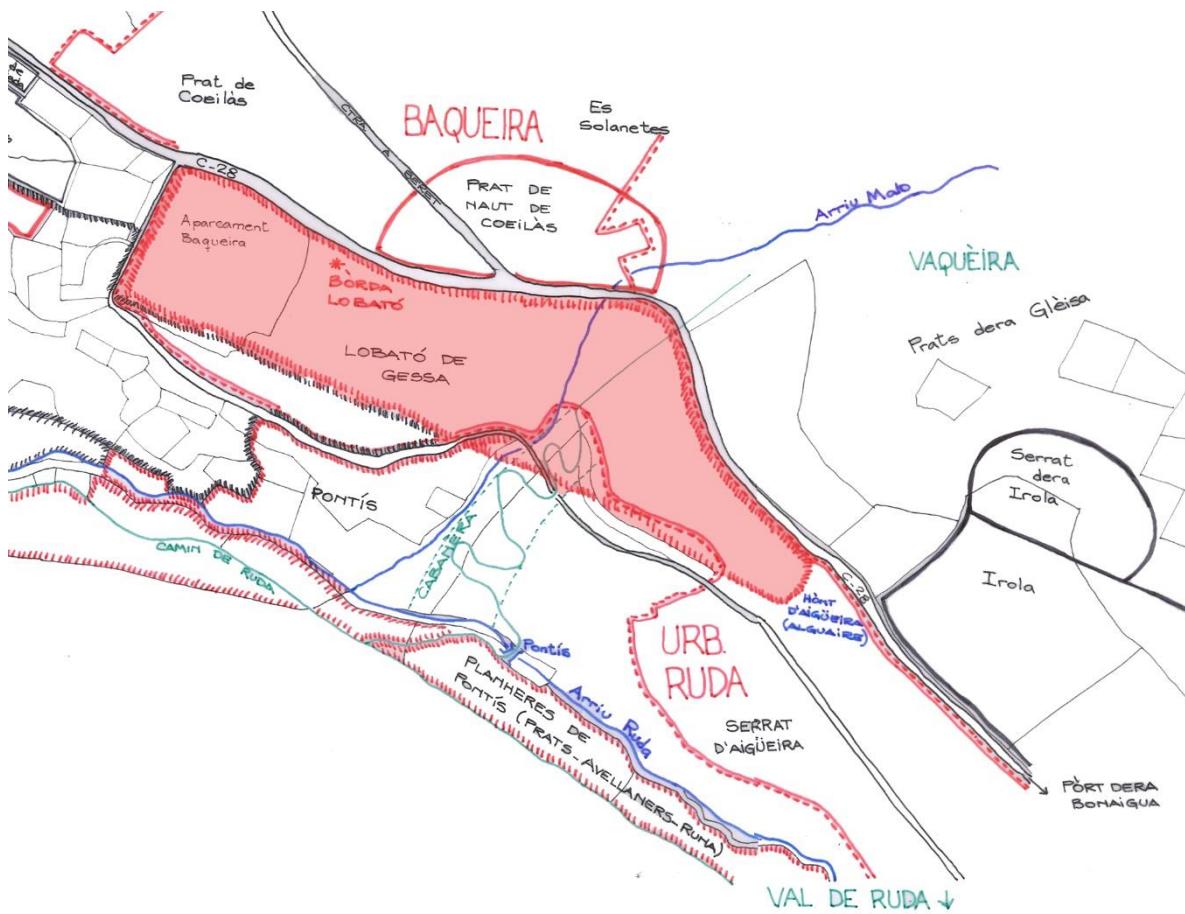
Figure 32. Participatory map of the surroundings of Tredòs and Baqueira. Between BAQUEIRA and URB. RUDA the ranch highlighted in red corresponds to the fields the Lobatós sold to Baqueira.

Pep began with a detailed description of the size of the properties to give a sense of their magnitude: "Starting at the car park, when we reach *Borda Lobató*, then we go from the Ruda track to the Ruda River. And then we have the Malo River. And from the Malo River to Ruda [valley] it was all ours, from the [Bonaigua] road to Ruda [valley], except for two meadows next

to the road." After this clear description, he asserted, "Now you have the perfect location,"[79] and then added, "20 hectares!" On hearing this figure, Esteve expressed his surprise over the size, especially considering the small, regular dimensions of private fields in the rest of the municipality. "Did the meadows go right up there?,"[80] he asked in Aranese, immediately attracting my attention with his next comment: "at that time, no other house had more hectares in Val d'Aran."[81] Indeed, my walks with Naut Aran farmers and information from the land registry confirmed that the average field around the villages is not usually bigger than five hectares. In fact, the field Sebastià's family sold to the Baqueira ski resort covered three hectares, while one of the largest fields in the Ruda valley he currently mows is four hectares.

The other point I wanted to raise was the selling off of Lobatós' rural estate, which led to what I previously referred to as Baqueira Beret's primitive accumulation, that is, the land deals the ski resort pursued with local owners to make their ski business profitable. As the ski resort's first secretary clearly pointed out, "Baqueira couldn't build their facilities if they had no land, [so] they look[ed] for… land at the foot of the slopes, and those were Pep's" (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015). Therefore, once the blueprint for the ski runs was down on paper, the resort needed land for its housing development, and the Lobató family became essential to these interests because of both the location and the size of its properties at the foot of the Vaquèira mountain. In this land sale, the barn and an adjacent building were excluded from the deal. Since 1976 the barn

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[79] "*Començant al pàrquing, quan arribem a la Borda de Lobató, llavors ja anem de la carretera de Ruda, al riu Ruda. I llavors tenim el riu Malo. I del riu Malo a Ruda era tot nostre, de carretera [de la Bonaigua] a Ruda, menys dos prats que tocaven a la carretera. Ara ja tens la ubicació perfecta*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).
[80] *Hasta aquiu arribava eth prat?* (Esteve, 4/10/2018).
[81] "*A la Vall d'Aran no hi havia cap casa més que tingués hectàrees. L'única.*" (Esteve, 4/10/2018).

has been leased to Baqueira Beret, and *Borda Lobató* has become one of the most famous

restaurants where the jet set gathers in the village of Baqueira.[82]



Figure 33. *Borda Lobató*. The only original building in the village of Baqueira today, between the large

parking lot and *Hotel Montarto*, the end of which can be seen on the left of the photograph. The adjacent

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[82] In Chapter 3 I examine Pep's stance against this land trade. His opinion serves me to draw out connections between past and present situations regarding Baqueira's unceasing will to extend its ski areas in parallel with real estate investments. Before and now the ski resort presents itself as the key stakeholders for the road to develop of Naut Aran.

building at the rear no longer belongs to the Lobató family. *Borda Lobató*, now a well-known restaurant, has been attracting the rich and famous since 1976 (30/8/2017).
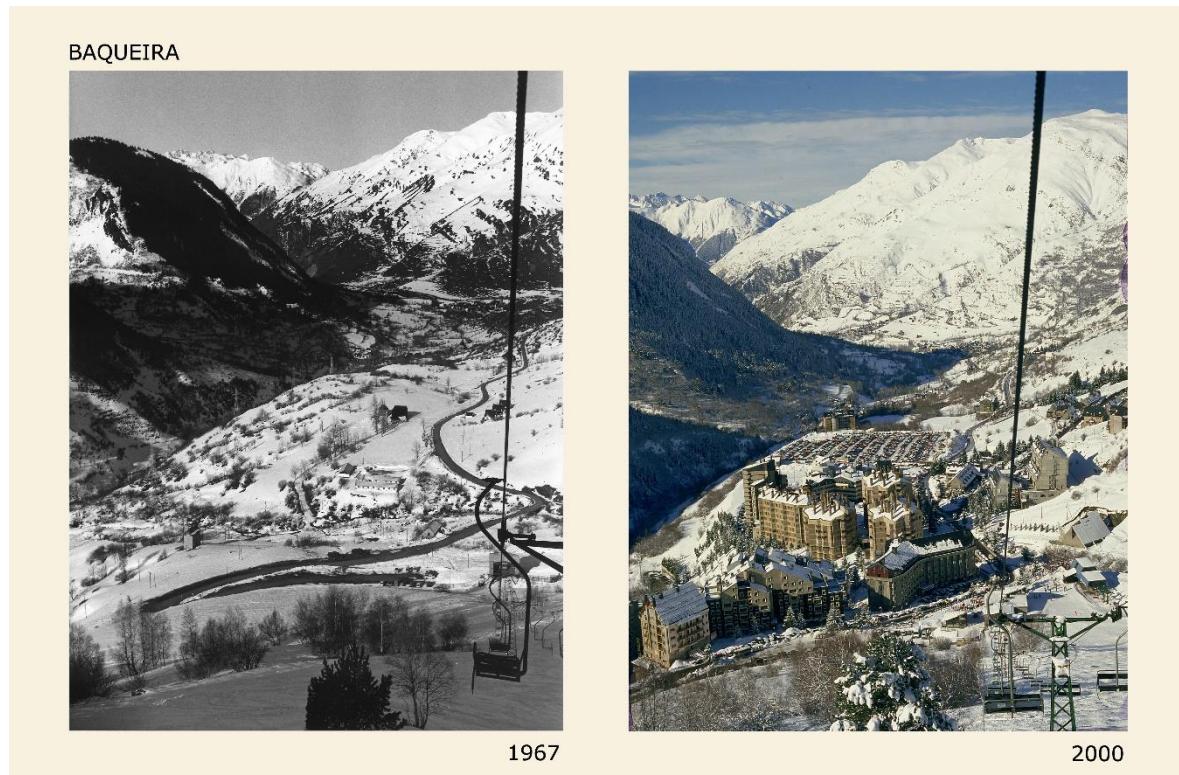


Figure 34. From the Vaquèira mountain at Baqueira 1,800, panoramic views of former Lobató lands that now form the heart of the village of Baqueira. (Pictures ceded by Anna Tur on behalf of her father, Francesc Tur, one of Baqueira Beret's first photographers operating since the late 1960s).

The sale of those twenty hectares of rural land in the late 1960s sparked the rapid construction of Baqueira, including hotels, tourist apartments, and the parking lot. Every corner of Lobató's lands has been touched by a housing development, including the construction of the Ruda Complex in the 2000s. However, as Pep pointed out at the end of our conversation, the construction boom was not limited to the areas situated at the bottom of the Vaquèira mountain

and the ski resort: "When Baqueira got started, it sparked housing developments all over the [historic Naut Aran] villages."[83] Therefore, the ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape transformations presented here refers not only to the changes at the foot of the Vaquèira mountain around the ski resort, but also to the changes in all the villages of Naut Aran. Focusing on Salardú, the main village in the municipality of Naut Aran, I show how the rise of Baqueira Beret brought about radical urban transformations in the historic villages of Naut Aran. I draw on the memories of one of the few farmers in Salardú, Ernest, as we engaged in an in-depth interview and later walked the village streets. By looking back on these changes from the present, I highlight the enduring traces of a vanishing, though not completely vanished, farming society in today's urbanized skiing landscape.

**Going walkabout through the streets of Salardú**

Born in 1957, Ernest is exceptional in that, despite the ski resort boom, he is one of the two remaining farmers in Salardú, a village with around 450 residents in 2021. Initially, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, being a farmer in Naut Aran was not the exception. Rather, the small number of animals per household—five cows, two horses, 30 sheep in the case of Ernest's family—allowed most of the villagers to combine two jobs in the winter: working in the resort during the day and tending to the animals in their barns located in the villages in the early hours and in the evenings. However, as the farmers got older or simply passed away, younger family members chose the easier path of working an eight-hour day in Baqueira rather than toiling day

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[83] "*Quan va començar Baqueira, ja hi va haver molta edificació... per tots els pobles*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).

and night in non-mechanized farm work. Ernest defined this way of life in terms of hard work that came close to enslavement. Like Sebastià, Ernest belongs to a generation that was raised alongside the birth and expansion of Baqueira. "The Baqueira Beret generation," as the previously mentioned Aran government veterinarian called them, had experienced the rupture and displacement of a farming landscape over the last third of the twentieth century in the wake of Baqueira Beret's success.

This was not the case of Ernest. And yet, his perseverance in farming was not unaffected by the expansion and success of Baqueira since the late 1970s. In fact, when he turned eighteen, and already having worked in the resort's cafes and bars for a few years, he became a ski instructor, a job he continues to do today. Moreover, the ski tourism boom directly helped Ernest to thrive as a farmer. When he took stock on his father's death in 1978, he saw that most of the livestock in the municipality was concentrated on a handful of farms and realized that he would have to expand his herd if he wanted to make a living from farming. Crucially, the money he earned as a ski instructor allowed him to invest in these changes. The ski resort thus provided him with the funds he needed to turn his farm into a profitable business. His herd of cows quickly grew from four or five to more than ten, and some years later and given the limited capacity of his barn in the village, he built a new one near Salardú. Ernest steadily increased his herd to between 20 and 30 cows once he had moved them away from the village. Since the 2000s, Ernest has run the family business with his only son Sergi, born in 1985, and by 2020 they had expanded their stock to 80 cows and 12 horses split on two farms, both situated on the outskirts of the village. Like the rest of the horse farmers in Naut Aran, Ernest and Sergi take their horses to a farm in France from mid-November until mid-April, coinciding with the harshest months of the winter and the ski season. This periodic cross-border transhumance, in

which the horses are transported by road, pursues two goals. Firstly, the horses graze on lowland pastures, avoiding the need to stable and feed them hay over winter. Secondly, moving the horses allows Ernest and Sergi to focus on his job as a self-employed ski instructor and looking after the cows, which usually calve in the farm situated next to Salardú during the first three months of the year, coinciding with one of the busiest times in the ski season. In fact, Sergi assured me that in 1995 there was not a single barn with livestock in Salardú, while Ernest remarked that "all the barns have disappeared… all of them."[84]

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In contrast with the casual, easy way I was able to approach Sebastià, the process of getting to know Ernest was not so smooth and straightforward. In hindsight, I understand Ernest to be somewhat Janus-faced, with two very established sides: the reserved and the hospitable. He gives off an aura of hermetic impenetrability, with no sign of porosity. If you stand in Salardú's main square, you will easily see him go past several times a day. In the winter, he strides by tirelessly, eyes fixed on the ground, or drives past in his outdated four-by-four. Whether he is wearing long green boots and farmer's overalls or a full-equipped blue skiing suit tells you where he is heading: to the farm or the ski resort. Always busy, his solipsistic posture, absorbed in his thoughts, and his serious appearance may make you wonder if he has seen you as much as you have seen him, there, standing in the main square.

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[84] "*Totes les bordes han desaparegut. Totes!*"

For almost a year, the unknown, self-contained, passerby Ernest and I lived in inseparable, but just tangential worlds. Like two separate bubbles, every day he would cross the square, passing by our apartment on the main square on the way to his car, but never stopping to say hello. I was not even sure if he ever saw me. He was probably too busy. Or perhaps he did not want to waste his time getting acquainted with another couple of tourists with kids "who stay for two, three, four years… and then leave,"[85] as he later put it.

Distance turned into bonding, though.

A few months after my wife gave birth to our second son, Ernest became a grandfather for the first time. Through those coeval births we became visible. And this visibility took a much more intimate shape soon after when he invited us to *Borda Eugenio*. Like most of the households in the High Pyrenees, Ernest's family used to have two different types of barns. The first type was located in the village and was used to stable and feed the livestock in the winter. The second type was built halfway up one of the valley sides close to each village and surrounded by forests and pastures. These barns were mainly used in the spring and fall as an intermediate stage when the livestock were moving between the village and the high mountain pastures.

Chiseled in the wooden horizontal lintel of the main door, the year 1816 indicates when this barn was built, while the other two dates—1994 and 2014—correspond to the two refurbishments made to the original building. The name it goes by today pays homage to Ernest's father, Eugenio. According to Sergi, despite some attractive offers coinciding with the rise of the ski resort, Eugenio decided to keep the family's property intact and not to sell off their land,

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[85] "*[C]om vosaltres... que hi esteu dos anys, tres anys, quatre anys... i marxeu*" (Ernest, 13/9/2018).

once he had witnessed the tears of sorrow rolling down Ernest's cheeks when this possibility was broached. In the same patrilineal manner, Ernest's idea to convert the barn took hold after a conversation with his son when he was only eight years old. The usual two-storey structure of these buildings, the basement used to stable the livestock and the upper floor to store the hay or straw to feed the animals, was turned into a duplex apartment connected by an external stone stairway.

Very close to one of the most touristic sites in the summer, next to one of the main accesses to the edge of the only national park in Catalonia, *Borda Eugenio* is located in a privileged spot. Several metres above the main track, and therefore away from any traffic, and at the foot of one of the most famous peaks in the region, it commands some astonishing views. Panoramic 180-degree high-mountain vistas unfold from the garden that separates the barn from the adjacent field. In this spot, sitting on a couple of wooden benches around a long rectangular table, sheltered from the burning sun by a large sunshade fixed in the ground, watching the horizon or just the movement of their cows and horses across the mountain pastures, drinking red wine or shandy straight from a glass recipient and passing it on, feeling the warmth on our backs from the embers after cooking a piece of game in the fireplace, Ernest's bubble had been penetrated and his usual reserve turned into a welcoming hospitality as he shared with us his most valuable sacred place.

In June, at the end of one of those long days in *Borda Eugenio*, in which we celebrated his son's saint day and his daughter-in-law's birthday, I asked Ernest if we could meet up another day to talk about his view of the transformation in Naut Aran. He immediately told me to pick a rainy day, otherwise he would probably be in the meadows making hay to feed the cows in the

winter. In this encounter, Ernest would *tell* me his experiences of the socioeconomic transformations in Naut Aran in the wake of the Baqueira boom in an in-depth recorded interview. A couple of months later, as I went walkabout with him through the streets of Salardú, we engaged in a more intimate and peripatetic ethnographic encounter (Darby 2000; Strang 2010). This time he *taught* and *showed* me the urban changes that he had previously related, and provided me with a closeup view or, in Olwig's terms, a "binocular vision of the landscape," through which the "touched, smelled and heard proximate material world [was]… woven into the walker's sensory field" (2008: 84). On our walkabout through the streets of Salardú, Ernest thus provided me with a detailed vision of the former barns that were used to stable the household's livestock and hay until the late 1970s and early 1980s.

| Census of barns and livestock Salardú (1980) | Cows | Horses | Sheep | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Borda Margalida (Fernando Carrera) | 8-9 | | | |
| Borda Hotel Lacreu | 3 | | | |
| Borda Ademà | 4-5 | | | Livestock stabled in the village of Gessa |
| Borda Espar | 9 | 14-15 | | |
| Borda Aloy | 6 | 4-5 | 40 | |
| Borda Agnès (Hotel Mont Romies) | 10 | 4 | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Borda Montardi** | 4-5 | | | |
| Borda Trinxera | 2-3 | | | |
| Borda Lanhèu | 3-4 | | | |
| Borda Pelat | | | | |
| Borda Barberà | | | | |
| Borda Bandoler | 10-11 | | | |
| Borda Pere | 5-6 | | | |
| Borda Teodomiro España (Hotel Pais) | 3-4 | | | |
| Borda Benjamin | 2-3 | | | |
| Borda Mossèn Prat | 5-6 | | | |
| Borda Sau | 4 | | | |
| Borda Enrique | 5-6 | | | |
| Borda Garona | 11 | | | |
| **19 Barns** | **99-100** | | | |

Figure 35. Census of barns and livestock in Salardú around 1980. The numbers show a striking general transformation in Salardú. None of the 19 barns listed around 1980, with an average of less than ten animals per household for a total of 120 heads of cows and horses, now serves its original purpose. Although this transformation is striking, it has not brought about the complete disappearance of farming in Salardú, nor in most of the villages in Naut Aran. The remaining one or two farmers have the same number, or more, of large livestock—horses and cows—as forty years ago. Today, there are three cattle farmers in Salardú, belonging to two households, and there are around 110 cows. Source: Author based on transcript from an interview with Ernest (16/7/2018).

I planned to go walkabout with Ernest through the streets of Salardú to film what the *disappearance* of those old barns, as he had put it, looked like today. I took the printed transcripts from the previously recorded interview, in which Ernest had listed all the households that still had livestock as well as their respective livestock numbers back to the late 1970s, and handed him my cell phone. Following the sites of the former barns used to stable livestock, Ernest took on the role of filming improvised raw footage of the streets of Salardú.

Starting off from the western edge of the village, I began by reading my transcripts: "You told me 'Fernando Carrera'… a family [barn] that disappeared… What did you mean by 'disappeared'?". "Apartments. It's apartments, now," Ernest immediately replied. "See," as he pointed the cell phone camera to capture the doorway to those new apartments, "this used to be the entrance to the hay loft and it's now the entrance to the house."[86] Once he had filmed another two barns, one of them retaining its original style, we reached *Borda Aloy*, Ernest's family barn. Three brown overhead doors at ground level with a "Sortie de garage" notice, written in French, indicated the presence of three garages.

There are usually more cars than garage spaces, however. The grandparent's and the daughter-in-law's SUV vehicles and Ernest's and his son's four-by-four are parked inside, and the entrance is partially blocked by another vehicle outside. Above the ground floor, there are two apartments on each of the other three storeys. Ernest's son, his wife and their two children

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[86] Me: "*Em vas dir Fernando Carrera... una casa [borda] que va desaparèixer... Per què va desaparèixer?*
Ernest: "*S'han fet apartaments… Veus, això era l'entrada del paller i ara és l'entrada de la casa.*"

live in one of them. The rest are rented to tourists who rarely make an appearance throughout the year.

The façade, the structure of the building, the private garages, the excessive number of vehicles: nothing would have made me think a barn had previously stood on this site, if Ernest had not told me. "This was the barn," he announced. "All the lower part [the garage] was the shed for the cows, and the upper part was the hay loft"[87] he explained.

From this spot, we continued along the path Ernest walks every day from his old barn to the apartment where he now lives, passing through the main square of Salardú where I lived for three years. At this mid-point, and after identifying one of the biggest barns in the village that used to stable around ten cows and fifteen horses, Ernest turned the camera onto the *Hotel Mont Romies*. "This was *Borda Agnès*," his voice inadvertently contrasting enormously with the image he was filming. The transformation of barns to hotels was not an exception. A few metres further on, Ernest drew my attention to *Borda Pere*, a barn that looks just the same as ever, as though time had stayed still. However, he stressed that animals were never stabled there, but in what is now another family hotel in Salardú, *Hotel Colomèrs*. Both hotels—Mont Romies and Colomèrs—stand on the sites of former livestock barns.

In other places, like the case of *Borda Lobató* in Baqueira, the barns retained their names even though their function changed completely. *Borda Benjamin*, for example, is one of the ten restaurants that open during the peak season in Salardú; a barn where Ernest's uncle used to

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[87] "*Sí. Tot allò era la borda. Tota la part de baix [garatge] era la nau on estaven les vaques, i a dalt era el paller.*"

keep between two and three cows until Ernest bought them once his uncle had to stop combining his job in Baqueira with his farming activities for health reasons.

At the end of our walk, as we were passing by a set of apartments built along the same lines as those of Ernest's former barn, but in this case most of them lying empty practically all year long, I realized we had left an important point out of our conversation. Ernest's voice and filming recounted the changes to the old barns in Salardú. "You see," he underlined in the middle of our tour, "there is not a single barn left. People tore down the barns and built on the parcels."[88] Today, no livestock is overwintered in the village. However, there are many buildings that are barely inhabited second-homes, build from scratch instead of converting the old barns. I then realized that our tour had not covered those housing developments. "This was a kitchen garden," Ernest explained pointing at the empty apartments built for tourists. "And look the apartments they made!", he exclaimed. With his concluding remarks, Ernest filled the gap: "Every household had a kitchen garden in the village," and all of them, including that of his mother, as he succinctly put it, "turned into apartments" or hotels.[89]

Fields and pastures, barns and kitchen gardens turned into hotels and apartments, restaurants and garages. The arrival of tourists coincided with the departure of livestock from the barns in the villages. As Teo, the only cheesemaker in Naut Aran today, and the Aran

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[88] Ernest: *Però veus, no hi ha ni una borda!*
Me: *Perquè això es va tirar... clar, el procés aquest...*
Ernest: *Bueno, tiraven les bordes, tenies dues o tres cèdules i edificaves... i punto pelota.*
[89] Ernest: *Això era un hort abans… Això era un hort d'aquesta casa. I mira les cases que han fet!*
Me: *Clar, perquè una cosa són les bordes que van tirar i van fer pisos, i l'altra [són les cases construïdes sobre espais prèviament no urbanitzats, com exemple sobre antics horts]...*
Ernest: *Cada casa tenien horts a dins del poble. Nosaltres, per exemple, la meva mare tenia un hort...*
Me: *... aquest que m'has dit, al costat del [Hotel] Pais.*
Ernest: *Exacte. Edificar! Tots! Es van edificar tots!*

government vet graphically put it, "cows were replaced with tourists" and "the people replaced barns with restaurants."[90] Literally, as most of the restaurants are currently sited in converted *bordes*. This is the case not only of the Lobatós, but also of Teo's family. In 1987, they moved their cows out of the village to set up one of the five restaurants in Bagergue, a village of around 100 residents that in 2019 won the accolade of being "one of Spain's most beautiful villages," as well as holding the "Vila Florida" label since 2016. Metaphorically and in a broader sense, the replacement of cows with tourists meant a radical shift in the local economy, from a production-based capitalism underpinned by farming to a leisure-based capitalism mostly dependent on the ski resort (see Walker 2003). Although the disappearance of the barns conveys the idea that what Salardú looks like today has, according to Ernest, "nothing in common"[91] with its appearance in the late 1970s, going walkabout with him through the streets of Salardú, together with delaminating Baqueira landscape in Sebastià's ramshackle jeep and travelling across time through the memories of Pep, sitting on his couch, allows me to challenge the notions of disappearance, replacement, and erasure, and the schism between the past and the present they are fraught with. Instead, an ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape reveals the nexus between past and present times as well as between the farming and skiing worlds.

In the next chapter I shift my perspective to these transformations from villages to mountains to examine the urbanization of the landscape based on the production, under the banner of improvement, of green slopes within the ski areas.

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[90] "*Aquí hem canviat les vaques per turistes*" and "*la gente cambió cuadras por restaurantes.*"
[91] "*Sí, no té res que veure!*"

# Chapter 2 — Greeneering the slopes. Removing rocks, sowing grass seeds, and improving the mountains

## Getting acquainted with the ski resort or making meaning out of the Baqueira Beret mountains

From the terrace of the Refugi Rosta, a well-known hostel with a history of welcoming French explorers since the nineteenth century,[92] and now a haven for modern hikers, I caught a captivating view of the Vaquèira mountain. Facing to the west, its slopes were bathed in orange and yellow as the sun went down behind the mountains that shape the contours of the other side of the valley.

Once I had hung the laundry on the three clothes lines spanning the terrace, I leaned against the white stone veranda for a while staring at the glowing mountain, and I whispered to

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[92] These explorers have since been framed within a movement known as *Pyreneeism*. This movement emerged between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and was composed of a miscellany of men from different areas of knowledge and with different personal motivations (cartographers, botanists, geologists and early hikers), but with a shared scientific interest in the mountains. This scientific and humanist movement fostered a turn regarding the notion of the Pyrenees by bringing together its social and natural aspects and making them known through their explorations and *discoveries*. Well-to-do men, mainly from France and England, embarked on a series of individual projects culminating with a more than ambitious goal: to get to know the Pyrenees and to make it known to others. Their knowledge was produced *in situ*—traversing territories, feeling landscapes—but from a certain distance, describing and drawing from the prism of an outsider, a traveler, a tourist. *Pyreneeism* can thus be considered by certain Pyrenean regions as the means through which their villages, and their valleys and mountains began to open to tourism based on these two elements: distance, and therefore mobility, and knowledge. See Baqués i Soler (2010) for a comprehensive account on how this movement arrived to Val d'Aran.

myself: "I'll know you before long…" It was July 2017, a few days after we—my pregnant wife, our older son, and I—had settled down in Salardú to begin my fieldwork.
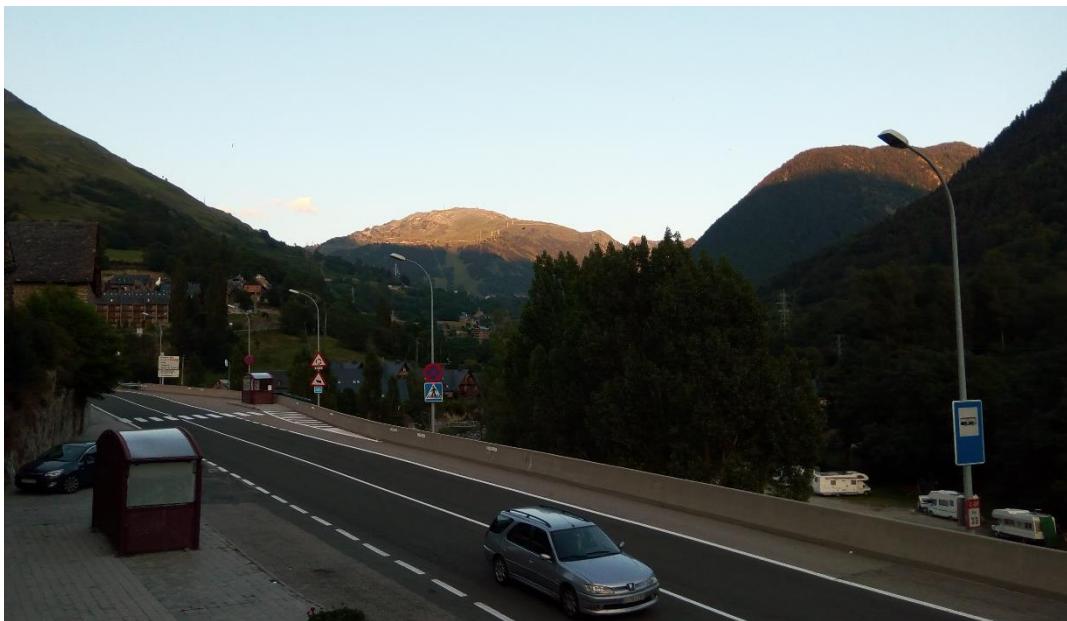


Figure 36. The Vaquèira mountain at sunset from the Refugi Rosta terrace (11/7/2017).

Mark Stoddart's book *Making Meaning out of the Mountain* (2012) inspired my interest in the behind-the-scenes works that allow a ski resort to become what it is and to function properly when it is open. Following Stoddart, I had planned to contact the Baqueira Beret staff in charge of those "black-boxed" maintenance tasks that are concealed from skiers. Snowmaking and grooming the ski runs with snow groomers overnight were two examples that I had in mind in those early stages of my fieldwork. What I had not foreseen at all was the extent to which those tasks were not limited to the winter season, but went on all year long. In light of this revelation, I expanded the scope of my research to look at what happens before and after the snow. I thus

focused on the range of annual operations that take place in ski areas once the snow melts away in late spring and continue over the summer and early fall, just before the first snowfalls return to cover the mountain slopes. These layers of snow hide the technological operations that modify the orography of the mountains and the composition of the soil below. Yet, the white snowflakes are not the only elements that conceal these interventions. The green landscapes produced in the summer also accomplish the same function.

The neologism *greeneering* serves precisely to tease out the production of green landscapes ethnographically in a portmanteau word from greening and engineering. By greening I refer to the process of turning the mountain landscapes *green*, while engineering concerns the technological operations involved in producing such green landscapes. Through *greeneering*, Baqueira Beret manages to turn the mountains *greener* both literally—making them green—and metaphorically—as an index of wildness or apparently untouched nature. As a result, the engineered production of green makes the mountain landscapes, paradoxically, appear *unproduced* or *natural*, as if they had never been touched. *Greeneering* thus corresponds to a twin process: the *engineered production and unproduction of green*.

Of all the Baqueira Beret employees I interviewed and visited the ski areas with, two became particularly relevant in expanding the scope of my research beyond the ski season to include the work carried out over the summer. I am deeply indebted to Frederic and Eusebio for the time they spent driving around the ski areas with me and for their detailed explanations of the sectors, toponyms, orographic modifications, soil changes, etc., brought about by the ski resort. These two employees belong to a select group of experienced and high-ranking staff in Baqueira Beret's Mountain Department. Frederic supervises around 50 ski patrollers whose main

task is to guarantee high safety standards in the resort, while Eusebio manages a team of 30 snow groomer operators, divided into two night shifts working with more than fifteen machines,[93] as well as all the heavy machinery operating over the summer. These two employees manage "the black-boxed technological operations" that take place on the slopes in the winter, and when the ski resort is closed in the summer (see Stoddart 2012). As well as these complementary tasks, Frederic and Eusebio also share a similar career background. They were both hired in the mid-1980s, and have worked in the same department since.

Beyond these professional considerations, Frederic played a supplementary role in this research. He allowed me to get acquainted with the resort through informal rides in his four-wheel pick-up during the early stages of my fieldwork, before I got to know villagers from Salardú or contacted any of the Baqueira Beret staff. Frederic introduced me to the area covered by the resort on two occasions during the summer of 2017. Those initial introductions helped me read the landscape produced in the ski areas through a more meaningful lens.[94] It was mainly through those rides that I became acquainted with the resort, but this process was complemented by interviews and informal talks with several of its employees, photo elicitations after going

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[93] Just to give a sense of the expenditure required by Baqueira Beret to maintain the snow standards it strives for, Frederic commented that each snow groomer costs about 300,000€ and is replaced with a new one every two years.
[94] For a non-skier ethnographer, visiting a ski resort for the first time in the summer, most of its places appear meaningless at first glance. There are no premises in which it is easy to see where the entrance is, where the offices are, where the action takes place. Only in the winter, when the resort is open and its facilities working, the space makes sense in motion.

walkabout with Frederic, observations prior to and after the summer rides,[95] and a visit to the Snow Museum, which provided me with a useful overview of the Baqueira Beret timeline.[96]

The visually appealing but undeciphered view of the Vaquèira mountain on that summer evening from the Refugi Rosta terrace gave way to a process of teasing out the different sectors and regions that make up the Baqueira Beret ski areas today.[97] Paraphrasing Mark Stoddart's book title, through those summer rides Frederic helped me make meaning out of *Baqueira Beret's mountains*.

**Sensorial impressions on the Baqueira Beret mountains**

On the warm but cloudy evening of July 16, 2017, I heard a mixture of sounds that was not easy to decipher. Leaving my car at one of the ski resort's parking lots in the Beret Plain, where the wind blows freely, I strolled with my older son among the chairlifts, tracks and trails. Up above, dark grey clouds were sending out low rumbles of thunder, indicating an imminent storm so typical of the summer months. Down on the ground, the cows moved lazily, their bells tinkling

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[95] On two occasions I had the opportunity to ride on a snow groomer in the evening after the resort had closed. I am fully indebted to Quique for these memorable experiences. The ski runs and the mountains take a completely different shape when they are seen from this aircraft-like machine that compels you to feel that nature may always be under control. The shovel at the front; the groomer and the flexible yellow wings at the back; the red cabin; the powerful though silenced chains that help keep the traction on snow-covered slopes; the backlit buttons to make the high-tech function; the white spotlights reflected on the snow in the middle of the dark night; the machinery and human sounds via radio communications among the team of drivers; Quique's detailed and careful explanations of what he was doing as he was doing it. On two other consecutive days in the winter of 2018, I also took ski lessons with a friend, who helped me skiing as she inadvertently allowed me to *know* the ski resort at work.
[96] https://www.visitvaldaran.com/en/el-museu-dera-nheu-un-centro-tematico-unico-en-europa/.
[97] In 2020, these areas spread over about 160 kilometres of marked ski runs divided into three main sectors: Baqueira [Vàqueira Mountain], Beret [Plain], and Bonaigua [mountain pass]. See Chapter 1 for a more detailed explanation about the area covered by the ski resort and the chronology of its territorial expansions).

gently in the air. Between these two constant sounds from above and below, a steady beating

pervaded the scene. The clunking and banging of heavy machinery—backhoe excavators, trucks,

rock breakers—working invisibly behind the mountains, echoed in the air between the rolling

thunder and the cowbells. Looking up at the north face of Vaquèira, I took a picture to capture

this soundscape through an image. The landscape contained no machines and apparently, no

sounds. A quiet landscape. Forests of pine trees standing beside green pastures. Yet, two areas

of white stones stood out in the centre of the picture.



Figure 37. Panoramic view of the north face of the Vaquèira mountain (16/7/2017).

From the same place, I spotted a cow on my right. It was grazing next to a construction that

immediately attracted my attention. Raised up on short stilts, an angular, modern structure made

of wood, surrounded by an outer façade and with overhanging roof of the same material but

darker, sheltered an open terrace closed in at the sides with glass panels. My surprise grew when I saw what was written on the back of the building: "Audi driving experience," with the four interlocking rings of this luxury car firm's logo.



Figure 38. View of the "Audi Driving Experience" building (16/7/2017).

Some metres ahead on our left, another building stood out in the alpine pastoral landscape of the Beret Plain. Although on that day I did not find out the purpose of the "Moët Winter Lounge," I became aware of its relevance for the ski resort through later conversations.[98]

    This is the most famous meeting point in the ski areas for the elite who come in the winter. Frederic once told me that one of the most typical sights to be seen in this hotspot is

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[98] See section "The Spanish royal family and the snowball effect: 'This is like the Bernabéu VIP box'" in Chapter 1.

visitors uncorking extremely expensive bottles of champagne just to witness how the effect of the altitude and low temperatures causes the foam to burst out and apparently turn into snow in the air. This place is famous for selling more bottles of Moët champagne than anywhere else in Spain, but as Frederic pointed out, the customers "don't even drink it!"[99]

On a rise just beside this construction appeared a shepherd's hut, in an equally surprising way as the grazing cow juxtaposed in space next to the "Audi driving experience" structure. The contrast was staggering: one building designed to shelter a shepherd tending the sheep in the summer right next to another one, built as a playground where the most elite tourists meet to show off their wealth and status. A shepherd's hut next to the Moët Winter Lounge epitomizes the juxtaposition of two worlds—skiing and farming—that instead of colliding, appear to be seasonally compatible. In other words, the spatial inseparability of these two buildings is tied to their temporal seasonality. "In the winter," as Frederic put it, "there is nobody [shepherds or farmers] here."[100] And, in the summer, I said to myself, the rich and famous are not to be found wandering around here either.

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[99] "*L'ampolla… ni se la beuen!*" (Frederic, 29/7/2017).
[100] "*a l'hivern no hi ha ningú [cap pastor]*" (Frederic, 29/7/2017).

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Figure 39. The shepherd's hut and the Möet Winter Lounge at the bottom of the north face of Vaquèira in the summer and winter of 2017.

Two weeks later, on July 29, Frederic picked me up in the main square of Salardú in his Baqueira Beret four-wheel vehicle. Following the ski resort's chronological expansion, our plan for that day was to visit two of its three sectors: Baqueira and Beret.
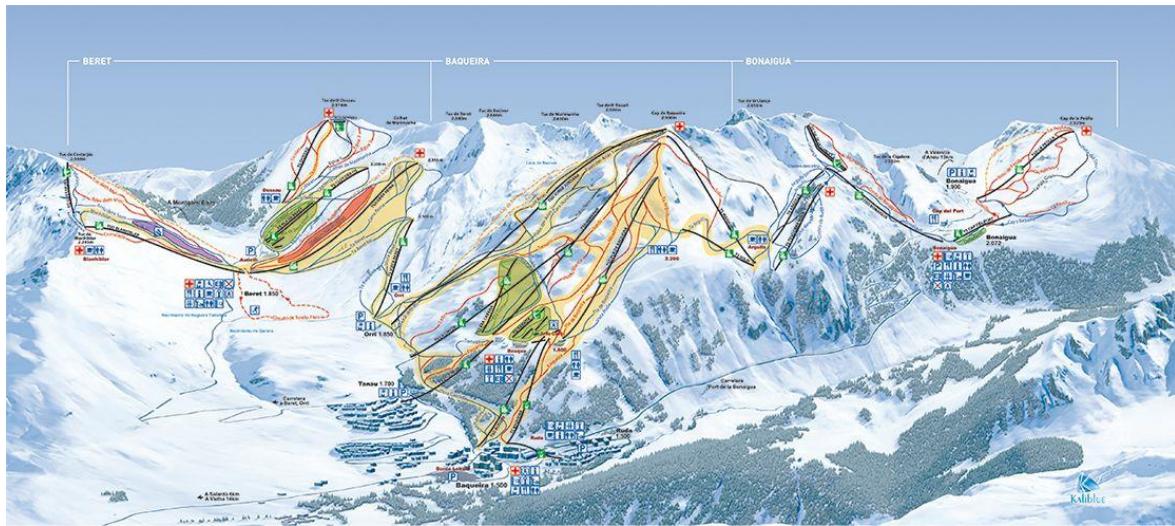
Figure 40. Map of the Baqueira Beret ski areas with its three main sectors (from left to right): Beret, Baqueira, and Bonaigua.

In the village of Baqueira he turned left to take the Beret Road.[101] After rounding one of the curves, I asked him to stop and we got out of the car to enjoy a privileged view of the Vaquèira mountain, which I captured in the following picture:

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[101] See Chapter 1 for a detailed ethnographic description of this area and the transformations undergone since the creation of the ski resort in 1964.

Figure 41. Panoramic view of the Vaquèira mountain (29/7/2017).

Some days later, on August 17, I recorded Frederic's observations elicited from this picture: "Vaquèira! It's not Baqueira Beret. It's Vaquèira, period! … Isn't it just *beautiful*?!"[102] The beauty of the mountain fitted well with the perfection he had ascribed to it as I was taking that picture: "This mountain is actually *perfect* for skiing … As it faces west, it gets most of the snow because it usually comes in from the north west."[103]

Vaquèira, the *beautiful and perfect mountain*. And yet, Frederic's choice of adjectives contrasts with his definition of any mountain in terms of skiing: "Look, you take a mountain as

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[102] "*Vaqueira! No Baqueira Beret, és Vaqueira i punto! … És ben maca!.*" (Frederic, 29/7/2017)
[103] "*Aquesta muntanya realment és perfecte per a la pràctica de l'esquí a causa de la seva localització, orientació i pendents. En estar orientada cap a l'oest rep el major gruix de les nevades, les quals solen venir direcció NW*" (Frederic, 29/7/2017).

it is, and it's a *potato*."[104] The meaning he gives to "potato" here might be twofold. On the one hand, and in a more literal sense, the irregular shape of a potato with its characteristic protruding bulges conveys the irregular and unsuitable contours of a mountain for skiing. On the other hand and more metaphorically, the expression "to be a potato" in Spanish or Catalan refers to the ineptitude of a person, object, or place for a given activity or purpose. At that time, and still today, I am uncertain whether Frederic was using the expression literally or metaphorically, or maybe both. Vaquèira might have had some interesting *natural* features that gave it the potential to become a successful ski resort—altitude, size, and orientation—[105] but far-reaching technological interventions were needed to reshape its slopes and soil in order to turn it into a "beautiful and perfect mountain."

## Potatoes, mountains, … and Baqueira Beret

A vertical, rectangular tilt-and-turn window provided the perfect frame for the Vaquèira mountain from our apartment once we moved to the village of Gessa, just next to Salardú, in 2020. This distanced gaze gave way to a much more intimate, domestic scene. I was at home, in the kitchen. It was dinner time and the children were hungry. They were not around but playing outside in the streets of the quiet tiny village of Gessa. I bent down and opened the door under the sink. A white plastic basket contained half a dozen onions and potatoes. I took one onion and four potatoes of different sizes. *Tortilla de patatas* was on the menu for dinner that night. I

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[104] "*Tu, una muntanya l'agafes així, tal qual, i és una patata [per a la pràctica de l'esquí]*" (Frederic, 27/7/2017).

[105] In the early 1960s, when the preliminary explorations to open a new ski resort in Val d'Aran took place, one of the Baqueira Beret's former directors recalled how the first shareholders that wanted to invest in the project recognized the Vaquèira mountain as a sensible spot to found the new venture (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015).

grabbed a potato in my right hand and tossed it twice to feel its weight, catching it again in the palm of my hand. "You take a mountain as it is, and it's a potato," Frederic had told me, already three years ago. The sentence resonated deeply in my mind. I carefully observed the potato's uneven shape, its irregular contours, brownish colours, and rough texture. Tiny hollows were followed by small mounds. It was beginning to sprout. There was nothing that resembled the way Baqueira Beret looks now through the window, with its smooth green slopes on this sunny day in the middle of the summer. Still holding *my* potato, I tried to figure out the unruly features of the Vaquèira mountain before it was turned into the Baqueira Beret ski resort.

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In January 2020 I attended a session at the Aran government's offices in Vielha. Professors from several universities responsible for organizing a master's degree in the management of mountain areas invited me to give a short talk as a scholar who had been living and doing research in the Catalan High Pyrenees for a while. Two technicians from the Aran government were designated as the main speakers: Lola, the tourism coordinator, and Àlex, the expert on snow. What struck me most that day were not their respective talks, but rather the informal, welcoming conversation between them as I participated in as a mere observer. The topic was the weather during the current winter season, the scarce snow so far and the similar pattern expected for the upcoming weeks. These observations contrasted, however, with the forecast for the next weekend. In five days' time the temperatures were supposed to fall to near or below zero degrees Celsius but, according to Àlex, no significant snow was expected. Partially dismissing this information, Lola seemed optimistic and relieved to hear this news. Her only concern was the

revenue Baqueira Beret brought in. She thus added: "At least, [given the low temperatures at night] they [ski resort] will be able to make snow with the cannons."[106] Àlex looked surprised, even disturbed. His concerns about the lack of snowfalls in the winter clashed with hers, focused on the amount of snow in the Baqueira Beret ski areas. They had been chatting for a while, and until that moment it seemed as though they were talking about the same topic. Yet, the sense of bewilderment reflected in the snow specialist's grimaces on hearing Lola's comment made me think that they might actually be referring to different things as they were talking about the snow. What if one of them was talking about *potatoes* and the other one about Baqueira Beret?! My suspicions were confirmed when Àlex clarified his meaning: "Ah, but I'm talking about the mountains!"[107]

As a geologist, responsible for the Aran government's Avalanche Centre created in the 2000s and thus specialized in snow, Àlex seemed eager to emphasize that his interests lay in the meteorological conditions beyond the possible thickness of the snow made artificially by the ski resort. In doing so, he was implicitly making a clear point. Baqueira Beret *is not* a mountain; in his geologist's mind it does not belong to this category. Subsequently, the following image came to my mind: the ski resort enveloped in a structure similar to the Buckminster Fuller designed geodesic dome in Montreal, within which the weather could be controlled by humans. I immediately recalled Eduardo Galeano's sharp description of such technological control of

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[106] "*però com a mínim podran fer neu amb canons…*" (Lola, 13/1/2020).
[107] "*Ah, però jo parlo de la muntanya!*" (Àlex, 13/1/2020).

nature in his book *Patas Arriba* (2005, 292), in which he portrays an artificial beach in Japan, named Wild Blue and how its technologically-driven conditions are pleasing by the visitors.[108]

Vaquèira had been a mountain once. A potato full of protruding bulges in the form of rocky stony screes. Baqueira Beret is another thing altogether. It gives you the impression that "you are in the mountains," as Eusebio once told me, but it is not a mountain anymore. It is not a *potato*. Its uneven shape, irregular contours, brownish colours, and rough texture have given way to smooth green slopes. The *potato* had been peeled, its content chopped up and cooked. Baqueira Beret is neither a mountain nor a *potato* but a *tortilla de patatas* prepared for the delight of the visiting skiers.

Building on these ethnographic observations, in this chapter I examine how Baqueira Beret has produced these green landscapes; I analyze how the ski resort has managed to turn a mountain, which was a *potato*, into something "beautiful and perfect," and how this landscape production has intersected and still intersects with the livestock grazing on those pastures in the summer. To do so, I first approach the production of green landscapes through an ethnography of *greeneering*, centring on the removal of rocks and the sowing of grass seeds undertaken by the ski resort, and the extent to which these two tasks are claimed by those in charge of them as proof

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[108] "*Salvaje azul. Este cielo jamás se nubla, aquí no llueve nunca. En esta mar nadie corre peligro de ahogarse, esta playa está a salvo del riesgo de robos. No hay medusas que piquen, ni hay erizos que pinchen, ni hay mosquitos que jodan. El aire, siempre a la misma temperatura, y el agua, climatizada, evitan resfríos y pulmonías. Las cochinas aguas del puerto envidian estas aguas transparentes; este aire inmaculado se burla del veneno que la gente respira en la ciudad. La entrada no es cara, treinta dólares por persona, aunque hay que pagar aparte las sillas y las sombrillas. En Internet, se lee: 'Sus hijos lo odiarán si no los lleva...' Wild Blue, la playa de Yokohama encerrada entre paredes de cristal, es una obra maestra de la industria japonesa. Las olas tienen la altura que los motores les dan. El sol electrónico sale y se pone cuando la empresa quiere, y brinda a la clientela despampanantes amaneceres tropicales y rojos crepúsculos tras las palmeras. -Es artificial -dice un visitante-. Por eso nos gusta*"

of improvement by making the mountains not only suitable for the practice of skiing but also "beautiful." Second, drawing on scholars who have combined the broader insight of political ecology with more specific interests in infrastructures and moral ecology (Carse 2012; Scaramelli 2019), and based on a critical approach to compatibility, I examine this alleged improvement of the landscapes by looking into the historical role played by livestock grazing in the Baqueira Beret ski areas.

## The green and the unseen: removing rocks and sowing grass seeds

"Every year, we [Baqueira Beret employees] move the soil on the ski runs to *sow* [seeds for] *the right vegetation* at this location and altitude, and to *remove the stones and rocks* so as to leave the ground as smooth as possible."[109] In our first conversation about my research interests, Frederic succinctly conveyed, in a single sentence, the two key tasks Baqueira Beret performs to produce such green landscapes: removing rocks and sowing grass seeds. Given this preliminary explanation, and once I had acquired a more nuanced sense of the scale of the works carried out during the summer, I inquired more directly about their importance for the resort's operations in the winter. Eusebio provided me with a convincing reply: "Totally! Everything you can do in the summer has an effect in the winter," and intriguingly, added: "Just like the farmers."[110] The

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[109] "*Cada any es remou la terra de les pistes per sembrar-hi la vegetació pertinent segons la localització i l'alçada, i per treure'n les pedres i rocs per tal de deixar el terreny el màxim de llis possible*" (Frederic, 27/7/2017).
[110] "*Tota! Tot lo que puguis fer a l'estiu es nota a l'hivern… Això és com els pagesos*" (Eusebio, 11/3/2018).

production of green landscapes in the summer thus benefits the quality of the white snow in the winter.

Both Frederic and Eusebio first presented these landscape transformations in practical terms. The purpose of the works is to give the mountains smoother slopes. The main aim is, therefore, to make skiing easier, or from a more economics-based perspective, to make the resort more profitable. Specifically, removing rocks and sowing grass seeds "allows the resort to open the ski runs with less snow," as Frederic pointed out.[111] While the absence of stones and rocks reduces the probability of snow groomer breakdowns, planting grass, and especially keeping it short, allows the ski resort's machinery to groom the ski runs when there is less snow. Further in-depth conversations with the Baqueira Beret employees responsible for these works on the mountain made me realize, however, that there was something other than just producing *green* for the consumption of *white*. Reading between the lines, or sometimes just listening carefully to these employees' arguments, a window opened up onto visions beyond the activity of skiing. Some of the interventions were meant to produce a green landscape that could not be explained as merely practical measures to improve the skiing conditions. Some of them were not even related to the activity of skiing. I thus noticed that the production of *green* took on other senses and meanings. Apart from ensuring high quality skiing, landscape aesthetics seemed to be taken equally into consideration in the work Baqueira Beret does on the mountains today. Through

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[111] "*Del què es tracta és que amb la menor neu possible s'obtingui el mateix producte per als esquiadors, i per això, les tasques fetes des de primavera a tardor resulten primordials* (Eusebio, 11/3/2018).

this realization I developed an *ethnography of greeneering* focusing on the removal of rocks and the sowing of grass seeds, and the subsequent engineered production of green landscapes.

To develop this ethnography, I centred on two regions in the Baqueira sector of the resort where far-reaching interventions were underway: the north face curve on the mountain of Vaquèira and the expansion behind the peak of Saumet next to the Beret Plain. Both interventions were carried out as I was conducting my fieldwork, so I could observe the changes to the landscape at the same time as listening to explanations for them from the resort employees. Technological operations overlapped fruitfully with discourses. Visiting those sites as they were being reshaped allowed me to grasp the reasons and projections behind the production of green landscapes through Frederic's and Eusebio's eyes.

**The engineered concealed production of green in the north face curve and behind the peak of Saumet**

Some weeks after we had visited the Baqueira Beret ski areas for the first time, I met with Frederic to record his comments on a set of selected pictures. Of this selection, I was keen to show him the soundscape picture I had taken as I was walking with my older son before we were drenched by the summer thunderstorm.

See Figure 36.

"Here we have the entire north face of Vaquèira," he told me, summing up the picture in a brief caption. "You are looking at one of the work sites," he went on, "which is the enlargement of a [ski] run on a very delicate curve... The north face, apart from having some very beautiful ski areas, gives access to Beret [Plain] from Vaquèira [mountain]."[112]

Following the description elicited from this picture and recalling from my first visit the sound of the heavy machinery working in the area, I wondered if the traces of those works to

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[112] "*Aquí tenim tota la cara nord de Vaqueira... Aquí s'està veient una de les obres, que és l'ampliació de pista en una corba que teníem i que és molt delicada... Sobretot la cara nord, a part que té unes zones molt maques d'esquiar, lo que fa és donar tot l'accés de Vaqueira … a Beret*" (Frederic, 17/8/2017).

enlarge the curve that guides the skiers to Vaquèira's north face would be still visible once the

snow from the upcoming season had melted away. Frederic's reply was clear:

> Here you see a strip with soil and another with stone... You gotta think that this stone
> will be covered with topsoil and will be sown [with grass], and everything that looks
> white [the exposed rock] won't be seen either... Everything, *next year, everything you see*
> *will be green.*[113]

Another picture allowed us to continue this conversation. A shot from the side taken much

closer clearly showed the ongoing works to widen this curve. The presence of a backhoe and the

green hues of the grass, the browns of the topsoil, and the white exposed rock turned the image

into a dynamic scene in motion.

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[113] "*Aquí veus un tros amb terra i un tros amb pedra... Pensa que aquesta pedra anirà coberta amb terra vegetal i anirà sembrat, i tot això que es veu blanc tampoc es veurà... Tot tot tot, l'any que ve tu veuràs que tot això és verd*" (Frederic, 17/8/2017)

Figure 42. Lateral view of the works to enlarge the north face curve on the Vaquèira mountain (29/7/2017).

"Here it is," Frederic noted. "You can see the work... It's been opened up... This was a very busy blue [ski] run that a lot of people used to move to other runs… And what we've done is open it up… For safety reasons, to make it much wider... it [the rock] has been cut away, now the soil will be put on, covered, sown [with grass seed]... and *next year, you won't see any of this.*"[114]

"Next year, everything you see will be green… you won't see any of this." The heavy machinery and white exposed rocks will be replaced with grass and green slopes. In this way,

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[114] "*Aquí sí que es veu el treball... S'ha obert... Això era una pista blava i amb una comunicació molt important, que movia molt volum de gent, i lo que s'ha fet és obrir-ho per fer-ho... per temes de seguretat, que sigui molt més ample... I aquí ja veus el treball, que s'ha picat això, ara es fica la terra, es tapa, es sembra… i l'any que ve no es veurà res de tot això*" (Frederic, 17/8/2017).

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green conceals its own production. In other words, through *greeneering* the engineered production of green is covert. As a result, "the [ski] resort," as Eusebio put it, "is like a golf course; its machinery is like what you'd find in a mine."[115] A mountain like a golf course enables the resort to open its ski runs with much less snow, and also helps minimize snow groomer breakdowns. The green as product thus facilitates the consumption of white: "If everything is smooth like a golf course," Eusebio explained to me, "with just 30 centimetres of snow you can work on the ski runs and get them ready to open."[116] Making the mountain look like a golf course also pursues an aesthetic purpose. The resort always aims to make "the minimum visual impact" after its modifications to the mountain, Eusebio repeatedly insisted. Paradoxically, the resulting green product that aligns with this minimum visual impact is achieved through a technological process that requires heavy machinery similar to that found in the mining industry. Lying somewhere between a golf course and a mine, Baqueira Beret is there, producing yet concealing the production of a green landscape.

Twenty tons of grass seed are sown on 30 hectares in Baqueira Beret every summer. Seed enhancers, biodegradable fibres to help the seeds take root in the soil, and a hydroseeding machine, which speeds up the spread of seeds that are mixed with a proper compost of topsoil and manure,[117] are used both to open up new ski runs and in the upkeep of previous mountain interventions. The seeding calendar usually runs from June to November, although during warm

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[115] "*L'estació és com un camp de golf*"; "*La maquinària de l'estació és com la d'una mina*" (Eusebio, 11/3/2018).

[116] "*Si ho tens tot planxat, com un camp de golf, amb trenta centímetres de neu ja pots treballar a les pistes per obrir-les*" (Eusebio, 22/5/2018).

[117] Forty tones of manure are used every year by the ski resort.

summers the work stops to prevent the seeds from being scorched by the sun. It takes between three and five years for the soil to finally be fixed once a mountain slope has been carved out.

Visiting the north face and other ski areas with Eusebio provided me with a deeper insight to the rationale behind the removal of rocks and the sowing of grass as summarized by Frederic; behind, to use Stoddart's expression (2012), the "black-boxed" production of green, or the engineered concealed production of green landscapes.

When I approached the north face for the first time with Eusebio on July 15, 2018, the unseen production of green landscapes was unveiled to me. Listening to his technical explanations about the works as I saw them close up, the mountain slope resembled a map, in which lines following human wishes were designed with such ease as the mountain was carved out and reshaped with the aid of heavy machinery. The mountain appeared naked as if someone had stripped it of its flesh, peeled it off. Perhaps more than this. To my eyes, the mountain had been x-rayed, and its features seemed to have been effortlessly modified, like a clay mold. The solitary presence of a backhoe in the shade aroused me from these illusory thoughts and brought me back to the profound transformations engineered in the mountain landscapes.

Figure 43. Visual aspect of the ski run down from the north face curve during the works to reshape the mountain slope (15/7/2018).

Two months later, on September 15, 2018, the gritty aspect of this mountain slope, with its clear traces of the ditches and drainage holes dug out to prevent soil erosion before the seeds were sown, looked completely different. "Today," I wrote in my field notes, "a fairly prominent green colour can easily be seen on one half of the ski run, whereas the process in the other half is taking longer. Eusebio explained this difference as follows: the greener half situated closer to us was sown on new topsoil, whereas the original soil was used in the more distant part."[118]

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[118] *Avui es pot observar clarament com la meitat d'aquesta corba ja té un verd prou prominent, mentre que una altra part li està costant més. Novament, igual que en l'experiment fet a la zona d'Argulls, Eusebio em fa constar que la diferència es deu a que la zona més propera a nosaltres s'ha sembrat amb terra vegetal adquirida de les obres que s'estan fent a Escunhau per a la construcció d'un nou hotel, mentre que la part més allunyada a nosaltres s'ha plantat amb la terra que hi havia originalmente* (Field notes, 15/9/2018).

Figure 44. Different intensities of greens on the ski run. These differences depend on whether the grass seeds were sown on topsoil or on the original soil. The silhouette of the curved ditches is still visible, whereas the drainage holes located at the edges of each turn have already vanished under the new growth of green grass (15/9/2018).

From this spot Eusebio pointed to the rock very close by on our right, which, as Frederic had already told me, had been carved out to enlarge the access to this ski run. Eusebio explained that no more work will be needed here, since in ten years' time the rock's own natural oxidation process will have gradually turned it dark grey. This explanation prompted me to ask him why there was concern about the colour of the rock, to which he quickly replied: "So it [the excavated rock] can't be seen."[119] Following this logic, I continued asking why only half of the rock was

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[119] "*perquè no es vegi*" (Eusebio, 15/7/2018).

covered with topsoil and grass, especially considering that these excavations can be easily seen from several points around the resort and even further afield; the scarred rock is visible from the main square in Salardú where we lived for three years, from the Beret Plain where I took the first picture of it, and even through the window from the apartment in the village of Gessa. Eusebio explained that they had tried to cover it, but the rock was too steep to hold the soil. However, he did point to some small flat areas where grass had been sown to disguise the whiteness of the excavated rock as much as possible.



Figure 45. Varied rock colourations in accordance with oxidation periods. Note also the small flat patches of grass on the rock where seeds were sown (15/9/2018).

The relevance of the excavation works on this rock goes beyond any improvements to the skiing conditions. Indeed, this particular intervention is not related to skiing at all. Landscape aesthetics (cf. Berleant 1995; cf. Morton 2009) and minimizing the visual impact after any engineering work on the mountain clearly frames the moral ecology of skiing, in which the green is produced while its production is concealed to satisfy the "tourist gaze" (Urry 1990), as Hug, a local sheep farmer from Alt Àneu, succinctly put it: "What people [tourists] want is to see green."[120] Andrea, another ski resort employee who was responsible for organizing competition events illustrated how the relevance of producing green goes beyond the activity of skiing in reference to the facilities of the new ski area behind the Saumet peak, the other region I examined in my ethnography: "Today it's still not set up… the pylons are arriving… they are galvanized, and they could go up just as they are, with that silver colour. And Baqueira cares about painting them green because … when you look at them…[there's] less visual impact."[121] The tourist and rural gazes converge in the production of green landscapes in the mountain slopes of Baqueira Beret in the sense that this production "fram[es] a nostalgic vision of the countryside for touristic consumption … aestheticiz[ing] land uses in a nostalgic way in an attempt to distance it from contemporary capital and globalizing processes" (Woods 2011, 103).

These ethnographic instances illustrate the contrast between a "perspectival gaze, in which the observer is always outside and above the action" based on "an aestheticized pictorial point of view," and the one built up from an "engaged ground-level labourer" (Darby 2000, 13). The whiteness of a scarred, excavated rock is one of the visual traces left from the Baqueira

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[120] "*La gent també vol veure verd*" (Hug, 27/10/2017). See Chapter 6 for biographical notes about Hug.
[121] "*Avui en dia encara no està muntat... ens estan arribant ara les pilones... són pilones galvanitzades, que es podrien col·locar tal qual venen, de color platejat. I Baqueira té la cura de pintar-les de color verd perquè realment... tu quan miris... menos impacte visual*" (Andrea, 9/11/2018).

Beret interventions in the mountain landscapes. The production of green not only accomplishes the practical function of helping the ski resort open the runs with less snow, but it is also the product that both conceals this production and which the tourists want to see as an idealized representation of rural mountain landscapes.

The second time I visited the ski areas with Eusebio, after looking at some maintenance tasks in the Bonaigua sector, in the district of Pallars Sobirà, he took me to the most significant new works taking place in preparation for the upcoming season. We were heading to the lower station of the new T-bar being installed behind the peak of Saumet, beside the Beret Plain and next to the Vaquèira mountain, which from a commercial point of view was extremely relevant because it reached a new maximum height in the resort at 2,600 metres.

As we got closer to the site in his four-wheel vehicle, Eusebio defined the area as pristine and pointed out that it usually receives a lot of snow due to its altitude. He explained that both these factors—its pristine condition and altitude—were taken into consideration when the works were planned. The new facilities would provide access to an unexplored area for a limited number of expert skiers. As a result, a T-bar, rather than a chairlift, would be installed and just one commercial ski run would be opened. The underlying goal was to provide skiers with "the feeling of being immersed in nature … you can see that… [the landscape] has been shaped, but you can't see the human touch." This aim aligned with what the resort wants to show. In short, "when you get to a place you say 'everything's green'… and you don't say 'something's happened here'." These lines seem to clearly reflect the resort's leitmotiv as Eusebio repeatedly insisted:

"our intention is to interfere with the mountain as little as possible."[122] However, this general rationale contrasted with my first impressions. As we approached the site, and perhaps anticipating this contrast, Eusebio forewarned me that the large heaps of white stones that I was going to see would be buried and covered with topsoil. "Everything will be green and all the stones that have been removed won't be noticed," he constantly repeated through our ride.[123] The green and the unseen were highlighted and linked together, just as Frederic had done.

From the bottom of the T-bar, I looked back and saw the work that had already been done to access this site. Looking up ahead, I contemplated a mound of stones dug out from elsewhere. I could see the Baciver Lake in the background. Eusebio was at pains to point out that they were not allowed to touch that zone since it belongs to a natural protected area. From Val d'Aran we could see an area with several lakes belonging to the High Pyrenees Natural Park, in the district of Pallars Sobirà.

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[122] "*Aquest nou busca que l'esquiador tingui la sensació d'estar immers en la natura … que es vegi que estàs a la natura... que s'ha transformat, però que no es vegi la mà humana… La idea és que quan arribes a un puesto diguis 'està tot verd' … i no diguis 'aquí ha passat algo' … És tocar la muntanya el mínim possible*" (Eusebio, 15/9/2018).
[123] "*tot quedarà verd i que no es notarà tota la pedra que s'ha arribat a treure*" (Eusebio, 15/9/2018).

Figure 46. A recently opened track to access the bottom of the new T-bar (15/9/2018).



Figure 47. A mound of rocks piled up in the foreground against a backdrop of the Baciver Lake in the

High Pyrenees Natural Park, district of Pallars Sobirà (15/7/2018).

From this spot, the presence of a backhoe indicated the extensive work required to open up access to the new ski area; the engineering behind the greening was evident.



Figure 48. Works at the base of the new T-bar.

While we walked up to the highest section following the route of the future T-bar, Eusebio insisted that only the sharp rocks that would hamper the work of the snow groomers would be removed. However, this practical reasoning was intertwined with the relevance of concealing the movement of those stones.

A specific technique is applied to conflate practical and aesthetic aspects. Backhoes lift the stones and put them down nearby in exactly the same original position, so they look as though they have not been moved. Colours, shapes, and even the lichens that cling onto the

stones look natural, as if they had always been there. This technique, similar to the grass seeds sown on the flat patches of the scarred rock on the north face curve, evidences the relevance of the engineered concealed production of green beyond simply pragmatic skiing purposes.

Heading off to the Baciver Lake, this side of *greeneering* clearly stood out. As we walked toward the lake, I asked Eusebio about the works carried out in this area some years ago. From a high point where we overlooked the entire area, he tried to explain what had been done and what they had tried to fix more recently. In the 1990s the lake was dammed to meet the growing demand for water from the housing developments in and around the village of Baqueira and for snowmaking purposes. This work involved piling up stones around the lake. Today, in response to my positive comments about the astonishing landscape before us, with the Baciver Lake at our feet, and in contrast with the previous work to dam the lake, Eusebio captured the scene with the following short yet poignant sentence: "It *looks like* you're in the *mountains*."[124]

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[124] "*Sembla que estiguis a la muntanya*" (Eusebio, 15/9/2018).

Figure 49. The dammed lake of Baciver and a ski run (15/9/2018).

My two visits in the lapse of a couple of months to the ski run down from the north face curve and to the works on the new ski area behind the peak of Saumet confirmed what Frederic had told me about the speed with which Baqueira Beret is able to reshape the landscape. Grey, brown, and white quickly morph into shades of green. Rocks and grass are key to producing this green landscape. In other words, if the ski resort resembles both a golf course and a mine, as Eusebio once told me, it is because it needs to reshape the mountain slopes by removing rocks and sowing tons of grass seed. The ethnography of *greeneering* presented here serves to illustrate the cornerstone elements of *greeneering*: greening the mountains and concealing the production

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of green landscapes, as though the mountains were untouched. In what follows I delve into how *greeneering* is imbued with a sense of improvement under the moral ecology of Baqueira Beret and examine the genealogy of this moral ecology as well as the power relations underpinning it.

## Baqueira Beret's green moral ecology: improvement, compatibility, and power

On March 11, 2018, and after several attempts, I managed to arrange a meeting with Eusebio at the Baqueira Beret offices for the following day. I had invested so many expectations in this encounter. Seeing Eusebio almost every day driving his pick-up Hilux with the Baqueira Beret logo along the streets of Salardú, I envisaged him as the person who could speak on behalf of the ski resort's "official voice." Before 3 pm I got into the car and drove up to the village of Baqueira, less than ten kilometres from Salardú. Five more minutes and I would be inside the "bowels" of Baqueira Beret. I had been putting off this moment, sometimes because of the fear of exposure; sometimes because of what I had learned about the ski resort's operations through informal conversations and driving around the area with Frederic. I parked at the entrance of Baqueira 1,500, just next to the cable car access point. I got out of the car and tried, unsuccessfully, to find the offices were Eusebio was supposed to be. I wandered around. There was hardly anyone there and everything looked a uniform grey. The colour of the clouds seemed to blend with that of the ski runs in an illusory continuum. Finally, Eusebio came out of the building where his office was. He invited me to come in. We went upstairs, and I was met with a new image of the ski resort.

A carpeted floor, computers with large screens.

Eusebio showed me the way toward a glass-walled room with a round, wooden table. A rectangular sign hung on the door: "Mountain Department Manager," but the manager was absent that day. We sat and started talking.

When it seemed that our long conversation had reached an end, Eusebio switched the interviewer/interviewee roles and asked me a direct question: "What exactly are you up to?"[125] I tried my best to provide a concise answer. "I am interested in the interactions between Baqueira Beret, extensive husbandry, and the natural protected areas that surround the ski resort," I announced, hesitantly and fearful of the reaction this research blurb might arouse. Given this relational approach, Eusebio, as he got closer to me, convincingly stated the underlying principle of any mountain intervention the ski resort carried out: "We [Baqueira Beret] are experienced, and no one is more interested than us in leaving it in a better state *and* making sure that the visual impact is as low as possible."[126]

Following political ecology scholars dealing with environmental conservation policies (Brockington, Duffy, and Igoe 2008), I questioned such an obvious and apparently non-conflictive purpose through a historical insight. "Leaving the mountain better" has meant different things and pursued different purposes over time. In other words, "improving" the mountains has been fraught with different ideologies about what landscapes are supposed to look like, and these ideologies have been conditioned by the technologies available to produce

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[125] "*Exactament en què consisteix el que estàs fent?*" (Eusebio, 11/3/2018).
[126] "*Nosaltres tenim l'experiència,… i som els primers interessats en què … es deixi millor i que l'impacte visual sigui el mínim possible*" (Eusebio, 11/3/2018).

such landscapes. Furthermore, the landscape transformations in the Baqueira Beret ski areas have also depended on the involvement of another party: livestock. Beyond the canonical inquiry "who loses, who gains" put forward by political ecology scholars (Neumann 1992, 95; Blaikie 2016), this research looks into how those gains and losses have been achieved historically. In other words, how has the alleged improvement of the landscape under the idiom of green worked out over time in the articulation between skiing and farming that lay behind the scenes? Apart from these general inquiries, it is worth mentioning that since 2013 the European Union Common Agricultural Policy (EU-CAP) has also framed extensive husbandry within the greening-improvement formula as the logical consequence of the decoupling policies initiated under the CAP reforms in the 1980s and consolidated since 2003, when the policy to dissociate farming subsidies from production was first implemented. This framing has subsequently classified the local farmers as the "gardeners of the Pyrenees," a category that, interestingly, some of them have proudly embraced. In sum, "[a]s farming became synonymous with environment caretaking, the environment," and the landscape as well, "progressively became a care-taking priority in each plot of land" (De Musso 2021, 254).[127] I do not deal with the effects of this EU-CAP policy here in any depth, however.

The pragmatic view of improvement provided by the Baqueira Beret employees, with its exclusive focus on skiing conditions, slowly gave way to a more sophisticated meaning. Mountain interventions went beyond attempting to improve *just* the skiing conditions to *also* claim that

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[127] See Matthews (2013) for more information on the origins and goals behind the CAP's "green direct payment" as well as for a critique of its allocation as part of the Income Support Pillar, "which … is largely proportionate to the volume of production and therefore concentrates the greater part of support on the largest and the most intensive farms" (COM/91/100 in De Musso 2021, 236), rather than the Rural Development Pillar, which was introduced in the CAP's Agenda 2000 as "a more encompassing and holistic approach to life in the countryside" that "aimed at revitalising life and well-being in the countryside" (De Musso 2021, 248; 250).

they were improving the mountain landscapes. New machinery and a more scientific rationale enabled them to think of improvement of the mountain landscapes beyond ski runs while "the government of nature led to the birth of the environment" (Agrawal 2005, 201), requiring both its regulation and the making of environmental subjects out of the linkage of knowledges, power, institutions, and subjectivities resulting in what Agrawal named as environmentality, which "is about the simultaneous redefinition of the environment and the subject as such redefinition is accomplished through the means of political economy" (Agrawal 2005, 23–24). The regulation and the making of environmental subjects spread across Catalonia in the 1980s, at a historical conjuncture in which the Democratic Transition facilitated the creation of environmental NGOs, such as DEPANA (Defense of the Natural Heritage), and the approval of Catalan legislation covering natural protected areas. The enactment of the first Law of Natural Protected Areas in 1985 (Font and Majoral 1999), which resulted in the mapping of the Plan for Areas of Natural Interest (PEIN) in 1992 and in the creation, at a more regional scale, of the High Pyrenees Natural Park in 2003, precisely to stop Baqueira Beret's expansion plans (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014b; see also Introduction) are just three examples of the processes of regulating the environment and environmental subject making in Catalonia.[128]

In this context, an alpine ski resort such as Baqueira Beret combined "the increasing intensity of care for and government of nature" (Agrawal 2005, 201) with the engineered production of green landscapes. Thus, the engineering process carried out by the ski resort, while it ran in parallel with the dawn of a new governance, understanding, and subject making around

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[128] In his article published in 2005, Agrawal explicitly shares how his inspiration in the coinage of the term "environmentality" came from the shifts in the perception of the environment in the village of Kumaon (India) that took shape between 1985 and 1993. Despite the staggering cultural, political, and geographical differences between India and Catalonia, this period resonates and aligns with the arousal of environmentality around Baqueira Beret.

the concept of environment in Catalonia, provided the ski resort with a new understanding of the mountain landscapes. Landscapes became green infrastructures (Carse 2012). Both environmentality and landscape as infrastructure nourished Baqueira Beret's current moral ecology, underpinned by the technopolitics of *greeneering*, within which the production of green landscapes prevailed as irrefutable proof that the company was improving the mountains. As a result, Baqueira Beret claims that its interventions on the slopes must be seen in terms of improvement, since the resulting green landscape enhances not only the ski runs, but also the mountains in general. Drawing on Scaramelli's proposal for a moral ecology of infrastructure, in which "moral ecologies … indicate people's notions of just relations between people, land, water, … plants, buildings, technologies, and infrastructures … beyond … the context of peasant, indigenous, and activist resistance" (2019: 389), I contend that Baqueira Beret produces and reshapes the mountain slopes under a *moral ecology of infrastructure* through which the landscape is improved by making it greener easily and unnoticeably. This is what *greeneering* or the engineered concealed production of green is about. *Greeneering* makes the mountain landscapes greener, but at the same time it conceals the engineering work and the interplay with livestock that lay behind the scenes or that is black-boxed in producing this green. In effect, such moral ecology undermines its own genealogy, which is built on the power relations between the ski resort and the farming sector.

Two interlocutors responsible for managing Baqueira Beret's mountain interventions on the ground before and after the shift toward engineering in the resort, Aureliano and Eusebio, will help me to tease out the genealogy of this moral ecology, that is, the historical changes in

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the idea of what the ski resort landscapes should look like and how different technopolitics have been put to work to produce greener mountain landscapes.[129]

## Crafting the mountains in Aureliano's times: turning points in the history of Baqueira Beret

Aureliano was born in 1938 in a village in Galicia, northwestern Spain. Like many other families from impoverished rural areas across the country, his family—father and two younger siblings, plus an uncle who had already settled in Val d'Aran—moved to the Pyrenees to work on the construction of hydroelectric power stations during the mid-twentieth century. He was thirteen years old, and just three years after moving to Salardú, he started to work in the only power plant in Naut Aran. Before this five-year period employed by the hydroelectric company—from 1954 to 1959—he spent two years working as a shepherd for the village flock of Gessa. Grazing the sheep from the different households of the village on the high-mountain pastures of the Beret Plain gave him detailed knowledge of one of the emblematic spots of Baqueira Beret a long time before the ski resort was even conceived of. A few years after quitting his job in the hydroelectric power station, he became involved with the alpine ski project.

Aureliano was hired in 1964, thus becoming Baqueira Beret's first employee. He worked in the resort until the early 2000s when he retired. At the beginning, his job was multifaceted,

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[129] The choice of these two interlocutors is warranted by Aureliano's own words. "The first years [once he had retired in the early 2000s]," he pointed me out, "Eusebio used to ask me about some doubts before any intervention… Just the first years. After that, he knew everything. The one who knows the most about these things is Eusebio. More than the Mountain Director. On the ground, Eusebio is the one" (Aureliano, 3/10/2018).

working as a ski patroller, driving a snow groomer, looking after the T-bars and chairlifts, but he gradually rose up to the position of assistant general manager where he played a significant executive role until the 1990s when his presence and expertise was undermined by some restructuration plans. Until then, he was in charge of "everything that happened in the mountains," in his own words.

Aureliano keeps a mental map of the resort in his head, which includes the layers sedimented beneath the green grass and the white snow. "The map was here [pointing at his head]," he told me poignantly during the semi-structured interview that took place in my apartment. Following his knowledge and my interest in what goes on below the surface and is hidden or black-boxed from the general public, I steered our conversation toward the ways in which the resort used to reshape the mountains for skiing in those early times. This general question revealed the main purpose pursued through those initial works on the slopes: opening new ski runs first, and subsequently improving the skiing conditions. Through his memories I was able to trace the timeline of improvement Baqueira Beret followed; he allowed me to trace the genealogy of Baqueira Beret's moral ecology.

Back in the early days, Aureliano highlighted the precarious resources—both human and technological—at the resort: "The first year [1964] we installed a chairlift… It was for one person… By then four or five of us were employed there… The first year there were no ski patrollers, no snow groomers... there was nothing. The machines didn't come until 1967 or 1968… the first machine to groom [the snow]. A machine that didn't even have a shovel!"[130]

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[130] "*El primer any vam muntar un telesilla … Era d'una plaça… Llavors érem 4 o 5 empleats… El primer any no hi havia pisters, no hi havia màquines … no hi havia res. Les màquines no han vingut fins al 1967 o 1968 … la primera màquina per trepitjar. Una màquina que no tenia ni pala*" (Aureliano, 3/10/2018).

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Memories from the old times centred on the techniques used to construct the facilities, including a ski run, a chairlift, or even a track.[131] "The contrast is huge," he told me, referring to the technological shift between *before* and *now*. The past is not unique, though, nor is it easy to temporalize, at least in the case of the history of Baqueira Beret. However, Aureliano's memories helped me locate a turning point in the mountain interventions:

> Whenever this equipment [a new chairlift] was installed, all the ski runs that reached it were refurbished. It didn't use to be like this. The equipment was installed first, and then the run was fixed, or not. Everyone would ski wherever they could… or if they liked to go [skiing] on the stones nobody cared… Then, it changed… *Since the 90s* every bit of new equipment installed was … *to improve the [ski] run.*[132]

Changes occurred very quickly in the ski areas. Among those changes, two turning points were crucial to understanding the shift between *before* and *now*. The first related to the arrival of heavy machinery to work on the ski runs in the summer. Bulldozers allowed the resort to remove rocks more quickly. However, this machinery could only push the rocks to the sides of the ski runs. This left a clearly visible line of stones in the landscape causing, according to Aureliano, a "horrible visual impact."[133] Eusebio put it even more bluntly. "In the beginning, not one fucking

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[131] See Chapter 1 for a detailed description about these construction works.

[132] "*Quan es feia una instal·lació d'aquest tipus [a new chairlift], totes les pistes d'esquí que anaven a aquella instal·lació s'arreglaven. I abans no. Abans es ficava la instal·lació, i després s'arreglava o no s'arreglava la pista. Cadascú esquiava per on podia... o si li agradava fer pedres era igual... Després ja... a partir dels 90 cada instal·lació es feia... per millorar la pista*" (Aureliano, 3/10/2018).

[133] "*un impacte visual fatal*" (Aureliano, 25/9/2018).

stone was taken off the mountains,"[134] so a set of "stone trenches" were perfectly visible. The second turning point was marked by the replacement of bulldozers with backhoes. This new heavy machinery could move stones, rocks and other materials more efficiently and also conceal those movements, either by burying it or taking it elsewhere.[135] This turning point also called for more staff with technical and scientific skillsets. With the arrival of this heavy machinery and a scientific rationale, "the resort," in Aureliano's own words, "got engineered."[136] Interestingly, the engineering process in the ski resort in the 1990s coincided with the rise of environmentality that spread through institutions and subjects in Catalonia. However, some time would pass before the new care for the environment merged with the ski resort's engineering capacity to make the mountain landscapes greener. In the 1990s, mountain interventions were meant to improve the ski runs or to optimize "the snow product," whereas the discourses and tasks I observed during my fieldwork extended the notion of improvement beyond skiing quality to include the production of better landscapes under the new moral ecology.

**When Baqueira Beret "got engineered"**

Amongst the landscape changes to the slopes in the ski areas, the intervention on the mountain of Vaquèira was particularly spotlighted by several interlocutors I spoke with. Both the resort employees—Aureliano and Eusebio—and local farmers, who recall their elderly relatives' memories, described the mountain as formerly a mass of scree covering the slopes with stones

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[134] "*Al principi no es treia una puta pedra de la muntanya*." (Eusebio, 11/3/2018).
[135] See above subsection "The engineered (un)production of green…" on the works behind the peak of Saumet for a detailed explanation of these tasks and techniques.
[136] "*l'estació es va enginyerar*" (Aureliano, 25/9/2018).

and rocks of huge dimensions. This was especially the case above Baqueira 1,800, in what can be considered as the heart of the ski resort, both in the past and today. Aureliano graphically described the scene from the old days: "I don't know where so many stones came from,"[137] and went on to explain how they managed to transform the landscape in line with the resort's wishes:

> Then, we bought a gasoline hammer drill and blew up [the rocks] with dynamite because, of course, the [snow] machines couldn't even… [get through]. We loaded them onto trucks, and they all went into a ravine that was eight or ten metres deep. There was a spring up there… Then we fixed a debris chute and we threw all the stones in there. All this [the ravine] was filled with the stones that used to be there [on the mountain].[138]

Learning about such extensive landscape changes made me wonder what had driven the resort to undertake them. Standing on that spot, I asked Eusebio. His answer was straightforward, and would be confirmed by Aureliano in a later conversation: "To make the [ski] run."[139] What looks like a fairly flat area today was actually a rocky cliff that split the slope into two different levels, which made skiing very challenging.

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[137] "*No sé d'on havien sortit tantes pedres*" (Aureliano, 3/10/2018).

[138] "*Llavors vam comprar un martell de gasolina i les rebentàvem amb dinamita perquè, clar, les màquines [de neu] no podien ni... [passar]. Les carregàvem amb camions, i totes estan dins d'un barranc que hi havia… de 8 o 10 metres de profunditat. Hi havia una font a dalt... Llavors vam ficar un tub, i totes les pedres les tiràvem allà dins. Tot allò s'ha omplert amb les pedres que hi havia [a la muntanya].*" (Aureliano, 3/10/2018).

[139] "*Per fer la pista [d'esquí]*" (Eusebio, 15/9/2018).

The interventions on the upper reaches of Vaquèira coincided with a second turning point in the history of Baqueira Beret. Although Eusebio identified 1986 as this turning point, the year when the resort began working with backhoes and acquired a hydroseeding machine that allowed major changes to the mountains by removing rocks and sowing seeds, Aureliano dated this transition in 1990 and reflected on those days with a touch of resentment. He told me that in the early 1990s "everybody who knew anything was pushed aside and a bunch of engineers were hired."[140] The "enactment of expertise" or the "rule of experts," to use Carr's expression (2010) or Mitchell's book title (2002), endowed engineers with knowledge and power in their interaction with pastures, snow infrastuctures, previous employees, and skiers' demands as part of Baqueira Beret's environmental or landscape politics. Transposing Agrawal's analysis on the construction and regulation of the environment to the production of an engineered landscape, "the emergence of new knowledges … ha[d] the potential to affect the bounds of what can be imagined as the [landscape] and actions in relation to the [landscape]" (2005, 214). The replacement of employees was accompanied by the installation of the first detachable chairlift and investments for snowmaking, since the previous year, 1989, is still well remembered for the scarce snow during the winter season.

Despite these technological advances before the turn of the twenty-first century, which followed the model fostered in the French Alps and North American ski resorts, mountain interventions were still exclusively focused on improving the ski runs. The damming of the Baciver Lake for snowmaking purposes in the 1990s, mentioned by Eusebio when we visited the new ski area behind the peak of Saumet, would epitomize the persistence of this engineering

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[140] "*Ha arribat un moment en què el que sabia de tot l'han fotut fora i han entrat tot d'enginyers*" (Aureliano, 3/10/2018).

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mindset that lacked any concern for landscape aesthetics and the visual impact caused by the engineering work on the mountain. Likewise, changes to the contours of Vaquèira were intended to solve problems of gradients and slopes to improve the skiing conditions. Aureliano's and Eusebio's discourses on the orographic works on Vaquèira until the late 1990s thus seem to focus on improvement exclusively related to the activity of skiing. Landscape was never mentioned or considered. In Aureliano's words, "what most concerned the resort was keeping the ski runs in perfect condition, with no bumps" to offer "the best snow, the best runs, the best safety."[141] Baqueira Beret's moral ecology did not yet correlate with the production of green landscapes.

## Compatibility and win-win scenarios around the green moral ecology of skiing

At the end of August 2017, I drove up to a mountain hut following a steep, rocky forest track. In the evening, I had arranged to meet with Ignasi, the shepherd who tended the *collective flock* in the Bonabé valley, in the municipality of Alt Àneu and the district of Pallars Sobirà, once he had penned the sheep in for the night.[142] After talking for a long while, mainly about his shepherding work and the disruption the renewed presence of bears caused for the farming sector, I switched the topic of our conversation. Considering his experience working as a musher on the Beret Plain for a couple of winter seasons and as a high-mountain shepherd since 2013, I introduced

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[141] "*El que preocupava més és que les pistes estiguessin perfectes... que sempre les tinguéssim sense baches*"; "*millor neu, millors pistes, millor seguretat*" (Aureliano, 3/10/2018).
[142] Collective flocks have been organized since 2010 following a sheep regrouping policy promoted and funded by the Catalan and Aran governments to protect the sheep from bear attacks in the high-mountain pastures during the summer grazing season (see Chapters 4, 5, and 6 for a comprehensive explanation on the origins, dynamics, and consequences of this new collective action).

the subject of the interactions between skiing and farming. At that time, I was fascinated by all the work the ski resort had done to reshape the orography of the mountains. I shared this fascination with the shepherd by explaining the tasks Baqueira Beret was currently undertaking: sowing grass seeds to smooth and green the mountain slopes over the summer. Although I was only referring to the intended improvement to the skiing conditions, our conversation was extremely revealing in the way Ignasi viewed the unexpected positive interactions between skiing and farming. "Having a ski resort is fantastic for a shepherd,"[143] he enthused. Interestingly, he argued in favour of this situation without mentioning the grass the resort had sown, an aspect he was not aware of until I explained it to him. Instead, he pointed to other elements in the landscape that have resulted from the presence of a ski resort which simplify the shepherd's tasks. In terms of accessibility, the construction of forest tracks allows shepherds and farmers alike to drive across the high-mountain pastures to search for missing livestock. Unexpectedly, considering his terror of thunderstorms, he also regarded the chairlifts as an asset, since they act as lightning rods.

While the chairlifts' role as lightning conductors might be regarded as a quirk of this particular shepherd, most farmers and shepherds agree that they benefit from the resort's policy to leave the mountains with smoother and greener slopes, free of rocks, as well as the increasing number of tracks to access the highest points. Among those opinions, Miquel, a local goat farmer gave his view clearly, recalling his uncle's viewpoint: "The presence of the ski resort had greatly improved the mountain of Vaquèira."[144] Improvement here relates directly to husbandry and the

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[143] See Chapter 6 for some biographical notes about this shepherd. "*La presència d'una estació d'esquí és fantàstica per a un pastor*" (Ignasi, 29/8/2017).
[144] "*Amb l'estació [la muntanya] havia millorat molt*" (Miquel, 22/6/2018).

two main tasks of greeneering—removing rocks and sowing grass seeds. Hug, another local sheep farmer from the same village was even more explicit and enthusiastic about the benefits brought by the ski resort:

> As far as the farmers are concerned, [Baqueira Beret] is bloody marvelous: they create access tracks so then we can go up to the mountains by car where previously we had to go on foot. Before there were only stones and screes, and they [BB] make fucking good meadows! Cows, sheep, goats, horses… they live like queens! They've got more territory. In the same area, with the same hectares, they have more mountain [to graze].[145]

Going walkabout with Frederic on our second ride, just the day after I had met with the shepherd from the Bonabé valley, the mutual advantages between skiing and farming were not only reinforced but also increased. As we were driving up along a ski run, I noticed a flock of sheep coming down a steep slope on our left. Amidst the sound of their noisy bells, I spotted a shepherd driving the animals. I then asked Frederic to stop the car so I could take a picture of the pastoral scene in the ski areas.

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[145] "*Als ramaders ja et dic, [BB] ens va de puta mare: mos fan accessos per poder pujar en cotxe, accedir a es muntanyes que abans s'hi havia d'anar a peu. Puestos que abans només hi havia pedres i tarters, foten uns prats de puta mare! Es vaques, es ovelles, es cabres, es eqües... viuen com a reines! Guanyen territori. Amb els mateixos metros, amb es mateixes hectàrees de muntanya tenen més muntanya*" (Hug, 5/11/2018).

Figure 50. Flock of sheep descending a slope with the silhouette of a shepherd on the horizon. In the foreground, wooden fences installed by the ski resort. Frederic confirmed that none of these fences is for livestock. They are all for assisting the skiers to move across ski areas (30/8/2017).

Recalling in rigorous detail how the shepherd from the Bonabé valley had described having a ski resort as an asset for shepherding practices, I asked Frederic about the possible positive interactions between the resort's sowing of grass seeds and the presence of livestock grazing on the summer pastures. Besides the benefits the shepherd had identified, Frederic explained how the interplay between the two led to what he saw as a win-win scenario. Livestock benefit from the grass sown by the ski resort, since they prefer to graze on fresh grass, while the resort also benefits from the presence of livestock on the ski runs in the summer, since the animals act as

"natural lawn mowers" to keep the grass short. Frederic proceeded to give me a more technical explanation about the relevance of this interplay. When it snows and heavy thicknesses accumulate, tall grass causes a layer of air between the snow and the ground. The air circulates through this interstitial layer, and in doing so the snow may become warmer. The ground is always colder than the snow accumulated on top, so the lower the grass, the less snow is required to open the ski run and work on it. Livestock therefore lighten the ski resort's work load by controlling the height of the grass.

As we proceeded on our ride, we ran into another flock. Frederic enthusiastically showed me how the sheep were grazing within the contours of the ski run. From the car I could easily see that the animals were actually grazing on a strip of brighter green that coincided with the ski run.

Figure 51. Flock of sheep from Pallars Sobirà grazing in a section where grass was recently sown, as can be seen by the more intense green of the strip that coincides with the ski run (30/8/2017).

One year later, Eusebio also made this very same point. Livestock tend to choose the strips of land sown by the ski resort so they can graze on fresh, greener grass. In September 2018, I witnessed how a dozen horses were grazing on one of the most prominent strips of green grass corresponding to a recently sown area. Eusebio defined these strips as "Cardinale" or a delicatessen for livestock, comparing them with the part of the lettuce that we humans enjoy best.

Figure 52. Horses grazing on freshly seeded land and avoiding areas with dry grass in early fall (15/9/2018).

Borrowing the terminology from ecological economists, it is worth distinguishing two sorts of resources that seem to conflate in the Baqueira Beret's ski areas: stock and fund resources. While stock resources are those that "output flows physically transformed by their use" (i.e., pastures grazed by livestock in the summer), fund resources "provide services that are used without their physical consumption" (i.e., pastures exploited by the resort in the form of ski runs in the winter) (Hartley 2018, 604). Although Hartley uses the example of a pasture to illustrate the concept of a stock resource by asserting that "a pasture of grazing animals … does constitute a stock resource since it produces a flow of outputs" (2018, 605), Frederic's and Eusebio's discourses claim that the high-mountain pastures in the Baqueira Beret ski areas deliver two environmental

services at once, since they take the form of a double stock and fund resource. This dual function should not be conceived as separate, but rather entwined. The entwined relevance of grass as both pastures and ski runs explains, in part, why farming and skiing are considered to be two compatible worlds whose interplay leads to win-win scenarios that result in the production of green landscapes.

The ethnography of *greeneering* described above inclined me to more nuanced reflections, however. Following Scaramelli (2019), I take the concept of moral ecology in dialogue with infrastructure or, paraphrasing the title of Carse's article (2012), "landscape as infrastructure," to approach compatibility through the lenses of conflict and power. While Scaramelli proposes an approach to moral ecology of infrastructure "beyond dichotomies of anticapitalist resistance and supposedly immoral ecologies" (2019, 394), Carse conceives infrastructures as conflictive projects that "raise questions about which among a multitude of potential environmental services are to be emphasized and delivered and, crucially, *whose* societies and economies those services support" (2012, 544. Emphasis in the original). *Greeneering* is built upon the moral ecology of skiing infrastructure, in which green landscapes are regarded as proof of improvement. Drawing on these two authors and approached this way, *greeneering* thus enables us to pay attention to two apparently compatible types of services: skiing and farming. Greening the mountain slopes by removing rocks and sowing grass seeds is the mechanism through which livestock benefit from the presence of the ski resort. Likewise, the presence of livestock grazing on those slopes allows the resort to maintain this green landscape with less effort. However, considering that "moral ecologies reflect varying understandings about who gets included and excluded in environmental decision making, and who reaps the benefit of infrastructural and ecological transformations" (Scaramelli 2019, 391), and given the conflict inherent in any

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infrastructure (Winner 1980; Bijker 2007; Larkin 2013; Harvey, Jensen, and Morita 2016), Carse points out that the delivery of those environmental services is usually subjected to a hierarchical order. Through the following quote, I transfer these reflections to this research: "When a landform is assigned value in relation teo one cultural system of production [skiing] rather than the other [farming], different environmental services become relevant and the landscape is reorganized to prioritize the delivery of those services and support that system" (Carse 2012, 557).

**A lost battle on *our* mountain**

Initial explanations from Baqueira Beret employees framed the resort's goals and the presence of livestock as a win-win scenario, a viewpoint backed up by several farmers and shepherds. The green landscapes produced by the ski resort provide farmers with better pastures in addition to a network of forest tracks that make it easier for them to control their animals by providing access to remote areas by vehicle. In short, the presence of the ski resort not only appeared to be compatible with the longstanding exploitation of mountain pastures by extensive husbandry, but it was also depicted in terms of a symbiotic interplay that would benefit both parties.

Speaking about the resort's seeding work, Eusebio, who had already drawn an interesting comparison between skiing and farming in his comment that the resort's work on the mountains followed the same tradition as the work carried out by the farmers, shed further light on this

win-win scenario with this quick, concise answer: "Any animal is good [for the resort]!"[146] Frederic had pointed out, though, that not all livestock are equally good. Sheep and horses bring about better outcomes than cows because of the way they graze. While sheep and horses cut the grass with their teeth, cows tear it out of the ground, forcing the resort to reseed some strips of land. Eusebio also nuanced his earlier comment with an observation on timelines: "During the first year [after sowing] we might not want any [animals], but it's not worth fencing off a ski run."[147] This remark contrasts with his first comment in that he mentions the potential negative effects of grazing livestock on recently sown areas before the grass has become fixed on the ground. It seems that "any animal is good" may actually mean *every animal can be bad*.[148]

Although the 4,500 animals—approximately 2,000 sheep and 2,500 cows or horses—currently grazing on the ski areas in the summer are mostly valued by the resort in a long run, Eusebio's second statement illustrated another interesting aspect of this interaction. "It's not worth fencing off a ski run" implicitly conveyed a peculiar scenario. Although it might be tempting to consider this interaction in terms of compatibility and collaboration, which according to Tsing allow us to "move discussion beyond the eternal standoff between opposing interest groups" (2005, 13), I want to draw attention to how this apparently compatible collaboration is built on ingrained power relations between skiing and farming. In other words, these two worlds produce a green landscape and thus seem to share compatible moral ecologies, but the key question is how this apparent compatibility in the production of green landscapes is achieved or takes shape. To address this inquiry, I build on Franquesa's analysis of the power

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[146] "*Qualsevol animal és bo*" (Eusebio, 11/3/2018).
[147] "*Durant el primer any potser no en voldríem cap [d'animal], però tancar una pista no surt a compte*" (Eusebio, 11/3/2018).
[148] The resort expects to lose 40% of the first seedings due to several factors, which include thunderstorms, wind, and also the presence of livestock.

struggles between the farming community and the energy sector in southern Catalonia. "Although coexisting," he asserts, "those two worlds … are juxtaposed rather than integrated, simultaneous rather than contemporaneous" (2018, 6). In the same vein, skiing and farming represent two coexisting worlds, which share the space and resources of the Baqueira Beret ski areas and which even seem to share the same outcome (i.e., the production of a green landscape). However, even though they may both benefit from this situation, such interplay is built on a seasonally simultaneous and juxtaposed compatibility that conceals the power relations between them.

A dialogue with Eusebio helped me understand the extent to which talking about compatibility misses out an important aspect of this interaction. As we were visiting the ski areas in his car, he framed the presence of livestock on the ski areas as "a lost battle," and he complained about the fact that of all the high-mountain pastures in the Pyrenees available to them, farmers were choosing to come here. "I always say the same," he stressed, "look at all the mountains there are, and they [farmers] have to come here!"[149] Driving from one end of the resort to the other on a single day, his use of the term "*here*" implied to me "*our* backyard, *our* mountain," while I understood his reference to "a lost battle" in terms of resignation rather than of winners and losers. "It's not worth fencing off a ski run" aligned with this interpretation. Moreover, this understanding implied that previous attempts had been made to modify livestock mobility patterns to benefit the resort's seeding programs. *A lost battle* hinted at the fact that some compromise between the two parts may have occurred in the past.

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[149] "*Jo sempre dic el mateix. Mira que hi ha muntanyes, i han de venir aquí!*" (Eusebio, 15/7/2018).

Returning to the in-depth interview with Aureliano, when I asked him about the positive or negative effects that livestock may have brought about in the Baqueira Beret ski areas and the potential variations over time, he seemed eager to stress that the presence of livestock "has changed, but not because of us [Baqueira Beret]," adding that "in Vaquèira there used to be a flock of thousands of sheep until it was gone… Flocks of sheep used to come to the entire Val d'Aran from elsewhere… now none of them comes."[150] After this general overview of the collapse of transhumance,[151] Aureliano gave me some relevant details on how the resort had engaged in a much more influential interaction with the farming sector and the mobility of livestock. Before the social figure of the shepherd disappeared, he recalled how "we took advantage of having these flocks here, and paid something to the shepherds to fertilize the patches [ski runs] that we were interested in."[152] These agreements established that the shepherds would make the sheep stay overnight in one particular site so as to enhance the growth of grass in the near future. When flocks were tended by shepherds, the resort used to entice them to move the sheep to benefit the conditions of the ski runs, although according to Aureliano, these movements did not preclude them from grazing on certain areas.

However, in a document from the Naut Aran Municipal Archive, dated 1991 and signed by the resort's director, Baqueira Beret requested that the town council put up for auction pastures from an area of land to prevent the livestock from ruining the recently seeded areas on

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[150] "*[La presència de bestiar] ha canviat, però no l'hem canviat nosaltres! … A Vaquèira hi havia una ramada d'ovelles, que ha arribat un moment que s'ha perdut… Tota la Val d'Aran eren ramades d'ovelles que venien de fora... Ara no en ve cap*" (Aureliano, 3/10/2018).

[151] See Chapter 1 to account for a more detailed explanation on the rise and decline of transhumance in Val d'Aran. See also last section of Chapter 4.

[152] "*Però nosaltres, per exemple, aprofitàvem les ramades aquestes, els hi pagàvem algo als pastors per ficar fems als puestos que volíem*" (Aureliano, 3/10/2018).

the adjacent ski runs.[153] This example notwithstanding, Aureliano mentioned another important aspect to help me grasp the extent to which this interaction was steered to meet the interests of the resort. The shepherds' huts, which belong to each village that has the right to use these pastures and which are perfectly visible today, are no longer located on their original sites. In the early stages of the ski resort, huts were removed and rebuilt nearby "because they were in the way of the [ski] run."[154] This hierarchy was explicitly underscored by Esteve, the cattle farmer from the village of Bagergue,[155] who, in response to my comments about Baqueira Beret possibly making the mountains greener and therefore benefitting the farmers, wanted to stress that "it's greener because it's in their interest... because they have to sow to keep the snow longer… Don't think they've done it for the farmers!"[156]

In sum, flocks used to be moved occasionally, and huts were displaced at the ski resort's will. Baqueira Beret fostered those hierarchized interactions, whereas shepherds and farmers took the subordinate role. Compatibility may have thus occurred between these two worlds, but an important caveat must be underlined. Compatibility existed as long as there was no disturbance. More accurately, as long as extensive husbandry did not get in the way of the ski resort's goals. Compatibility thus becomes contingent on and subjected to the power relations

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[153] "Baqueira Beret, SA, with registered office in Salardú … and on his behalf and on behalf of [the] Resort Director of the aforementioned Entity … states: that finding ourselves working on the reseeding and conditioning of the Baqueira ski slopes for their optimal use during the ski season, and because the presence of livestock on these slopes would cause damage to said fields, request the award of the auction of pastures of the second lot, called Ruda, which was deserted in the first and second announcements" ("Sol·licitud de Baqueira Beret a l'ajuntament de Naut Aran" 1991. My translation).

[154] "*perquè on estaven mos destorbaven per la pista [d'esquí]*" (Aureliano, 3/10/2018).

[155] See Chapter 1.

[156] "*És més verda perquè els interessa … perquè han de sembrar per guardar més la neu … No et pensis que ho han fet pels pagesos, eh*" (Esteve, 4/10/2018).

between Baqueira Beret and local farmers, a situation in which the powerful and the weak sides seem to have been clearly defined.

To illustrate this point, I turn to a casual encounter with Frederic in the main square of Salardú. When discussing the possibility that livestock numbers may soon become negligible, he seemed to be completely unconcerned. His words managed to convey both the incidental and juxtaposed features of compatibility between Baqueira Beret and farming and the power relations that underpin them: "It's good to have the animals there [ski areas] because they don't bother [us], but if they weren't, there would be boars or other wildlife to eat the grass."[157] By equating the presence of livestock to the potentially increasing number of wild animals, Frederic's words erased any sort of intentional or political collaboration from the scene. Wildlife or livestock, both would work equally well as free natural lawn mowers for the resort. Putting aside the truthfulness of this correlation, since boars are notorious precisely because of the huge damage they cause to farmers' fields by digging up the ground, Frederic's words perfectly illustrate the powerful stance on livestock under Baqueira Beret's moral ecology, within which any intentional compatibility and collaboration seems to be completely absent.

Edgar, a sheep farmer from Naut Aran, and Ada, his wife even went one step further. On the downsides of the ski resort for shepherding practices, he vehemently complained: "For us, it's [the presence of the ski resort] nothing but problems."[158] Considering the advantages identified by most farmers and shepherds of grazing on the richer grass of the ski runs in the summer, Edgar's complaint may sound implausible. However, it is in tune with his overarching

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[157] "*El bestiar va bé que hi sigui perquè no molesta, però si no hi fos ja hi haurien els sangliers o altres animals que es menjarien l'herba*" (Frederic, 16/9/2018).
[158] "*Per nosaltres només problemes*" (Edgar, 9/11/2017).

view on the interaction between the primary and tertiary sectors: "Look, tourism and farming are incompatible,"[159] he had told me when we first met. Some months later, he began to unpack this sentence with a list of what he meant by "nothing but problems."

A few animals died inside a cafeteria located in the ski areas because the door was left open and they became trapped in the building, while other animals died when they fell into the holes surrounding the snowmaking cannons. Besides these unexpected losses, his complaints mostly referred to the Beret Road and the snow infrastructures, such as anti-avalanche fences, built around it. What stood out most from his comments were the priorities and hierarchies, and thus the power relations underpinning the interplay between skiing and farming.



Figure 53. The mountain slope where the Beret Road was constructed showing various snow infrastructures, including the metal anti-avalanche fences (29/7/2017).

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[159] "*Mira, turisme i ramaderia són incompatibles*" (Edgar, 28/10/2017). See section "Toward an ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape" in the Introduction.

Along this road, which was built in the 1970s and extended in the early 1980s to give access to the Beret Plain, despite the three historical drove roads that traverse it, there is no signpost to warn of cattle crossings. Edgar considered this absence to indicate the subordination and invisibility of livestock in this ski-driven built environment.

Official documents reveal an intriguing ambivalence regarding this hierarchy. On the one hand, a document about the occupation of Uplands of Public Utility in Val d'Aran stored in the Aran General Archive (AGA) states that the ski resort was meant to adapt to the previous agreements on farming use of "paths, cattle crossings, and other existent communication networks in the mountain. Likewise," the document goes on, "said Company [Baqueira Beret] will be responsible for any damage derived directly or indirectly from the facilities, to the people or livestock that cross the mountain." Finally, the document asserts that "[Baqueira Beret] is also obliged to reestablish [road] communication, if it is interrupted, within the period indicated by the Headquarters of the Forestry District"[160] ("Aucupacion deth Monte 297 'Bandolèrs, Dossau, Beret, Ruda, Aiguamòg...', Salardú e Tredòs" 1964). At the same time, one of the legal entries in the Property Registry of Vielha asserted that "the establishment of the works will not prevent the construction of new paths, trails or cattle crossings that they require for the better use of the mountains, Telecables del Valle de Arán,… today Baqueira Beret… being obliged to carry out the necessary works to save the facilities that are the object of the concession." Furthermore, until the works begin, "the Owning Entities [local institutions from each village] of the mountains will be allowed to use pastures as they would do every year" ("Aucupacion deth

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[160] "*La Sociedad respetará todos los derechos y servidumbres legales existentes y protegerá contra posibles accidentes los caminos, pasos de ganado y demás vías de comunicación existentes en el monte. Asimismo será responsable dicha Sociedad de cuantos daños se deriven directa o indirectamente de las instalaciones, a las personas o ganados que crucen el monte. También queda obligada a restablecer la comunicación, si se interrumpiera, en el plazo que señale la Jefatura del Distrito Forestal.*"

Monte 297 'Bandolèrs, Dossau, Beret, Ruda, Aiguamòg...', Salardú e Tredòs" 1964).[161] On the other hand, those eventual new trails and cattle crossings seemed to be conditioned to being compatible with the ski facilities: "The establishment of the works will not prevent the construction of new paths, trails or cattle crossings required for the best use of the mountain, as long as they [paths, trails, or cattle crossings] are compatible with them [works by the resort]" ("Aucupacion deth Monte 297 'Bandolèrs, Dossau, Beret, Ruda, Aiguamòg...', Salardú e Tredòs" 1964).[162]

From the local farmer's grounded viewpoint, the invisibility and subordination of farming uses of the mountain to ski facilities prevailed in other areas. The scarcity of water in the wake of the Baqueira Beret mountain interventions came to the forefront in our conversation. "The springs in Vaquèira. Vaquèira used to have springs. Vaquèira was full of ravines!," he exclaimed. And "they buried them all."[163] "Before, the animals had water everywhere, and now they have covered up all those sites." He finally concluded, "money makes the world go round [*don dinero es don dinero*]."

When Edgar had finished listing his complaints, the conversation was wrapped up with a crucial exchange between the couple. Ada joined in and clearly stated: "They [Baqueira Beret] believe that the mountain is theirs," to which he added, "but the priority is yours, it's not theirs,

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[161] "*En las zonas edificables mientras no se construya, y en las zonas verdes y deportivas, se podrán realizar por las Entidades Propietarias de los montes, los aprovechamientos de pastos que vienen realizando todos los años.*"
[162] "*El establecimiento de las obras no impedirá la construcción de nuevos caminos, senderos o pasos de ganado que precisen para el mejor aprovechamiento del monte, siempre que sean compatibles con éllas.*"
[163] "*Les fonts de Vaqueira. Vaqueira tenia fonts. Vaqueira era barrancs, era barrancs! … Les han tapat tot[e]s*" (Edgar, 3/7/2018).

you know! The pastures are for the farmers. Those who have [right and priority]… the locals, in the end. The lands of Baqueira belong to our villages."[164]

In outright contradiction to the commonly expressed maxim on the rights to the mountains—"the mountains belong to everyone"—a forestry engineer once made a clear point that there was no single property-free patch of land in the Pyrenees, so the mountains always belong to *someone*, not to *everyone*. The political approach to greeneering or Baqueira Beret's moral ecology brings to the fore the power relations underpinning the production of green landscapes through the longstanding interplay between livestock and skiing. This approach leads me to a property analysis of the mountains where Baqueira Beret is sited that ties into the notion of hegemony and the resignification of the commons in current times. Prompted by the closing remarks of the interview I conducted with Edgar and Ada, in the next chapter I examine the following crucial question: Whose mountains are these?

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[164] "*Ells [Baqueira-Beret] es creuen que la muntanya és seva*". "*… però la preferència és teua, no és d'ells, eh! Els pastos són dels ganaders. Els que tenen [right and preference]... el pueblo, vamos. Les terres de Baqueira són dels nostres municipis.*" (Ada, 9/11/2017).

# Chapter 3 — Whose mountains are these? Hegemony and property around Baqueira Beret

## The Three Wise Men on the balcony of the Naut Aran town council

January 5 is not an ordinary night in Spain. Three crowned men dressed in leather cloaks ride atop colourful carriages along the streets of every town and village. They pronounce holiday greetings and distribute candy to a crammed audience of parents and children who stand along the sidewalk, waiting for a chance to hand their gift wish list to one of the figures. It is the "Kings Parade," and the three figures represent the three "wise men" or "kings" of the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew tells of men arriving from the east on camels to bring gold, frankincense, and myrrh as gifts to celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah born twelve days previously on Christmas day. While these men actually numbered more than three, a fifteenth century mosaic depicted them as three men representing the three "races": Melchior the white from Europe, Caspar the brown from Asia, and Balthazar the black from Africa. As many religious festivities in our capitalist times, this tradition became a commoditized secular celebration when the first Kings Parade was held in 1866 in Spain. Gold, frankincense, and myrrh became toys and games for the kids.

Back at home, the children are excited. They have just seen the three wise men, have maybe even touched them or sat on their lap. One final ritual needs to be performed before bed. A pair of shoes of each household member and some food and drink are left next to a balcony or window. The shoes signal the number and the age of those living in the household; the food and drinks are refreshments for the wise men, their assistants, and the camels—even though

these days they ride in carriages. The little ones know that they will wake up with presents in the living room but have no idea how those magical figures could have delivered all those presents on time and in the right place.

There is a turning point in one's lifetime: the day in the primary school when someone— a friend, your parents, or yourself—tells you that "the three wise men are your parents." This is a shocking moment for almost every child, although most of us recover from it and enjoy ourselves as we pretend to believe in this magical world, at least for one night a year.

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On January 5, 2019, I asked for a few hours off from my part-time job at the Refugi Rosta, the hostel situated at the main square of Salardú where we lived for three years and worked sporadically, during the summer and winter seasons. The previous year we hadn't been in the village, so this was the first time I had the opportunity to witness the Kings Parade in this corner of the Catalan High Pyrenees.

Salardú's Kings Parade is far from extraordinary. In the bed of three pick-ups with the town council logo (which was quickly identified by our three-year-old son), the three wise men were making a short tour of the village's streets, stopping at the church and the town council. Parents and children from Salardú and other nearby villages followed the entourage, picking up candy from the ground as it was thrown from the vehicles. Then, standing at the doorstep of the town council, we all waited for the three wise men to appear in the balcony.

The underlying religiosity of this festivity resonated for a moment: the balcony as the altar, the three wise men as priests, and the audience as parishioners. That day, there was a secular fourth character in the scene: the mayor of Naut Aran stood beside the magical figures. There were loudspeakers and a microphone. Everything was ready for the speeches to get started. No Messiah was coming, apparently.

Only Melchior and the mayor spoke, and to my surprise, their words were similar. After having thanked the audience for their presence, each man acknowledged the task of Baqueira Beret resort for having taken care of the runs in spite of the lack of snow, making skiing possible those days. I was astonished by who was pronouncing these words (the mayor and a wise man) and where (the town council balcony), and I was equally astonished by the audience's lack of response. At the same time, I felt I understood what the message was about, and the symbolic power imbued with its ritualization. For Naut Aran, Jesus Christ was not born two thousand years ago but much more recently. From the town council balcony, Baqueira Beret was blessed as the Messiah born in 1964.

*The most magical night of the year* turned into an opportunity to praise a private company from the core of Naut Aran's most important public institution. It was not a casual and informal conversation that took place at a cafeteria, such as the Bar Muralha, or in a friend's house. The praise and the divinization of Baqueira Beret was voiced by the maximum representative of the town council and a beloved magical figure. Baqueira Beret was a deified private enterprise that looked after the collective interests of Naut Aran's villagers.

Beyond this symbolism, there was a more specific reason for gratitude. The snow conditions had been terrible over the Christmas holiday, one of the high peaks within the winter

ski season, which spans from the 26th of December until the 5th of January. During this period, tourists from Madrid and other regions of Spain arrive in mass in Val d'Aran to ski as they celebrate New Year's Eve. The absence of snowfalls over December and in the first days of January plus a long sequence of sunny days and fairly high temperatures pressed the ski resort to work harder than usual to make the runs skiable during those days, especially considering the average attendance of 15,000 visitors every day over that period.[165]

I would have expected to hear at least a few people questioning under their breath the appropriateness of praising a private company from the balcony of a public institution. But there was no response among those villagers, parents who were mostly born in the late 1970s and early 1980s and who belong to what a state officer from the Val d'Aran government once referred to as "the Baqueira generation." Was I—an ethnographer coming from a Canadian university and born in Barcelona in 1981—the only person stunned by what we heard?

I returned to work and told the couple who ran the hostel about what had happened. Sara and Lluís had been raised in a village near Barcelona but had settled down in Salardú forty years previously, in 1979. Lluís was fully involved in local politics and had been the head candidate of the opposition party from 1999 to 2011. Sara has been responsible for the library of Salardú from its founding in 1985 until her retirement in 2021. In this sense, they were both outsiders and insiders. They were not surprised by the message or by the lack of response. However, Sara was reminded of a widespread opinion among the citizens from Naut Aran at

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[165] As an example of the praise to Baqueira Beret in a completely different context, Tomàs, the mayor of Bagergue, remarked that "it was worth mentioning the effort devoted by Baqueira Beret over the entire previous season… Allowing us to skiing with no snowfalls" [*També cal agrair l'esforç de Baqueira. Tot el que van fer l'any passat també és digne de menció. De no nevar a poder esquiar*] (Tomàs, 8/8/2019).

the turn of the twenty-first century, when people generally agreed that "we should make a monument to the resort."[166] According to her, this comment conjured a unidirectional development narrative, in which citizens should be pleased with the ski resort, as exclusively responsible for the municipality's prosperity. The extent to which the contents and form of this opinion resembled the speeches voiced by Melchior and the mayor seemed to reveal that this mindset was still present. Baqueira Beret continues to hold a dominant position over most of residents, dependant on this private enterprise, in what could be framed as a "hegemonic process" (Roseberry 1994). Although the concept is employed to analyze processes of domination between the state and popular culture, focusing on the projects rather than the achievements of the former, it is also useful to better understand the extent to which a private enterprise such as Baqueira Beret has managed to shape the discursive framework of the local population.

Taking these speeches as the backdrop, in the first section of this chapter I draw attention to the production of this hegemony by and around Baqueira Beret (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006) and to the link between this hegemonic process and the municipality's economic dependence on the resort. In doing so, I stress that this ethnographic vignette must not be understood as an anecdote, but rather as a revealing moment within a longstanding collective devotion to the ski resort. Considering that "[h]egemony is the mastering of history … facing backwards and forwards" (Smith 2004, 217; 220), and hence "is to be understood … as a process [that] has both a historical past and potential futures" (2004, 223–24), I will focus on the production of hegemony by and around Baqueira Beret *through time* in the sense that it has been

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[166] "*Els hi hauríem de fer un monument als de l'estació*" (Sara, 5/1/2019).

built, not only historically but also using time as a key variable for its production. To do so, I will use different sorts of data to reveal the importance of tracing the continuities and discontinuities between present and past.

A few ethnographic snapshots will allow me to explore how hegemony around Baqueira Beret took shape through a process of both material economic dependence and symbolic sacralization. The hegemonic implementation of Baqueira Beret in Naut Aran has been constructed upon a historical consciousness inscribed in the landscape, within which farming is backward and therefore must be obliterated. Within this frame, Baqueira Beret is presented as the enterprise capable of replacing a farming landscape with a skiing landscape. I will return to the in-depth interview I conducted with Pep (the successor of Lobatós, the house that used to own most of the rural lands where the village of Baqueira stands today)[167] to trace the logics behind the primitive accumulation of rural lands by the ski resort. Likewise, the contributions to Pep's interview of his wife, Aurora, and a local cattle farmer, Esteve, will allow me to show the endurance of hegemonic tropes with regard to Baqueira Beret's ongoing expansion plans. These conversations not only provide evidence of the dominant position of Baqueira Beret in the territory, but also act as a transition to the next section, which is about the persistence of historical legal rights to former common lands. I employ de Certeau's notions of strategies and tactics to approach the hegemonic process by and around Baqueira Beret through the lens of property theory and through an institutional perspective. Under the claim of historic property rights, a yearly tax the so-called *canon* was established in 1982. The canon—through which the resort was obliged to make payments to the municipality treasury—reshaped the principles upon

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[167] See Chapter 1 for more details about this interview.

which Baqueira Beret had occupied the villages' mountains thus far. In this sense, the canon shattered the ingrained roles of domination and subordination between Baqueira Beret and Naut Aran's municipality by, paradoxically, establishing a new economic dependence between the ski resort and local livelihoods.

## From economic dependence to sacralization: some ethnographic snapshots

The endless line of cars with their rear red lights, stuck on the single road that crosses the Aran alley the first long weekend in December 2019, captured "Baqueira Beret's megacephaly" (as one Tweeter put it) within the development model of the municipality and the district.[168] In short, Baqueira Beret sets the pace of the local inhabitants' direct and indirect revenues.

Local livelihoods depend on the ski resort, but economic dependence does not necessarily lead to ideological hegemony.[169]

At this point, I need to tease out the difference between these two terms—ideology and hegemony—to claim their "reciprocal interdependence," borrowing Comaroff and Comaroff's approach. Following these authors, who used hegemony on the precepts of Gramsci's coinage, I use hegemony "to refer to that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images

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[168] "Development in [Val d'] Aran has been based on real estate, with an occupancy of <15 days/year, Baqueira Beret's megacephaly. The risk of monocrop" [*S'ha fet creixement d'Aran bàsicament immobiliari, amb ocupació de <15 dies/any, megacefàlia de Baqueira-Beret. El risc dels monocultius*]. December 6 and 8 are two holidays in Spain separated by a workday that both schools and other services tend to take as an optional holiday. Depending on which day of the week those holidays fall into many families enjoy spending a long-weekend break. As a result, and as long as there is enough snow to open the ski runs, the ski season is considered to get officially started then.

[169] This is the case ethnographically illustrated by Franquesa, who pointed out how working in a nuclear plant and being proud of it did not prevent some employees from founding a monthly magazine in which nuclear energy and the risks it entailed for the local population were recurrently criticized (2018, 80—7).

and epistemologies—drawn from a historically situated cultural field—that come to be *taken-for-granted as the natural and received shape of the world* and everything that inhabits it." Thus, hegemony "consists … of things that *go without saying* because, being *axiomatic*, they come without saying" (2006, 388. My emphases). In contrast, following Raymond Williams, ideology refers to "an articulated system of meanings, values, and beliefs of a kind that can be abstracted as [the] worldview of any social grouping" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 388). Given these baseline definitions, "[w]hereas [hegemony] consists of constructs and conventions that have to be shared and naturalized throughout a political community [villagers from Naut Aran], … [ideology] is the expression and ultimately the possession of a particular social group" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 388). As a result, one exceeds rationality, while the other is open to contestation. In other words, "[h]egemony … is that part of a dominant worldview which," though never in absolute terms, "has been naturalized and, having hidden itself in orthodoxy, no more appears as ideology at all" (2006, 389). The hegemony's end or "hegemonic process," using Roseberry's preferred term (1994), is more about, borrowing Ingold's distinction (2019), *wiping out* alternatives rather than *striking* them *through*; it is about replacement rather than change or transformation. Hegemony, whether or not is built upon ideological consensus, does not allow for criticism. The economic dependence (material dimension) on Baqueira Beret needed its sacralization (systems of ideas) in order to fulfill such a hegemonic, ideologically constraining process. However, ideologies sneak into the cracks left by any homogenizing hegemonic process, articulating dominant and dissenting opinions.

The following sequence of field notes composed of interviews and conversations with six interlocutors linked to the ski resort thus prompt me to address two main points: 1) illustrating the difference between economic dependence and hegemony ethnographically; and

2) stressing that the hegemonic process around Baqueira Beret has been built upon not only a material but also a symbolic dimension. Opinions about Baqueira Beret, and more specifically the role played by the ski resort in everyone's lives, were gathered through informal conversations and a specific question that I asked throughout my fieldwork: "What has Baqueira Beret meant to you?" Definitions, feelings, and opinions about the ski resort weave a fabric from economic dependence to hegemony, while in the next subsection I illustrate the endurance of farming ideologies beyond the hegemonic process by and around Baqueira Beret.

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At the end of a long interview, I asked my standard question to Ernest, a cattle farmer from Salardú born in 1956.[170] He replied, "[Baqueira Beret] has meant *economic development … for all the inhabitants* in Val d'Aran … from Vielha [the district capital] upwards [up to the municipality of Naut Aran]."[171] Ernest's statement accounted for Baqueira Beret's overarching impact over the Naut Aran villagers, including those like him who did not abandon farming as their main job and source of income. We have incontestable historical evidence of the link between the success of Baqueira Beret and the economic thriving of Naut Aran's villages: migration flows in the

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[170] See Chapter 1 for a portraiture of Ernest, including relevant biographical notes and labour experiences as one of the few local farmers in Salardú who also works as a ski instructor in Baqueira Beret in current times.

[171] "*[Baqueira Beret] ha sigut el desenvolupament econòmic de la Vall d'Aran. Ha sigut el desenvolupament i una millora econòmica per tots els habitants de la Vall d'Aran. No només dic del Naut Aran, eh! Sinó de tota la Vall d'Aran … a partir de Vielha cap amunt.*" (Ernest, 16/7/2018).

municipality and district contrast sharply with those of most of the Pyrenean districts in Catalonia (Guirado 2011: 188).[172]

Demographic evolution in Pallars Sobirà and Val d'Aran within the Catalan High Pyrenees, which includes four other districts (1900-2018).

| Year | Pallars Sobirà | Val d'Aran | Catalan High Pyrenees |
|------|----------------|------------|------------------------|
| 1900 | 12,990 | 6,389 | 74,186 |
| 1960 | 10,240 | 6,525 | 75,992 |
| 1981 | 5,247 | 5,923 | 63,431 |
| 1991 | 5,046 | 7,443 | 61,954 |
| 2001 | 6,191 | 7,697 | 62,811 |
| 2011 | 7,511 | 10,127 | 75,557 |
| 2018 | 6,908 | 9,776 | 71,873 |

Figure 54. Demographic evolution in Pallars Sobirà and Val d'Aran within the Catalan High Pyrenees, which includes four other districts (1900-2018). While the administrative territorial unit of the Catalan High Pyrenees, which encompasses six districts including Val d'Aran and Pallars Sobirà, covers almost a 18% of Catalonia, its population in 2018 (around 72,000 people), despite showing a stabilized pattern in absolute terms since 1900, has lost demographic weight in relative terms, since it only represents a 7% of the Catalan population in current times. Highlighted in yellow, the table shows the differentiated

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[172] Today, 16% of the 10,000 residents in Val d'Aran come from foreign countries, mostly from Romania, Morocco, Algeria, and South America (Colombia, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela) (Boya Ané 2021, 59–60).

population dynamics in Val d'Aran compared with the ones in Pallars Sobirà and the entire Catalan High Pyrenees over the period in which Baqueira Beret flourished (1981-1991). Although in the following years (1991-2011), the increase of the population occurred in both districts as well as in the rest of the Catalan High Pyrenees due to different factors and inner regional dynamics within each district, the staggering difference in that decade reveals the importance of the ski resort as the key economic engine in Val d'Aran. Source: Author, based on Ganau (2019).

Ernest added an important nuance, though. "Baqueira," he proceeded, "has been our *salvation*, so to speak... We've been very lucky!"[173] This additional comment draws out a crucial connection between past and present times. By framing the ski resort in salvation terms, Ernest's words conjured an apocalyptic past time redeemed by the unexpected presence of the *saviour*: Baqueira Beret. When Naut Aran's villagers were about to perish following the end of the construction of the power stations between 1940 and 1960 as well as the staggering devaluation of equine livestock with the arrival of tractors, the creation of the ski resort reversed Naut Aran's economic pattern.[174] The poor became rich, and the notion of "reserve" attached to Naut Aran completely shifted its meaning, from backwardness and tradition tied to farming to wealth and modernity linked to alpine skiing.[175] Interestingly, as expressed by a villager of Salardú, salvation tropes around the mountain of Vaquèira not only look back but also were present in the past

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[173] "*[Baqueira Beret] ha sigut... entre cometes la salvació. Això és evident. A més és una empresa que... hem tingut moltíssima sort! Jo ho reconec així*" (Ernest, 16/7/2018).

[174] See Chapter 1 and Chapter 4 for a detailed chronological account of the transformations in the farming sector in Naut Aran and Alt Àneu over the twentieth century.

[175] See Introduction for an analysis of the term "reserve" and how it has acquired different meanings attached to the territory covered by the municipality of Naut Aran over the recent decades.

looking forward: "I was eight or nine years old, and my uncle would always tell me: this mountain [Vaquèira] will be the salvation of Val d'Aran" (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015).

Edgar, another local farmer from Naut Aran who belongs to the same generation as Ernest, unpacked what salvation meant to local inhabitants. Edgar was a farmer whose family settled in Naut Aran running the first cafeteria at the ski resort. He worked at Baqueira Beret as a ski instructor for twenty-five years and became the national coach of the Spanish women's ski team. His view was clear: "People were able to stay here [in Val d'Aran, and not emigrate] and get an education because of Baqueira… And money came from this [Baqueira Beret, but more specifically land rezoning]. Otherwise, a field is valueless. If there is no construction, it's valueless."[176] In Edgar's view, skiing does not stand alone. Rather, it stands side by side real estate investments and land deals that generate the flow of money and technology: finance and technoscapes, using Appadurai's terminology (1996).

Sebastià,[177] another cattle farmer from Naut Aran born in the 1950s, succinctly pointed out the economic and technological transformations following the land rezoning. Recalling how much construction projects had changed since the mid-twentieth century, he mentioned a family who came from Madrid and whose grandfather is still known as the *burrero* [donkey caretaker]. This nickname referred to the fact that when moved to Naut Aran, he brought donkeys for use in construction at the power stations and later at the ski resort itself. As Aureliano, Baqueira

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[176] "*Sense l'estació d'esquí, aquí no quedarien ni les rates… Si no hi hagués hagut l'estació... la gent no hagués pogut treballar, la gent hagués emigrat… Gràcies a Baqueira ... todo el entorno vive gracias a Baqueira… La gent que ha pogut tindre ara ... que té carreres i estudiar, ho han pogut fer perquè hi ha hagut Baqueira. Perquè... uno se ha vendido un campo, el otro se ha vendido una casa… És que clar, els diners han vingut gràcies a això, sinó, és que un campo no vale nada, aquí. Si no hay construcción no vale res*" (Edgar, 3/7/2018).

[177] See Chapter 1 for a portraiture of Sebastià.

Beret's first employee, once told me, donkeys were used to transport the materials to build the first chairlifts and to open the tracks to reach new ski runs.[178] With a touch of irony that pointed to the economic importance of the concrete and transportation industries in the years to come, Sebastià noted, "His sons bought trucks instead of donkeys,"[179] and today they run one of the most important companies in Val d'Aran. Baqueira Beret thus allowed, or rather fostered, a paramount material shift, from donkeys to trucks. But it also entailed something else.

The cause-effect relation between the presence of Baqueira Beret and demographic patterns extends much beyond economic development in the form of direct employment. Only 100 of the resort's 700 employees stay year-round, but these figures conceal the deep economic dependence of Naut Aran—inhabited by fewer than 2,000 residents[180]—on this private enterprise. Most of the jobs partially or fully depend on the ski resort, from ski instructors to anyone involved in the hotel and catering sector. Even those involved in education or medical services are indirectly conditioned by overall population growth or stability, which has been linked to the presence of Baqueira Beret since the 1970s. Andrea, a former Baqueira Beret employee born in Naut Aran in 1984 and who also worked at the high school in Vielha, put it in personal terms: "If it hadn't been for Baqueira, even my mom, who works at the hospital [in Vielha], might not have been here. I mean, sometimes people say, 'I'm not linked to Baqueira'. Well, this hospital, or the high school might not have been here… Baqueira, like it or not, is Val

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[178] See Chapter 2 for a detailed explanation of the rudimentary conditions under which those first works in the mountains were carried out as they were recalled by this former employee.

[179] "*els fills enlloc de burros van comprar camions*" (Sebastià, 16/10/2017).

[180] According to the Catalan Institute of Statistics (IDESCAT), 1,836 people lived in Naut Aran in 2020 (https://www.idescat.cat/emex/?id=250254).

d'Aran's [economic] engine."[181] In other words, had not Baqueira been here, *life* would have been different. Andrea's words reveal the extent to which Baqueira Beret should be understood as an all-encompassing engine for not only the municipality of Naut Aran, but also for most of the district of Val d'Aran.

Pulling this thread, Aureliano, the ski resort first employee, asserted at the end of our in-depth interview, "For me, Baqueira has meant everything. My life is Baqueira." He expanded, "And for many people in Val d'Aran, too… Many people in Val d'Aran live off, work in [the resort] … and every year they retired, every year new people get hired…". Aureliano's testimony might be deemed too biased in favour of the ski resort, as he was deeply involved in its functioning from the very beginning until the early 2000s. However, his opinion is not an exception. Rather, for many villagers *Baqueira Beret equates to life*. This hegemonic axiom entails a powerful flip side, in which the absence of or opposition to the resort equates to death. Nobody put it more clearly than Teo, one of the cheesemakers from the village of Bagergue, in Naut Aran. Teo was born in 1977 and worked as a ski instructor from 1995 until 2008. "Baqueira Beret has meant everything for us," he said. "Those who go against Baqueira," he added, "the people from Val d'Aran who criticize Baqueira Beret … I would smash their heads."[182] Although Teo would not literally smash anyone's head, his opinion reveals the extent to which Baqueira Beret allows the local villagers to live, and consequently, criticizing Baqueira Beret would let

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[181] "*Si no fos per Baqueira, ni la meva mare, que treballa a l'hospital, potser no hi seria Vull dir, que a vegades hi ha gent que diu, 'no, jo no estic vinculada amb Baqueira'. Pues igual no hi hauria aquest hospital, ni hi hauria aquest institut [de Vielha]… Baqueira és el motor, t'agradi o no, de la Vall d'Aran*" (Edgar, 9/11/2018).

[182] "*Baqueira Beret per nosaltres ha sigut la vida … el que vagi en contra de Baqueira… L'aranès que parli malament de Baqueira Beret és per xafar-li el cap*" (Teo, 9/3/2018).

them die. The farming society that used to live off the land turned into a leisure-based society that lives off Baqueira and for which, through a sort of a metonymic twist, *Baqueira is life.*

These ethnographic snapshots illustrate the transition from economic dependence or the material dimension—living off Baqueira Beret—toward hegemony, which exceeds this rationality through the equation "life is Baqueira Beret." Aureliano and Teo's opinions extended much beyond direct and indirect revenues to touch upon the fact that Baqueira gradually became a life project for local inhabitants that cannot be criticized. The resort gradually acted not just as an all-encompassing economic engine but also as an engine of censorship shaping conversation in everyday life. This point was explicitly illustrated by Laurenç, a current Baqueira Beret employee with whom I developed a close friendship. Laurenç told me about an experience he had had some years ago. The scene happened in the street coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Baqueira Beret in 2014. He ran into a colleague, a snow patroller who also worked at the resort. They were chatting about the bonus offered by the company to all the staff to commemorate the resort's anniversary. Aureliano was in the distance out of earshot. Seeing them talking, he approached and reprimanded them, "You two, do not criticize Baqueira!"[183] Although they had been far from criticizing Baqueira, my friend took to heart Aureliano's comment, and he summarized the scene with the following concluding statement: "Baqueira is *sacred*. It can't be criticized."[184]

Sacredness and salvation are precisely two entwined features bound up with the commemoration of the birth of Jesus Christ through the Kings Parade. They also align with the

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[183] "*Vosotros dos, no critiquéis a Baqueira!*"
[184] "*Baqueira es sagrado. No se puede criticar.*"

long genealogy of this hegemonic process, in which "[t]he making of hegemony involves assertion of control over various modes of symbolic production," and by repetition such control "cease[s] to be perceived or remarked." When this happens, hegemony "come[s] to be (un)spoken of as custom, (dis)regarded as convention—and only disinterred, if at all, on ceremonial occasions, when they are symbolically invoked as eternal verities" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 389). The scene of the three wise men—including both what was said from the balcony and the absence of response from the audience—becomes an ethnographic instantiation through which hegemony-making is revealed as a muted process through a collective ritual. If the speeches by Melchior and the mayor as well as the ethnographic snapshots that I captured through conversations with different local villagers reveal the endurance of hegemony around Baqueira in current times, sources from the past allow us to delve into how this hegemony has been mastered *through time* since the inception of this ski resort, given that "the seeds of hegemony are never scattered on barren ground … and they seldom succeed in totally supplanting what was there before" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006, 389).

I am now resorting to the three-way interview with Pep, his wife Aurora, and Esteve conducted at the Lobató House[185] as a port of entry for the analysis of the making of this hegemonic process around Baqueira Beret, composed of the endurance of leisure and farming-driven ideologies.

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[185] In Chapter 1 I used this interview with the Lobatós' successor and the presence of his wife and a current local cattle farmer to reveal the landscape transformations at the foot of the Vaquèira mountain after the land deal between the ski resort and the Lobatós, and in the rest of historic villages tied to the urban plans in parallel with the success of the ski resort.

**Seizing development or looking after cows: the endurance of farming ideologies**

Speaking about the initial land deals between different individual owners and the ski resort at the foot of the Vaquèira mountain, in what must be deemed the Baqueira Beret primitive accumulation,[186] Aurora revealed her opinion about those deals:

> This has benefited the entire [Aran] valley, Catalonia, and many people … We, the first ones, and everyone the same. Everyone benefited. Therefore, what you may have stopped earning at any given time, you will regain over time. There was not much quality of life in Val d'Aran, people only eked out a living as farmers. The region needed this exploitation of snow tourism, which has worked. The region needed this, because otherwise, just by grazing livestock, there wouldn't be many Audis, you know! … Had it not been for the development of these [ski] runs, Val d'Aran would have been very beautiful today, because all this doesn't change anything, but there wouldn't be the quality of life we have now.[187]

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[186] See Chapter 1 for an analytical description on how Baqueira Beret's primitive accumulation went about.

[187] "*Això ha beneficiat a la Vall sencera, a Catalunya, i a molta gent… Nosaltres els primers, i tothom igual. Està tothom beneficiat. Per tant, allò que hagis pogut deixar de guanyar en un moment donat, pues ho recuperaràs al llarg del temps. La Vall d'Aran no tenien massa qualitat de vida, només vivien de pagès. Necessitava aquesta explotació del turisme, que ha funcionat, de la neu. Necessitava això, perquè sinó realment, sol amb pasturar animals, no hi hauria gaires Audis, eh! … Si no hagués sigut pel desenvolupament d'aquestes pistes, la Vall d'Aran avui, seria molt bonica, perquè tot això no canvia res, però no hi hauria la qualitat de vida que tenim ara*" (Aurora, 4/10/2018). Beyond the fact that Audi is currently the main promoting brand of Baqueira Beret, the acquisition and presence of luxurious cars is a recurrent trope, both in Naut Aran and Alt Àneu, associated with the consolidation in the territory of the ski resort. Given the real estate operations that the expansion of Baqueira Beret toward Alt Àneu entailed, the local population interpreted those operations in the following terms: "They will buy 'a Mercedes or a Mitsubishi'" (Jiménez Setó 2003, 62. My translation).

These words, voiced during my in-depth interview with the Lobatós' successor, reminded me of a passage from a documentary about the history of Baqueira Beret called *These Mountains* (Vinuesa and Rocher 2015), which I had watched before starting my fieldwork. In that documentary, there were several clips in which local inhabitants recalled how the ski resort and the ensuing land deals were presented to those who owned those rural estate parcels as momentary losses for a better future under a Manicheism scheme. "The lands," as Aureliano's younger brother and one of Baqueira Beret's first employees stated, "were given at bargain rates." Recalling the case of his own brother-in-law, who sold a tract of around 2,500 square metres for 60,000 pesetas (about 100€), this former employee remembered how he had enticed his relative to sell the land with the following argument:

> Listen, José [his brother-in-law]. Now you are losing out, because the value that this property will have in four or five-years' time is tripled or quadrupled, but think that you guarantee jobs to your children, to you, to us, and this is also valuable. And this value must be taken into consideration, because even if it is not tangible, it is real: now you have an opportunity for the future. If Baqueira isn't set up, in Val d'Aran we'll be looking after cows.

> (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015)

In other words, within the context of the Franco dictatorship, in which threats and extortions abounded, the smallholders who owned fields felt forced to sell them at very low rates to avoid being blamed as obstacles to development and as the malefactors who did not help others get

rid of misery and poverty. These two features are encapsulated in the expression "looking after cows." Thus, the production of hegemony by and around Baqueira Beret has been inscribed in the landscape, not only by the endless lines of cars stuck on the road to the ski resort or the unceasing construction of housing developments in the village of Baqueira and the urban transformations in Naut Aran's historic villages,[188] but also and foremost *through time*, that is a particular conceptualization of how Baqueira Beret has shaped the history of Naut Aran in contrast with the longstanding feature of a farming society. Baqueira Beret propels a particular historical consciousness, in which the past, and the material and intangible remnants of a farming society are deemed to be something to be forgotten, a threat for the local population that Baqueira Beret can get rid of. This mindset, in which farming equates to tradition, backwardness and waste, and the ski resort to modernity, development and value, has not completely vanished from local inhabitants' thinking. Rather, as was evidenced through the scene of the three wise men and through Aurora's opinion, it has endured.

However, both Pep and Esteve, the other two interviewees who participated in that triangular conversation, through a dialogue that combined the former's memories back to those initial times with the latter's recent experience, added nuance to this binary or Manicheism frame of thinking, despite its endurance in the resort and villagers' development narratives. While seizing development and change through the presence and success of the ski resort, neither Pep nor Esteve bent to Baqueira Beret's hegemonic standpoint. Rather, representing two local farmers from very different times—Pep was born in 1929, whereas Esteve in 1979—they present themselves as empowered rather than subordinate to the resort. While Pep recalled how the

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[188] See Chapter 1 for ethnographic descriptions of such urban transformation in the villages of Baqueira and Salardú.

resort succeeded, against his will, in grabbing his family's rural lands to start the housing plans in Baqueira, Esteve's testimony revealed the extent to which neither this accumulation process nor the unidirectional development narratives underpinning it have ceased. In other words, Baqueira Beret's primitive accumulation has been followed by endless attempts at land grabbing in the name of modernity, development, and value, whereas Pep's and Esteve's farming narratives serve to counter this totalizing or homogenizing hegemonic process.

It is worth mentioning here the dialectical approach to waste and value as the entwined parts of the geographies of capital drawn by Franquesa based on Gidwani's work (2018). From this vantage point, value does not stand in isolation, but rather in a dialectical relationship with waste. Waste, as "the antithesis of capitalist 'value'" (Gidwani 2012, 275), allows us to conceive capitalism as an economic, ecological, and moral order, tied to a landscape and the practices that produce it, that requires the devaluation of each of these three spheres in some places to bring about the processes of capital accumulation in others. In this vein, through a sort of a negative dialectics, value needs its counterpart, waste, to be produced. Capitalist expansion thus requires processes of creative destruction or even, emphasizing the destructive over the creative component, processes of "destructive production" (Gordillo 2014, 81). Wiping out the layers of previous farming landscapes precisely serves to accomplish this purpose. The following ethnographic excerpts counter this aim by making those vanishing layers emerge.

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Recalling in detail the context in which the land deal between the Lobatós and Baqueira took place in the 1960s, Pep showed his outright disconformity about how his father and younger brother handled the agreement. Likewise, he emphatically wanted to make me aware of the irrelevant role that he played in this decision-making process despite being the household heir. "They did not ask me anything… if I thought it would be good to sell it [the 20-hectare estate],"[189] he assured me several times as he underlined that the property was sold all at once. Speaking with one of his cousins a couple of years later, I was able to quantify the value of that deal: one million pesetas (around 6,000€). According to the cousin, this amount was considered exorbitant at the time. However, Pep's standpoint differed:

> It was a disaster! … Because you could already see that Baqueira [ski resort] was very interested in buying it … and you could see that they would build! It was obvious that they were gonna build… that it wasn't for skiing … You must be dumb not to see it … you must be blind! And a fool! Everything! … So what we did is mis-sell [the fields of] Vaquèira … I would have sold it in pieces … then a fortune! … They should have sold it at the beginning a bit … and then you see that they build ten-storey buildings … Your eyes would be wide open then! … You sell everything, and now let's run behind [them].[190]

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[189] "*A mi no se'm va preguntar res… si em semblava bé de vendre-ho [la finca de 20 hectàrees*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).

[190] "*Perquè ja es veia que Baqueira tenia molt interès en comprar-ho... i es veia que allò edificarien! És que allò ja es veia que edificarien… allò no era per esquiar… Allò cal ser burros per no veure-ho … cal ser ciegos! I tontos! Tot! … Llavors el que vam fer és malvendre Baqueira. … Ho hagués venut a trossos... llavors una fortuna! … Ho havien d'haver venut al començament un tros... i llavors ja veus que et fan edificis de 10 plantes, quatre cap a baix… Ja obriries més els ulls! … Ho vens tot, i ara ves a …*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).

Building on his critique of how his father and younger brother set up the deal with Baqueira, Pep's proposal was revealing. He would have sold the parcels of land too, but not all at once. Instead, he would have sold the fields piecemeal to wait for the land value to increase. In doing so, he would have set the pace of the development and change fostered by the ski resort. Pep's standpoint was thus not against Baqueira Beret or development, but about who controlled the pace of that development.

As the interview moved on, an unexpected comment from Pep paved the way to draw out resemblances between the past and the present. "The wealthiest village in Val d'Aran today," he predicted, "may well be Bagergue."[191] Considering that Esteve is from and lives in this tiny village of about one hundred residents situated at the highest point of the district, two kilometres away from Salardú and the main road, I did not hesitate to press Pep to expand on his statement. He then proceeded by foreshadowing that "they will build ski lifts up to the mountain peak…"[192] All of a sudden, Pep made us return to the present time and Baqueira Beret's current plans to expand its ski areas toward Bagergue. At this point, the presence of Esteve was especially meaningful for tracing the historical continuities of the hegemonic process surrounding Baqueira Beret.

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[191] The statement referred to Baqueira Beret's plans to extend the ski areas toward the village of Bagergue in line with some housing developments that partially took hold 2017 thirty years after they had been approved. Had the housing developments fully taken hold, Bagergue would have, according to his mayor, reversed its position in Naut Aran since the village stayed behind the development boom undergone in the rest of the villages at the turn of the twenty-first century.

[192] "*Ara a la Vall d'Aran, el poble més ric de la Vall d'Aran potser serà Bagergue… Perquè si fan … el telesilla al cap de la serra*" (Pep, 4/10/2018).

Following the approval of an urban plan of around one hundred apartments and six hotels in the early 1980s,[193] the partial construction of those housing developments—twenty-two apartments—coupled with the enlargement and improvement of the road that leads to the village took hold thirty-five years later, in 2017. In a previous conversation, Esteve had assured me that the reason why those housing plans had not still come to fruition even though they were approved so many years ago was because the ski resort had still not purchased rural lands to build on them. In parallel with this real estate operation, a pair of concatenated ski lifts were designed to connect Bagergue with the ski resort, so the village would turn into a new access to Baqueira Beret, presumably increasing the value of its lands. Esteve addressed Pep's prediction, especially considering that he was one of the handful of owners with rural lands situated under the trajectory of the new ski lift. "Well, I don't know," he replied hesitantly. "This is a similar situation to his… If he had had to decide, he would have held back… Well, this is what is happening to me now … you hold back and do what… What we have talked more than once…"[194]

Given this real estate operation, Esteve had told me that he was acting as a bottleneck. He was the only owner who opposed the first offer brought to the table by a real estate company closely related to the ski resort. Beyond the value given to those lands, what particularly interested me were the narratives behind this offer. According to Esteve, the real estate company displayed the deal as "an opportunity for them and for us [owners, but also all the villagers]." However, he recalled how he had been listening to the idea of "an opportunity for the villagers"

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[193] https://www.elperiodico.com/es/sociedad/20160814/polemico-proyecto-construir-nuevo-acceso-baqueira-desde-bagergue-5324159 (14/8/2016, accessed on 18/3/2021).

[194] "*Ara la situació que ens trobem és paregut a ell... que si li hagués tocat decidir s'hauria aguantat … pues és lo què em passa a mi ara, que t'aguantes i te fas el … el que hem parlat més d'una vegada*" (Esteve, 4/10/2018).

for forty years—all his lifetime, indeed. Opportunity tropes were expanded by Esteve as he recounted that meeting, and they resonated with narratives anchored in the past.

Esteve paraphrased these narratives as follows: "They take you for a ride… they even said to me, 'Dude, you have two children', meaning that if I gave in to build the chairlift in Bagergue, then my children would have a better future."[195] In other words, to quote Aureliano's younger brother in the 1960s, "You're losing out now, but in the future … you have an opportunity for the future." The resemblance between past and current scenarios was explicitly voiced by Esteve, who drew my attention to this point: "Today you meet a person [Pep] who tells you the origin … and I tell you the origin of another story that begins there … you know, with other times and with other visions and with other stories [contexts]."[196] In fact, when I made him aware of the equivalences between the tropes from past and present times, Esteve wanted to add an important caveat: "Here we live, with or without [a chairlift]… The people of Bagergue nowadays, more or less, earn a living somehow … None of us have the urgent need to have a chairlift in the village … I have to go down from Bagergue to Salardú and go up … but it's not the same … before there was nothing … It's very different."[197] In other words, Naut Aran is not a poor farming reserve anymore, but the wealthy snow reserve. Besides, what Esteve did not mention but seems also crucial is that, despite the endurance of some *modus operandi*,

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[195] *Perquè ells et venen la moto… inclús a mi em van arribar a dir, 'hombre, es que tú tienes dos hijos', … si jo cedia per fer el telecadira a Bagergue, doncs els meus fills tindrien un porvenir millor*" (Esteve, 4/10/2018).

[196] "*Avui et trobes amb una persona que t'explica l'origen [Pep]... i jo t'explico l'origen d'una altra història que es comença allá… Eh, amb uns altres temps i amb uns altres visions i amb unes altres històries*" (Esteve, 4/10/2018).

[197] *Ara veus tota l'especulació que hi ha darrere… Aquí vivim, amb o sense [telecadira]… Els habitants de Bagergue actualmente, qui més qui menys es guanya la vida d'alguna manera… ningún té la necessitat imperiosa de que hi hagi un telecadira al poble… He de baixar de Bagergue a Salardú i pujo... però no és lo mateix … antes no hi havia res… És molt diferent*" (Esteve, 4/10/2018).

Naut Aran's villagers are not under the same social pressure as those who lived and had to make their decisions under the Franco regime.

Expanding on that conversation with the real estate company, Esteve echoed another revealing passage through which the priorities of those interested in purchasing the lands were revealed. "If we start selling apartments," the company's spokesperson told him, "we might not want the chairlift."[198] The chairlift thus appeared to be an explicit conduit for the development of housing. "When you think of a chairlift," Esteve informed me, "the first image that comes to you is money," and in this case, he added, "I see speculation in it." For this reason, he held out for a better deal, even though the use-value of his plot of land would be the same once the deal was done. His cows could keep grazing; his tractor could keep mowing the grass with or without the chairlift. Summarizing, he said, "If it's for speculation and getting a piece of the pie, I don't want to give it away."[199] We can understand Esteve's stance better if we examine his background in local politics and the historical context of the ski resort plans to expand toward Bagergue. As a councillor of the governing party for twelve years (2000-2012), at the time of Naut Aran's urban boom, Esteve was aware of the money that circulates behind the scenes, that is, behind the ski resort expansion plans and the construction of new ski lifts that connect the ski areas to the villages.

Moreover, the partial construction of around thirty apartments related to an old urban plan approved in the 1980s coincided with two brand-making processes in Bagergue. While in 2016 the village was included in the "viles florides" [flowered villages] touristic circuit, in 2019,

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[198] "*Si empezamos a vender casas, quizá no querramos el telesilla*" (Esteve, 6/6/2018).
[199] "*Quan penses en un telecadira, la primera impressió que et ve [al cap] són diners… jo hi veig una especulació… Si és per especular i treure 'tajada', no vendre-ho regalar*" (Esteve, 9/5/2018).

when this label included more than 130 villages in Catalonia, Bagergue also became part of another tour as "one of the most beautiful villages in Spain."[200] Although the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring 2020 abruptly cut the progression of visitors experienced the year before, both of these brands were meant to increase the flow of tourism off-season, or at least off the ski season.[201] These two projects contrasted, according to Bagergue's mayor, with the ski-driven development associated with the construction of housing developments, which, in his opinion, is the model still promoted by the Naut Aran town council.[202] The following picture, taken at the end of the in-depth interview I conducted with Tomàs, the mayor of Bagergue, as we came out of his apartment, serves to illustrate those two development models. Flowers and other decorations, such as the painted butterflies hanging on the wall, contrast with the construction work in the background, where the mountain slopes join the village.

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[200] See the following website of "the most beautiful towns in Spain": https://www.lospueblosmasbonitosdeespana.org/cataluna/bagergue.

[201] As part of the idea of promoting tourism off the ski season, Bagergue's mayor remarked me that he supported the construction of the new ski lift for the possibility to design a "bike park" in the summer rather than to increase the number of tourists in the village in the winter.

[202] It is noteworthy mentioning that the village of Bagergue, as well as the rest of three historic villages around Salardú—Gessa, Unha, and Tredòs—is politically represented by an EMD, a municipal entity within the Naut Aran town council. Likewise, Bagergue municipal entity and Naut Aran town council are governed by the two main opposing political parties in Val d'Aran.

Figure 55. Bagergue on the day I interviewed Tomàs (8/8/2019).

These two development models notwithstanding, Bagergue seemed to have become the locus of interest for the upcoming tourism projects in Naut Aran. Given this context, instead of selling his small parcel of land at bargain rates, Esteve wanted to lease it:

> This is what I advocated, that they pay a fee … it's a lease … as if you were renting a house … it doesn't have to be a very high rent … But if in the end it's 1,000€, it's 1,000€, *but the property is yours.*[203]

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[203] "*Això és el que jo defensava, que paguessin un cànon … és un lloguer … com si lloguessis una casa … tampoc ha de ser un lloguer molt alt… Però si al final són 1,000 euros, són 1,000 euros, però la finca és teva*" (Esteve, 4/10/2018).

Accordingly, he would remain the owner of the land while the resort would have to pay for its use. Although he confessed that he had no idea if this proposal had a legal validity, his standpoint was inspired by or even mimicked the agreement between the municipality of Naut Aran and the ski resort in the 1980s. This agreement, famously known as the canon, meant that the ski resort had to pay a tax every year based on its yearly gross income to exploit the villages' lands upon which the ski facilities were placed. Since the new ski lift would cross private and village lands, and the ski resort would include the latter as part of the canon, Esteve hoped to emulate this agreement. In this case, the agreement would be between two private entities (Baqueira Beret and himself) instead of a private entity and a public one (Baqueira Beret and the town council).

If Baqueira Beret equates to life, Pep and Esteve made clear that they, as owners of the land, still held the power to govern *their* lives. In Esteve's words, "You [Baqueira] have the pan, but I [Esteve] have the handle … and without the handle you can't grab the pan."[204] Through this metaphor widely used in common parlance he graphically illustrated how "they [Baqueira Beret] were those who came to seek us [lands owners]."[205] Thus, Esteve challenged the hegemony of Baqueira Beret by questioning the trope of opportunity (the "good for all" narratives, as epitomized by Aurora's statements) and by pointing to ownership of the land, that is, by pointing to who owns the means of production.

In the second part of this chapter, I explore how this critical stance toward the hegemony of Baqueira Beret is inspired by the canon set up between the municipality and the resort, underpinned by the claims to historic property rights back to pre-modern or communal times.

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[204] "*tu [Baqueira] tens la paella, però jo [Esteve] tinc el mànec… I sense el mànec no pots agafar la paella*" (Esteve, 6/6/2018).
[205] "*han sigut ells els qui ens han vingut a buscar*" (Esteve, 6/6/2018).

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Interestingly, the canon challenged this hegemony by not revoking, but rather by reshaping the economic dependence of Naut Aran villagers on the ski resort.

## Property and the persistence of historic legal rights to former common lands

### The canon: origins, context, and the persistence of the commons

In 1963, the enactment of a law classified all the areas surrounding the Vaquèira mountain as a "Centre of National Interest for Tourism," while the subsequent "Tourism Planning" issued in 1965 and its confirmation through the "High Aran General Plan" in 1969 (Baqueira Beret 1978; Gili 2003) allowed the resort to build the initial ski facilities under a "public mountain concession" upon an area previously used for farming. This concession obliged the resort to transfer a single low payment for each facility to the municipality of Naut Aran and the municipal entity of Tredòs (Bruna Moralejo and Bruna Moralejo 2021, 131), as the legal representatives with rights to the lands occupied by Baqueira Beret. The concession was based on the economic loss the instalment of these facilities entailed for the use and exploitation of the mountain pastures.

Under this original agreement and since the late 1970s, the resort planned to build 3,000 apartments within 300 hectares in the Beret Plain. Baqueira Beret's former director devised this urban development as a unique market opportunity insofar as it would offer the possibility "to sell a product that nobody ha[d], which [was] to leave and come back home with skis on" (in

Vinuesa and Rocher 2015). The project was also meant to alleviate a traffic bottleneck that was already causing backups at peak times (Baqueira Beret 1978), because there was—and still is—only a single road connecting the rest of the valley to the village of Baqueira and the Beret Plain.[206]

"Until that moment," a ski instructor asserted, "the ski resort had exclusively developed within the contours of the Vaquèira mountain and … [a] ski lift had been set up … to lean on toward [the] Beret [Plain]" (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015). The extension of the ski areas toward this high-mountain plateau was not controversial; it was seen as the logical next step for the ski resort. What sparked controversy were the associated urban plans and the conditions for expansion. "What was controversial," the president of the insurance company that represents Baqueira Beret's main shareholder asserted, "was the building part, not the ski resort extension itself" (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015).

During one of my seemingly endless days spent scrutinizing historic documents in the Aran General Archive (AGA), I came across a press release by the ski resort's managers that revealed this tension. Dating to 1980, the document is divided into eight paragraphs under the title: "Comments on the current situation of the 'Beret Plain' project" ("Comentarios a la situación actual del proyecto del 'Pla de Beret'. Evaluacion der impacte ecologic d'un nuclèu abitat en Plan de Beret. Baqueira Beret SA" 1980). In it, Baqueira Beret provided a briefing on this housing plan and a complaint about the political, legal, and administrative hurdles it was

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[206] The line of cars in the peak hours of the ski season is what prompted a Tweeter to use the term "megacephallous development" (see above subsection "From economic dependence to sacralization"). Baqueira Beret former director put it in these terms: "In 1978 it is written that if Beret wasn't done, lines from Beret to Vielha would last about two hours. Here they [the lines of cars] are" (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015).

facing. "At a time of economic crisis," it is written, "the logical thing would be for those interested in investing … in Beret [the ski resort], instead of making things more complicated, to help and facilitate them." Following this general statement, the document specified to whom those words were addressed: "The town council has not yet said anything to Baqueira and it seems that, without consulting the villagers or the company as the primary interested party, it has asked the support of groups from outside the Valley [Val d'Aran] to make its decision."[207] The town council was thus clearly spotlighted as the institution responsible for hindering the ski resort's plans.

Isidre, who had been mayor of Naut Aran at that time, told me that there had been three options on the table regarding the installation of ski facilities in the Beret Plain: reaching an agreement with Baqueira, negotiating with another private enterprise to create an independent ski resort next to Baqueira, or founding a municipal ski resort. Baqueira Beret argued in favour of the first option: "The opinion that with the municipalization of Beret [that is, creating a municipal ski resort], the benefits of tourism development would have a greater impact on the Aran people is contradicted by the reality of the Valley [Val d'Aran]. The Valley has developed enormously with the exploitation of Baqueira [the Vaquèira mountain] by a private company [Baqueira Beret]."[208] The resort then issued a threat: "In case that it is decided to prevent Baqueira from exploiting Beret, Baqueira Beret, SA [Limited Society], will have no choice but to defend its interests (60 million [pesetas] investment already made, etc.) and fight so that

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[207] *En un momento de crisis económica lo lógico sería que al interesado en invertir … en Beret, en vez de ponerle dificultades, le ayudasen y dieran facilidades… El Ayuntamiento no ha dicho todavía nada a Baqueira y parece ser que, sin consultar ni a los vecinos ni a ella como primera interesada, ha pedido el apoyo a grupos exteriores del Valle para que le ayuden a decidir.*

[208] *La opinión de que con la municipalización de Beret, los beneficios del desarrollo turístico repercutirían más en los araneses se contradice con la realidad del Valle. El Valle se ha desarrollado enormemente con la explotación de Baqueira por una Sociedad privada.*

competition is not installed right next to it. This will undoubtedly put off the beginning of Beret [extension of ski areas] at least another 10 years."[209]

The document thus conveyed a tense scenario between the ski resort and the town council, characterized by a clash between private and public interests. The main investor from the insurance company defined this period as "a cold war," in which the resort was seen by the municipality as "the enemy, somehow the colonist" (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015). Analyzing these paragraphs, we see that Baqueira Beret held a dominant political stance that was inseparable from its role as the most important socioeconomic engine in Naut Aran. Delaying the opening of new ski areas in the Beret Plain was a way to block the economic development of the municipality, and it could be understood as follows: if *you* [town council] don't let *me* [Baqueira Beret] thrive, *I* won't let you thrive either.

Octavio, a person who was involved in the negotiations surrounding the canon and whose knowledge about this political process became paramount for my research, once told me that this position aligned with other coercive statements. "If this is your stance, we'll close the resort," he recalled hearing from the Baqueira Beret managers before the negotiations and the establishment of the new agreement that came to be known as the canon. This sort of statements was meant, according to him, to make a claim about "who commands [the situation], so let's see how you [town council] manage."[210] Thus, coinciding with the territorial sprawl toward the Beret Plain and after the first democratic municipal elections in 1979 once Franco's forty-year

[209] *En caso de que se decida prohibir a Baqueira la explotación de Beret, Baqueira Beret, S.A., no tendrá otro remedio que defender sus intereses (60 millones de inversión ya realizada etc.) y luchar para que no se instale la competencia justo a su lado. Ello sin duda provocará que se alargue el comienzo de Beret por lo menos otros 10 años.*
[210] *Si us poseu així, tanquem l'estació… "qui mana i a veure com us en sortiu"* (Octavio, 21/6/2018).

dictatorship was over, the Naut Aran town council challenged the hegemonic process commanded by the ski resort by questioning the previous conditions on the use of villages' mountain pastures.

Octavio was born in Val d'Aran in 1960, and he coordinated the political campaign of the party that won those first municipal democratic elections. Within that four-year period, he was considered one of the main ideologists of the canon, while today he holds an important position in the public administration as the secretary of two municipalities: Les, in the Baish Aran region, and Alt Àneu, in the district of Pallars Sobirà. Octavio was an imposing figure. I only managed to conduct one interview with him, and I did not dare to ask permission to record. I struggled to take notes as he spoke quickly.

Octavio explained that after the elections in 1979, the Naut Aran town council began to question the original conditions upon which Baqueira Beret managed to set up its ski facilities over the villages' mountains under the "High Aran General Plan" from 1969, which entailed the classification of the Beret Plain as an urban area (Baqueira Beret 1978). Several villagers had complained to the town council, and Octavio described this period as the time when "people began to talk about the canon" and to oppose the housing plans in Beret through the reform of the "High Aran General Plan."

Over the first twenty years of Baqueira Beret's history (1964-1982), the occupation of the villages' mountains was settled according to the Railway Law, equating ski lifts to railways. The agreement consisted of a single small payment depending on the square metres occupied by each facility, and each concession was signed for ninety-nine years. Moreover, the institution responsible for setting those conditions was not the municipality but the Forestry District of the

State. To counter this previous agreement, the town council argued for making the Local Regime Law—the law that establishes the powers endowed on the municipal entities in Catalonia—prevail over the Railway Law and pushed for limiting the land concessions to the ski resort to twenty-five instead of ninety-nine years.

Octavio, through an informal conversation on the phone, put it in very blunt terms by using a colloquial expression: "[The deal] was a drop in the bucket." [211] In other words, as the former mayor, Isidre, assured me, "the deal [reached in the 1960s] was not enough," especially considering the new political and economic context in the early 1980s. Two facets of the former mayor's own life shed light on this context, characterized by both the success of Baqueira Beret and the transformations already undergone in the villages of Naut Aran: Isidre the entrepreneur and Isidre the politician.

Isidre was born in the mid-1950s, and in the 1970s he recalled how "Baqueira was hardly known and there was only a scarce elite in Spain who went skiing in the Alps." In line with this context, most of the skiers used to come when the weather was fine, in spring, regardless of the snow conditions. In his own words, "people crammed into the ski resorts at Easter because they went to [see] the snow, not skiing. To make snowmen in the sun… People did not know what powder snow was … It was snow and it was white."[212] The slogan "sun and snow," which is still in force today,[213] synthesized the spirit of those initial visitors. In those early days, there was so

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[211] "*Això era la xocolata del lloro!*" (Octavio, 8/6/2018).
[212] "*A la dècada de 1970s l'estació de Baqueira gairebé ni es coneixia, i només hi havia una elit molt elit que anava a esquiar als Alps"… La gent omplia les estacions per Setmana Santa perquè la gent anava a la neu, no a esquiar. A fer ninots de neu, i clar, com que feia sol… La gent no sabia el que era la neu pols, i venien per Pasqua perquè feia bo. Era neu i era blanca*" (Isidre, 30/8/2019).
[213] See Introduction for a description and analysis about the picture placed on a billboard to illustrate Naut Aran's logo.

much room for market opportunities that many households in the Naut Aran villages took advantage of that historical conjuncture. The number of skiers in Spain was very low, and so was the supply of restaurants and hotels in Naut Aran. Coinciding with the housing developments undertaken in the village of Baqueira and the urban transformations undergone in the Naut Aran historic villages in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the staggering rise of skiers was thus coupled with the blossoming of hotels and restaurants, most of them in the same locations where barns had stood.[214] He remembered those times of opulence, when he and his wife opened a family hotel in 1985 on a parcel previously occupied by a kitchen garden, and the rooms were booked all winter. The same happened with the restaurant they opened in 1990, and this trend endured until the early 2000s when the relationship of supply and demand was reversed. While the number of skiers has held steady at around 800,000 per year since the late 1990s—including daily, weekly and season pass holders—the number of hotels and restaurants has continued to increase, especially with the construction at the foot of the ski resort in the mid-2000s of the Ruda Complex, which contains luxury hotels (two of five stars and one of four stars) offering rooms at very low rates.[215]

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[214] As a matter of fact, Baqueira Beret only received 118,000 visitors in the 1971-1972 season, while this number tripled in less than a decade—more than 300,000 in the 1979-1980 season (López Palomeque and Majoral i Moliné 1982)—, and it remained above 500,000 since the 1993-1994 season, reaching a maximum of 907,310 in 2004-2005 (see Chapter 1). In terms of hotel accommodation offer, the numbers are also striking. In 1980, there were only 2,384 rooms for tourists in Val d'Aran (López Palomeque and Majoral i Moliné 1982, 215), whereas this number raised up to 8,204 in 2018 ("Estadística Otelèra dera Val d'Aran 2019" 2019). According to Beltran and Vaccaro, the impact of the ski resort on these numbers is evident given that "45% of the Aranese hotel accommodations are concentrated around the station [sic]" and that "[t]he urbanised centres of Baqueira (…) concentrate an important part of the 2,590 secondary residences (according to 2011 data) and the 2,900 hotel beds (in 2016) of the Naut Aran municipality" (2020, 135; 144).

[215] The former manager of one of the historic hotels in Salardú complained about the unbalance created by the presence of these new luxurious hotels at the foot of the ski runs offering rooms at very low rates. More importantly, she pointed out the lack of criticism when those housing developments had been designed and presented: "We have been quite conditioned, we have lost clients. If you go to Baqueira and you are offered a hotel at the foot of the slopes, and your purchasing power is average, you will choose to go to this hotel. It means that now we have

Isidre's experiences as a entrepreneur ran in parallel with his involvement as a politican. He was mayor of Naut Aran from 1979 until he left local politics in 1987 after losing a poll. Over this period, he needed to weigh the boom of Baqueira Beret and villagers' "will to improve," borrowing Li's expression (2007), against the desire to protect Naut Aran municipality's property rights. After heated disagreements with the ski resort, as evidenced by the document from the AGA presented above, in 1982 the conflict was resolved through the establishment of the canon. This new agreement was a gradual tax on the ski resort's yearly gross income, which began at 1.6% and increased 0.8% every five years until reaching 5% (Bruna Moralejo and Bruna Moralejo 2021, 131).[216] The municipality agreed to invest 1% of that tax revenue to what was named "The Promotion Fund for Tourism in Val d'Aran."[217] The loose interpretation on where to allocate the 1% of these funds made it possible for the money to be spent on municipal facilities, such as new parking lots in the villages, by arguing that they were necessary for tourism demands. "In the end," as Octavio put it bluntly, "this made it so that the money [the entire 5%] could be used for anything."[218] Today, the revenue deposited in the municipal treasury from Baqueira Beret amounts to more than 1,5 million euros per year.[219]

When I brought up the question of the money received from the canon in my interview with the former mayor, Isidre assured me that, although the funds were not earmarked, the

fewer clients. I consider that this would not have had to be done. It has done, and we assume the consequences, because at that time we all remained silent… We wouldn't have had to remain silent" (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015).
[216] Both Isidre, the former mayor, and Lluís, the person who was the chief of the party in the opposition between 1999 and 2011, told me that this amount was supposed to reach a 6%, but it was reduced soon after Isidre abandoned the town council in 1987 to a 5% out of the sale of ski passes and revenues from cafeterias and restaurants under a new agreement signed in 1996 whose validity will expire in 2026.
[217] "*Fons de Promoció de Turisme del Naut Aran.*"
[218] "*Tot plegat va fer que els diners es poguessin fer servir per qualsevol cosa*" (Octavio, 21/6/2018).
[219] In concrete, in December 2018 the Naut Aran town council received 1,509,713.04€ from the canon with Baqueira Beret (Bruna Moralejo and Bruna Moralejo 2021, 133).

original idea was to allocate them to promote competitions within the Ski World Cup to put Baqueira Beret on the map. As a result, he presented the canon as a reinvestment for the ski resort that would also benefit the villages of Naut Aran. "It would be a way," he asserted, "to reinvest in Baqueira, because it is also our supporter."[220] And yet Isidre received criticism from the ski resort and, less intuitively, from several villagers, who said that he "should leave Baqueira in peace [not taxed] because many people lived off it."[221]

Despite these two critiques, the proposal to charge Baqueira Beret a tax for occupying *municipal lands*[222] and the revision of previously authorized urban plans was brought to the table, and the former mayor tried, in his words, "to convince people that that [the canon] was good, for everyone, also for Baqueira" (Isidre in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015). In other words, the canon was meant to couple the development of the ski resort with the improvement of Naut Aran villagers' livelihoods in order to avoid fostering a unidirectional development model that would set a stark contrast between the resort as a hub of wealth and luxury, and provincial villages anchored in the past. "I'm gonna put it bluntly," he told me as I was trying to figure out the logic behind the establishment of this agreement. "All these struggles for this [canon] were because here, in front of every household there was a dunghill, and everybody had ten cows and a barn inside the village …, and you can't have Hollywood up there, and shanty towns here."[223] The canon was thus presented as a way to increase the success of the resort and improve the standard

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[220] "*Seria una manera de reinvertir en Baqueira, perquè també és el nostre sostén*" (Isidre, 30/8/2019).

[221] "*molta gent d'aquí que deia que a Baqueira la deixés estar perquè molta gent s'hi guanyava la vida*" (Isidre, 30/8/2019).

[222] In the following subsection I will problematize to what extent these lands can be defined as "municipal" by scrutinizing the historic legal rights to them held by each one the villages within the Naut Aran municipality.

[223] "*Mira, t'ho explicaré ràpidament: Tot aquest lluitar per això [conveni] és perquè aquí davant de cada porta hi havia un femer, i tothom tenia deu vaques i una borda dins del poble. "El que no pot ser és tenir Hollywood al costat i tenir faveles aquí"* (Isidre, 30/8/2019).

of living of the local inhabitants of Naut Aran. The approach was "to sell it altogether, because we [town council] really thought that one thing was as valuable as the other" (Isidre in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015).

Looking back, Isidre made two key points. First, he was convinced that "had the canon and the urban plan revision not taken place, there would have been a macro-urban complex in Beret [Plain] while the Naut Aran villages would have still been full of dunghills and incandescent lightning."[224] Second, he wanted me to know that when the canon was signed, "Baqueira already had all the private lands [at the foot of the Vaquèira mountain] and they all had turned into urban estates."[225] Primitive accumulation and land rezoning ran hand in hand, but whereas the former was carried out through agreements between private entities (the ski resort and individual owners such as the Lobatós), the latter was undertaken with the approval of the town council. Given the staggering and immediate market value increase of that land when it was transformed into urban estates, he asked rhetorically, "Wasn't the town council responsible for land rezoning?! We'd already helped them!"[226] referring to the direct or indirect support given to the ski resort by the town council through the rezoning process.

The canon thus challenged the institutional basis upon which the hegemonic process around Baqueira Beret was built. By making a clear point about who was the owner (the villages of Naut Aran) and who was the leaseholder of those lands (Baqueira Beret), the agreement was meant to shatter the power relations between a private enterprise and the local institutions that

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[224] "*si no s'hagués portat a terme tota la negociació pel conveni així com la modificació del Pla d'Urbanisme, d'una banda tindries la macrourbanització a Beret, i de l'altra, als pobles del Naut Aran seguirien havent femers davant de les cases i llums d'incandescència als pobles*" (Isidre, 30/8/2019).
[225] "*Baqueira ja tenia tots els terrenys privats i urbanitzables*" (Isidre, 30/8/2019).
[226] "*O no ho va fer l'ajuntament, lo de requalificar les terres?! Ja es va ajudar*" (Isidre, 30/8/2019).

represented inhabitants' interests and rights. It thus strove to contravene the hierarchized view of the development of the region, which placed the ski resort on top and the villagers on the bottom in a dominant/subordinate relationship.[227] Considering that Baqueira Beret may have made, as several local inhabitants put it, Naut Aran inhabitants live,[228] the reverse, the canon implied, was also true. Naut Aran's mountains made Baqueira Beret thrive. In other words, the canon was meant to challenge Baqueira Beret's hegemony over the municipality of Naut Aran insofar as it framed the relationship between these two parties—a private enterprise and a public institution—in bidirectional terms, while also aiming to establish a new economic dependence on this private enterprise.

Both the canon and the revision of the urban plan established in 1969 were meant to set limits to the sprawl of Baqueira Beret. The negotiations behind both agreements serve to bridge the two main topics of this chapter: hegemony and property. The arguments put forward by the resort and some of the mayor's critics relate to the historical construction of hegemony embodied in the ski resort. The imposition of a land use tax on the ski resort presses us to examine this controversy through the lens of property analysis and the overlap of communal and (hyper)modern territorialities.

The occupation of the villages' mountains by an alpine ski resort sparked claims associated with a historic bundle of rights that prevail over or at least coexist with the current state-driven administrative territorial scheme. Borrowing, but also expanding on Octavio's words, I stress that "skiing," not only "has made us talk about municipalities rather than regions

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[227] See above the conversation I had with Sara, the librarian from Salardú, in the section "The Three Wise Men…"
[228] See above the subsection "From economic dependence to sacralization…"

such as Val d'Aran or the Àneu valleys," but also has pressed us to draw attention to the *persistence of the commons* under a legal pluralism, that is, the coexistence of historically heterogeneous rights that regulate access to resources beyond the allegedly homogenous legal monopoly held by the state (Moore 2001). The conflict between the ski resort and the town council leads us, therefore, to the crucial question of whose mountains are these.

**The genealogy of property rights to the villages' mountains: between state strategies and local tactics**

In the early 1980s, the municipality questioned the conditions of use that benefited Baqueira Beret. "These mountains," the former mayor asserted, "are not from the state … They are inscribed to the Land Register in the name of the villages [*béns de propis dels pobles*]." Therefore, concessions to different usages—pastures, timber, etc.—were historically made for those who leased them for such purposes. The town council then wondered: "[W]hy don't we grant a concession for skiing [operations]?" (Isidre in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015). Consequently, the municipality pressed the resort to adopt a new agreement—the canon—considering that Baqueira Beret had been occupying and benefiting from lands that belonged to different villages within the municipality of Naut Aran under outdated conditions. This claim sprang from a genealogy of bundles of rights to these mountains that must be thoroughly scrutinized, and which tell us about the persistence of historic local territorialities from pre-modern times in the hypermodern era of alpine skiing.

Naut Aran was formally constituted as a municipality in 1967 as the result of the aggregation of seven historic villages (Garòs, Arties, Gessa, Salardú, Unha, Bagergue, and Tredòs),[229] following the administrative efficiency and managerial rationalization principles that were set with the creation and standardization of municipalities since the 1820s in Spain (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014a). However, among the seven villages there was a territorial distinction that dated back from the seventeenth century. Whereas Gessa, Salardú, Unha, Bagergue, and Tredòs held, in different proportions, historic rights to the mountains occupied by the ski resort's facilities, Arties and Garòs, the two villages situated at the lower part of the municipality and closer to Vielha, Val d'Aran's capital, did not.

Focusing on the heterogeneity of legal frameworks in contemporary times (Moore 2001), I draw attention to the persistence of historic rights to former common lands through the establishment of a tax on a private ski resort by a public institution such as the Naut Aran town council. In other words, I am especially interested in how the project of modernity in the Western world unfolds via market opportunities around the creation of a private alpine ski resort under the command of the state apparatus, and how these two facets of modernity, "as a historical regime [that] results from the implementation of a new type governmentality associated to the simultaneous consolidation of nation-state and capitalism, with individualism as a generic behavioral framework" (Vaccaro 2010, 25), are shaped by pre-modern or communal territorialities. To do so, I approach the notion of the commons as a political-legal toolkit, a

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[229] "*Que por Decreto número 3290/67, de 21 de diciembre, se ha aprobado la fusión de los Municipios de Arties, Salardú, Gessa, Tredós y Bagergue, en uno sólo, con la denominación de Alto Aran y con capitalidad en esta localidad de Salardú, por lo que se ha producido una alteración de los respectivos términos municipales, quedando refundidos en uno solo*" ("Carta al Distrito Forestal de Lérida (2/3/1968)" 1968). Letter to the Forestry District in Lleida signed by the mayor of the recently constituted town council of Naut Aran.

process, a mechanism, or a relation within a "field of force," using E. P. Thompson's expression, rather than a category or entity, inspired by de Certeau's distinction between strategy and tactic (1988; cf. Aramburu 2000). This approach allows me to emphasize the extent to which the legal pluralism surrounding the notion of the commons is filled by a wide array of stakeholders—the state, local communities and especially farmers represented by their institutions, and a private ski resort—with different interests and goals.

According to de Certeau, strategy, as the basis upon which "[p]olitical, economic, and scientific rationality has been constructed," refers to "the calculus of force-relationships which becomes possible when a subject of will and power [whether the state or Baqueira Beret, in this case] can be isolated from an 'environment'" (1988, xix). In this sense, strategy sketches out the limits of a game board upon which stakeholders from their respective loci of power apply a Cartesian perspective in setting the rules of the game.[230] In contrast, tactic refers to another kind of calculus "determined by the absence of a proper locus" (de Certeau 1988, 37). Adaptative by essence, tactics belong to the ways of operating "scattered over the terrain of the dominant order and foreign to the rules laid down and imposed by a rationality founded on established rights and property" (de Certeau 1988, 38). Tactics are always fragmentary, depending on time and seeking to turn events into opportunities, using "the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers" (de Certeau 1988, 37). In short, whereas "strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose … spaces …, tactics can only use, manipulate, and

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[230] This insight is inspired by David Scott's reflections on how the colonial power permeated in the colonized societies: "What is at stake here is not whether the colonized accommodated or resisted but how colonial power transformed the ground on which accommodation or resistance was possible in the first place, how colonial power reshaped or reorganized the conceptual and institutional conditions of possibility of social action and its understanding" (2004, 119).

divert these spaces" (de Certeau 1988, 30). In other words, strategies are "directed to achieve or consolidate a dominant position", and hence they are an active part of the hegemonic process, whereas tactics "seek for survival," and they are usually intended to counter hegemony (Aramburu 2000, 64). While the canon emerged out of a hegemonic process composed of a field of force between Baqueira Beret and the local institutions representing the Naut Aran villagers set by the capitalist market in the middle of a transition toward a leisure-based society, this clash stems from longer-standing relations of forces between the state and the local communities through which different strategies and tactics have unfurled around the historic rights to former common lands.

I use de Certeau's theoretical framework for heuristic purposes in order to understand the patterned ways through which local institutions have struggled over time for the rights to the mountains. In doing so, I will distinguish three periods: a) pre-modern or communal times before the constitution of the liberal state in Spain in 1812, taking as a point of reference the *Querimònia*, an official document signed in 1313 in which Val d'Aran was endowed with a set of privileges; b) modern times, from the early nineteenth century,[231] coinciding with the municipalization of local territories and the disentailment campaigns, until the mid-twentieth century with the inception of the ski resort in 1964 and the constitution of the municipality of Naut Aran in 1967; and c) hypermodern times, in which the establishment of the canon in 1982

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[231] The term "modern" refers here to the project of modernity (see Introduction), commanded by the state and the market in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries rather than the modern era, which, according to historians devoted to the study of political and economic institutions in the Pyrenees (Bringué 2003; Sanllehy i Sabi 2007), usually encompasses the period between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

revealed the persistence of communal territorialities within a high-modernist state-driven territoriality (Scott 1998) as market opportunities emerged around a ski resort. [232]

### Communal times: Querimònia, terçons, and universities

Val d'Aran was already politically and legally constituted as a community at the end of the thirteenth century, but the enactment of a Magna Carta called *Querimònia* in 1313 consolidated it as a territorial unit. In the *Querimònia*, rights and privileges over the management of Val d'Aran's natural resources were formally endowed on local institutions and population: "By virtue of Chapter III of the Privileges of the *Querimònia*, the King of Aragon, Jaume II, granted … the free right to use the pastures, forests and waters to the Aran communities" (Aunós and Ribelles Sans 2018, 41. My translation). More importantly and beyond questions of its legal validity, the *Querimònia* is present in current discourses about Val d'Aran's political autonomy within both Catalonia and Spain. For example, beside Salardú's school, there is a bronze sculpture commemorating the 700th anniversary of this official document: a naked woman holds a rolled scroll in her right hand, her arm outstretched toward the sky. Ricardo, one of the owners of the Bar Muralha in Salardú recurrently referred to this historic document to claim that Val d'Aran's mountains do not belong to the state. Finally, Isidre, Naut Aran's former mayor, made the same

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[232] This classification is partially inspired by the three models through which territory has been governed in the Pyrenees, according to Beltran and Vaccaro: "(a) the pre-modern communal management, (b) the state- and market-driven reorganization of the contemporary Pyrenees, and (c) specific institutions or elements in which we think we recognize communal tradition and modernity" (2014a, 21). These authors also defined the contemporary times in terms of hybridity between different territorial models: "[T]he interaction between a pre-modern state model and full-fledge state or capitalistic market apparatuses has resulted on models, on managerial forms, that incorporate characteristics of both ideal types: hybridity seems to be the most common form of historical development" (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014a, 33).

point in the documentary previously mentioned (in Vinuesa and Rocher 2015). The *Querimònia* should probably be read as a legal artifact through which Aran political identity has recently been reasserted or even reinvented,[233] while its principles have been largely reshaped and rewritten. What I am interested in, though, is the extent to which these examples align with "the temporal quality of [a] Magna Carta," in the sense that "[w]hat matters is how people [from Val d'Aran] attach meaning to it … whatever 'temporality' they construct for it in their respective presents" (Ringel 2016b, 403).

The privileges endowed by the *Querimònia* tie into Val d'Aran's historical geopolitical peculiarities as a region that "geographically belonged to the Atlantic side, was politically integrated into the Spanish monarchy [and the Crown of Aragon, which included the current Catalan territory, until the eighteenth century], was administratively a district apart from the Catalan *corregiments* [jurisdiction of a Corregidor] and ecclesiastically depended on the diocese of St. Bertrand of Comenge [on the French side]" (Sanllehy i Sabi 2014, 21. My translation). Likewise, those privileges did not remain frozen in the fourteenth century, but they have rather been taken up periodically and endorsed by local institutions since then: "[A]ll the modern history of the Valley [the author refers to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries] was full of institutional arrangements to obtain new [concessions of privileges] and to ratify the existing ones" (Sanllehy i Sabi 2014, 71. My translation). Several compilations of those privileges promoted by the *Conselh Generau d'Aran* (Val d'Aran government) over that period (the last one from 1842) and also through "The book of the minutes from the Mayors Assembly of Val

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[233] Santi, a forestry engineer from the Catalan government born in Val d'Aran in 1964, assured me that when he was at school the *Querimònia* was not even included in the portfolio, and he added: "We did not even know about it!" (25/7/2019).

d'Aran"[234] in 1945 (Calbetò 2013) demonstrate these recurrent validations, particularly when Val d'Aran's special status within Catalonia and Spain was called into question (Sanllehy i Sabi 2007, 1:120). In sum, Val d'Aran, in contrast with other Pyrenean regions such as Pallars Sobirà, had not been subjected to a feudal regime in which a few lords held the property of the mountains and of the natural resources therein. Instead, it had historically been under the control of a kingdom, whether the Aragon or Castilian Crowns, which was consistently kept at bay by the local institutions. Born in 1964 in Val d'Aran, Santi, a forestry engineer from the Catalan government summarized this geopolitical tactic through the following words: "We, Aran people, have always liked to depend on Madrid because it is further away, and so you are less controlled, you are much more autonomous. We wanted the protection of the king in case the French invaded us … because the French have it much easier … It's a way to keep being autonomous [from any kingdom]."[235] A proof of this exceptionality endowed on Val d'Aran is the compilation of answers gathered by Francisco de Zamora through a vast questionnaire conducted in 1788. Through these questions and answers, "community self-management and the lack of the participation of the state were evident," according to Sanllehy (2014, 28. My translation). As a result, the Aran population has historically enjoyed much more autonomy than most of the Pyrenean regions in Spain.

Bearing Val d'Aran's special political status, in what follows I narrow down the geographical scope of my analysis to the Vaquèira mountain and the Beret Plain in order to examine the persistence of historic property rights in current times via the creation of an alpine

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[234] "*Eth libre d'actes dera Junta d'Alcaldes dera Val d'Aran.*"

[235] [*Sempre ens ha agradat als aranesos dependre de Madrid perquè està més lluny, i així controla menys, ets molt més autònom. Volíem la protecció del rei perquè si ens envaeixen els francesos … perquè els francesos ho tenen molt més fàcil… És una manera de mantenir l'autonomia*]" (Santi, 25/7/2019).

ski resort. To do so, I trace the formation of Val d'Aran's territorial regions following Sanllehy's historical analysis.

Prior to the Constitution of Cádiz in 1812, widely recognized as the inception of the liberal state in Spain and hence as the culmination of the shift from the old communal to the new modern political regime, three administrative spheres coexisted in Val d'Aran: *Val* (valley), *terçons*, and *universities*. The regional community, tied to the sense of the entire valley as a territorial unit, coexisted with the local communities, institutionally represented by *terçons* and *universities* depending on differentiated local dynamics.

*Terçons* refers to a territorial division, whose origin is unclear, but which dates to at least the thirteenth century (Sanllehy i Sabi 2007). Etymologically, it clearly derives from "terç," which stands for "third" and refers to the three historical and geographical main regions within the valley: Pujòlo, the highest region in the southern edge next to the district of Pallars Sobirà, Vielha, in the middle, and Romincosa, the lowest region in the northern end adjacent to France. To a certain extent, these divisions persist today, resulting in the following main three regions that take a topographical adjective. From the highest to the lowest: Naut or High Aran, Mijaran or Middle Aran, and Baish or Low Aran.
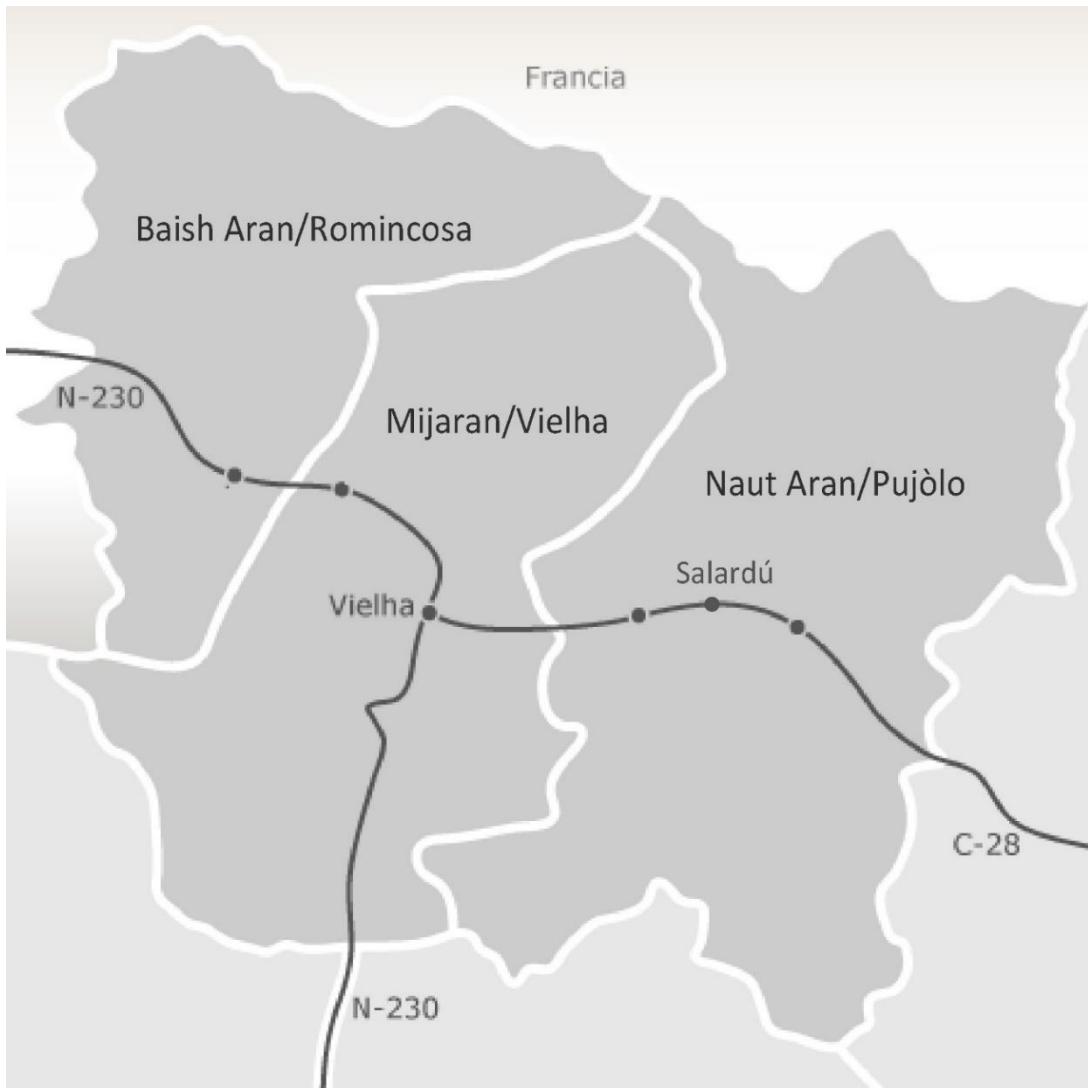
Figure 56. Map of Val d'Aran with the original administrative division composed of three *terçons* (Romincosa, Vielha, and Pujòlo) since at least the thirteenth century, which today correspond to the three regions within which villages, municipalities, and former *terçons* are included.

The former division of Val d'Aran into three smaller administrative regions called *terçons* underwent a subdivision in the sixteenth century. Each *terçon* was split into two parts resulting in six regions (Pujòlo, Arties e Garòs, Castièro, Marcatosa, Lairissa, and Quate Lòcs), which paradoxically, were still named *terçons*. Of this subdivision, Pujòlo contained the so-called "community of five villages," including Gessa, Salardú, Unha, Bagergue, and Tredòs, while Arties and Garòs were constituted as an autonomous *terçon*.



Figure 57. Map of Val d'Aran with the six terçons derived from the split of each one of the former terçons into two in the sixteenth century (*Aran, Istòria Grafica* 2014). Pujòlo, corresponding to the region and current municipality of Naut Aran, split into *Pujòlo* (Gessa, Salardú, Unha, Begergue, and Tredòs) and *Arties e Garòs*.

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I will focus on the former *terçon* of Pujòlo, which is equivalent to today's municipality of Naut Aran and spreads over roughly 25,000 hectares (17,000 hectares approximately belong to the community of five villages and 8,000 to Arties and Garòs) representing a bit less than half of the district of Val d'Aran. Within this large area, the ski resort covers more than 6,500 hectares partially spreading today over two "uplands of public utility" (MUPs in Catalan, Aranese, or Spanish) or *public mountains*: *MUP 297* "Bandolèrs, Dossau, Beret, Ruda e Aiguamòg," belongs to Salardú and Tredòs—8,000 hectares, of which 5,735 are occupied by the ski facilities—and *MUP 298* "Beret Darrèr," which belongs to Salardú, Tredòs, Bagergue, Unha, and Gessa—900 hectares, of which 823 are occupied by the ski facilities (Bruna Moralejo and Bruna Moralejo 2021, 136). Note that the term "mountain" or "uplands" does not stand here for a geographical toponym but rather a territorial classification that may include a large area composed of a set of mountains and valleys, as is especially the case of the MUP 297, which includes the Beret Plain, the Vaquèira mountain, and several other peaks and valleys, such as the valleys of Ruda and Aiguamòg, next to the villages of Tredòs and Salardú, respectively.
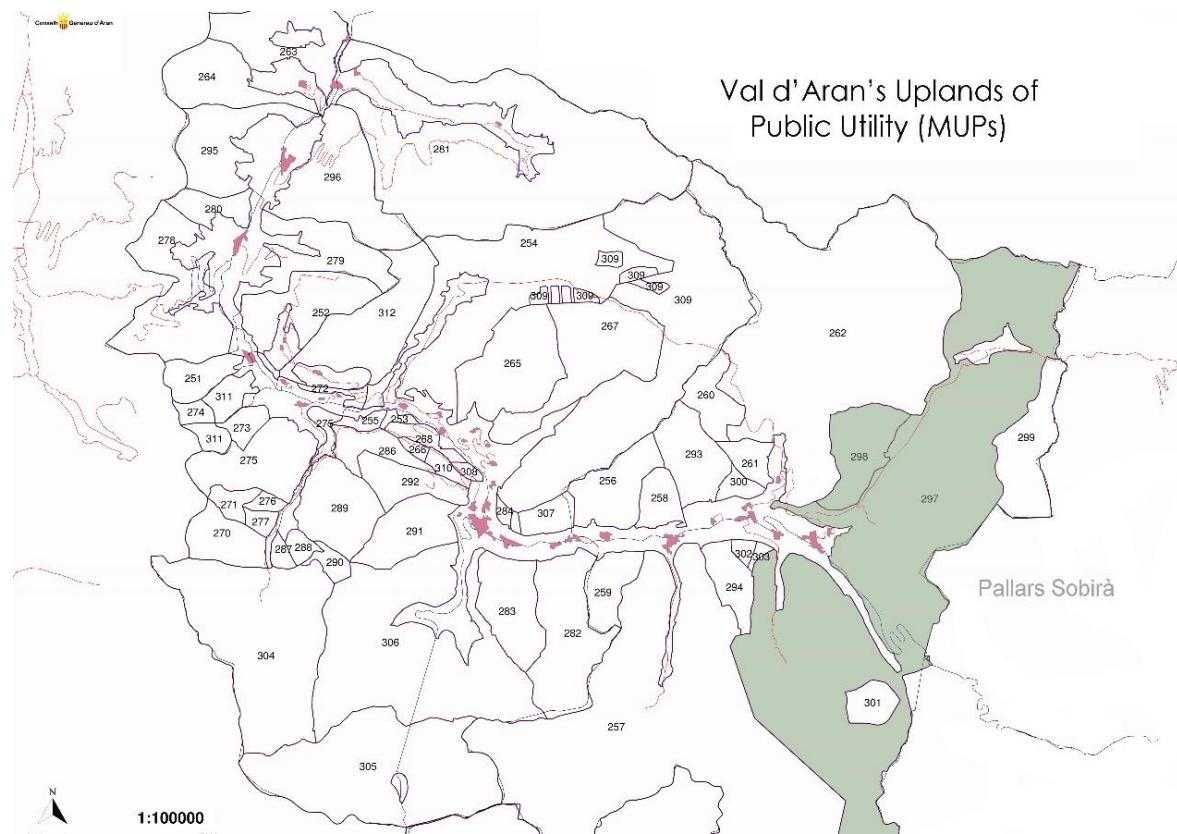
Figure 58. Map of Val d'Aran with MUP 297 and MUP 298 highlighted in green. Source: Author, based on "Montes d'Utilitat Pública Val d'Aran" (2017).

Figure 59. Section of the map of Val d'Aran's MUPs with the Baqueira Beret ski areas highlighted in green within part of MUP 297 and the entirety of MUP 298. Source: Author, based on "Montes d'Utilitat Pública Val d'Aran" (2017).

Following Sanllehy, *terçons* represented much more than the aggregation of a set of villages, since they were imbued with the sense of "a community territorially, socially, and institutionally defined" that provided "a communal frame" (2007, 1:59. My translation).[236] The "*terçon* identity" ran in parallel with the construction of an "imagined community," borrowing Anderson's famous term, which is still prevalent today in Val d'Aran beyond current political-administrative boundaries.[237]

In Pujòlo, the communal frame stretched over time more than in the lower regions of the valley, probably due to the abundant pastures in the Beret Plain that were historically shared among the "community of the five villages."[238] The vast number of dispositions regarding the use and lease of pastures in the Beret Plain over the eighteenth century report the institutionalization of Pujòlo's longstanding *terçon* identity. Furthermore, the Beret Plain is still today a condominium that has persisted since the division of Pujòlo's properties in 1614 following an agreement among the five villages with land rights to this high-mountain plateau. This agreement or *concordia* marked an important date. The overall number of 112 *fires* (*huecs* in Aranese) in the *terçon* of Pujòlo at that time, which were the households with full rights and duties including the obligation to pay taxes to the king (14 for Gessa, 43 for Salardú, 13 for Unha, 17 for Bagergue, and 25 for Tredòs)[239] is still valid today as one of the two units of measurement

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[236] "*En realitat, el terçon era molt més que això, era una comunitat definida territorialment, socialment i institucionalment… [E]l terçon era sentit certament com a marc comunitari*"

[237] See Introduction to connect this internal divisions with the geographical scope of my research in line with the notion of "Naut Aran as a reserve." Sanllehy also highlights the endurance of such historic territorial distinction in current times: "Even today, there is a clear distinction between the Aran people from one and the other edge of the valley" (2007, 1:59). [*Encara en l'actualitat és ben clara la distinció entre els aranesos d'un i altre extrem de la Val*].

[238] Such territorial-administrative continuity is well epitomized by the fact that each village from the lower part of the valley is politically represented its own town council, whereas the municipality of Naut Aran rules over a vast territory composed of eight different villages.

[239] Data gathered from a historic document in the Naut Aran Municipal Archive under the title *Cuentas Pujòlo* [Pujòlo's Accounting] over the period between 1940 and 1951. See also Bruna Moralejo and Bruna Moralejo (2021).

used in the canon to split the income from the resort among the five villages with historic rights to the mountains occupied by the ski facilities.[240]

The Beret Plain is thus crucial for two reasons. First, it shows the endurance of hierarchized collective property among all five villages underpinned by territorial and measurement units set in 1614, taking the *terçon* of Pujòlo (Gessa, Salardú, Unha, Bagergue, and Tredòs), which excluded two villages from the former *terçon* and the current Naut Aran's municipal boundary—Arties and Garòs—, and the respective *huecs* of each village. And second, it partially covers the two *public mountains* (MUP 297 and MUP 298) over which the ski areas spread today within Naut Aran's boundaries and the territory that prompted the town council to call into question the previous set of conditions agreed upon with the ski resort when it was created in the 1960s.

The second level of local communities was institutionally represented by the *universities*, which were endowed with a "juridical entity and institutional organization that brought together the entirety or 'universality' of each village's residents" (Sanllehy i Sabi 2014, 31. My translation). *Universities* were also crucial institutions to understand the inner mechanics in Val d'Aran's politics during those communal times as well as to further examine the potential connectivities, permanencies and discontinuities, with municipal entities created in modern times. At the organization level, *universities* were composed of a management body, called *conselh* or *village council*, responsible for organizing the exploitation of the resources within the village's lands, namely forests and pastures, and also for setting the norms for the community and applying punishment

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[240] See below last subsection of this chapter for further explanations on this subject.

in case of infractions.[241] As underlined by Sanllehy, when analyzing the institutional arrangements from those times, we must avoid conflating *the common of villagers* (*el comú de veïns*) or *all* the residents of each village, and the *village council* (*conselh*) or the group of villagers responsible for making the decisions, which also tends to be named using the term "the commons of the village X." In any case, considering that women were always excluded from those community-based decision-making processes, we should refrain from conceiving this institutional organization as a paradigmatic model of collective action in which *all* village's inhabitants had their voice heard. However, it is also true that the *chapters*—books for each *university* in which norms and punishments were inscribed and formalized—"sought economic and social self-reproduction [and] they kept the community structured and cohesive" (Sanllehy i Sabi 2007, 1:102. My translation), while "leases and sales [of the natural resources situated in the village's lands] were not valid unless there was consent among the majority of villagers, i.e., the decision-making power of councils' representatives [*còssos*] was denied" (Sanllehy i Sabi 2007, 1:77. My translation). In short, powers in decision-making processes were much more dispersed across the villagers or the local communities in those communal times than today, when the power is delegated to the political party that governs the municipal entity. However, those powers were not equally distributed among the villagers, nor were all the villagers allowed to participate in the decision-making processes.

Since the seventeenth century and especially over the eighteenth century, the central administration began to increase its control, limiting the decision-making power of the *terçons*

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[241] Although "local communities were already present in the medieval era," it was not until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries that they began to compile all their norms to be acknowledged as juridical entities (Sanllehy i Sabi 2007, 1:107. My translation).

*councils* and *university* or *village councils* by promoting uniform regulations on the management of their lands. This goal must be framed within a territorialization process within a historical context in which there was an increasing interest to know about the territory and its populations (Scott 1998; Braun 2000), which included demographic and cadastral studies, but also scientific expeditions (cartography, minerology, botany, etc.) that led to a disparate movement named as *Pyreneism* (Serra i Puig 2014, 3).[242] However, "although central power was increasingly interventionist, local bodies found mechanisms to evade control" (Sanllehy i Sabi 2007, 1:73. My translation).

Both the strategies undertaken by the state to increase control over the natural resources situated in the villages' lands in Val d'Aran and the tactics operationalized by the local institutions to avoid or minimize such control stretched and were exacerbated over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,[243] inaugurating a new period underpinned by three main political campaigns: municipalization, disentailment, and forest engineering.

***Municipalization, disentailment campaigns, and a new engineering rationale: a crucial change in the rules of the game… but not in the rights to former common lands***

Following Beltran and Vaccaro, "[t]he creation and standardization of municipalities" since the early nineteenth century "constitutes the first modern wave of state-driven territorialization" in

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[242] See Chapter 2 for a brief description of this movement and its importance in Val d'Aran.
[243] Beltran and Vaccaro underlined the extent to which "[l]ocal agents showed impressive levels of creativity and resilience to integrate the new models to their needs and the local ecological and economic characteristics" (2014a, 34).

the Pyrenees (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014a, 23). A new territorial grid was designed and implemented in accordance with efficiency and managerial rationalization principles that confronted the previous local territoriality. The Municipal Law enacted in 1845 established the minimum demographic threshold of thirty inhabited households for the villages to preserve their municipal status, and hence to receive public services (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014b, 187). The old transverse networks across the valleys and over the peaks gave way to new longitudinal flows underpinned by the presence of roads and the ensuing connectivity to markets that were gradually marginalizing the villages situated in the higher slopes. Under a bureaucratic administration and concepts such as citizenship and democracy, the old communal regime was gradually replaced through a set of territorial policies (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014b, 185–86), within which municipalization must be understood as the necessary first step. In fact, the term *huec* was replaced in the official documents with the term "*veí* [villager]" in 1810 (Bruna Moralejo and Bruna Moralejo 2021, 29), thus reinforcing the institutional shift from communal to modern times, in which villagers as individual citizens instead of *huecs* as households with full rights were put on the centre. Municipalization must also be read as a long process, though. While it began in the first half of the nineteenth century, it has undergone several stages, scaling up its territorial achievements. And yet, there has not always been a full-fledged transition from a pre-modern or communal to a modern or state territoriality.

The area currently covered by the ski resort—the municipalities of Naut Aran and Alt Àneu—precisely serves to illustrate these two features: a long process of scaling up that did not culminate in a fully modern territoriality. Both regions underwent the aggregation of seven historic villages into one single municipality in the late 1960s, but most of those villages, through different procedures, also managed to secure their old rights to access and control *their* forests

and pastures by converting their political status into a municipality or a decentralized municipal entity (EMD in Catalan or Spanish).[244] EMDs represent a lower political and legal figure than a municipality, and they were officially recognized in 1987 under the Catalan Municipal Law based on a previous Municipal Statute that dates back to 1924. As pointed out by Beltran and Vaccaro (2014b), EMDs may be deemed, to some extent, as the political derivation from those *universities* or *village councils* representing each local community's rights in the communal times.

Once the new territorial grid was mapped during the first half of the eighteenth century, the state moved forward along the second wave of state-driven territorialization through the so-called disentailment campaigns, which aimed to turn "barren" lands into "profitable" ones. Although the first of those campaigns, known as Mendizábal's Disentailment enacted in 1836, targeted church properties, common lands in the hands of a single or a community of villages were soon after under the siege of the state through the Madoz Law in 1855. This disentailment campaign must be read as an attempt to dismantle the previous local system of property and territoriality that hinged upon the notion of the commons: a common property regime and a communal unfolding of the society in the territory. Putting aside the fields nearby the villages, which were mostly owned by individuals under a private property regime, the lands from the mid-range mountains upwards were owned and managed by the *terçon* and *university councils* as the local institutions that represented the rights of the community of villagers (also called the *common of villagers*). The natural resources in these lands—basically, pastures and timber—were also used

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[244] According to Vaccaro and Beltran, "EMDs are special administrative units, inhabited centers separated from the capital of the municipality, with distinctive characteristics. EMDs have their own public juridical category and a certain degree of autonomy in relation to the provision of services to their residents" (2008, 13 f. n. 6).

*in common*. Common lands thus not only refer to a property regime but also a communal way of using the natural resources therein.

Former common lands held by the local institutions were redefined in accordance with a new terminology that tied into the political strategy to increase the commercial productivity of natural resources, whether turning them private or public lands.[245] The new term *own resources* [*bienes de propios*], with which former common lands were redefined, accomplished that function. In Val d'Aran, all mountains managed to remain exempt from the disentailment campaign enacted in 1855 and from their introduction into the real estate market, alleging two arguments. First, the size (minimum of 100 hectares) and type of species within Val d'Aran's forests (pine, birch, or chestnut) were considered by the state's forestry engineers to be preserved for environmental and economic reasons. Hence, they were not put into the market; second, the local institutions claimed the acquired rights to those mountains from times immemorial. However, Val d'Aran's mountains did not fully avoid the siege of the state, since the mayors had to redefine the villages' pastures and forests, previously framed within a common property regime, as *own resources* within a public regime. This distinction did not entail variations in the use of those resources, since communal and commercial uses had been combined since, at least, the seventeenth century, first, to meet the villagers' needs and, second, to cover their expenses (hiring shepherds, upkeeping farming infrastructures), while the remaining timber and pastures

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[245] The underlying rationale behind those state-driven campaigns clearly resonates with the famous thesis argument put forward by Hardin in the *tragedy of the commons* (1968), considering that the land must be transferred to private enterprises or the state in order to make natural resources both profitable and endurable. Santi, a forestry engineer from the Catalan government, put it in very clear terms: "The state pushed so that these forests, more or less under a common property regime, and the timber were transferred to private enterprises because paper mills, hydroelectric power stations, and all these industries needed much capital" [*L'estat va propiciar que aquests boscos més o menys comunals, i la fusta... passessin a mans privades perquè calia posar en marxa les papereres, totes les hidroelèctriques, i totes aquestes indústries que necessitaven molt capital*] (Santi, 25/7/2019).

were leased in public auctions (Sanllehy i Sabi 2007). However, in terms of ownership, the shift from *common* to *own* resources entailed a considerable change.

By recognizing the existence of monetary profits, and despite the explicit remarks on the fact that those profits were allocated to funding the municipal treasury and not to supporting private interests, the state based on the Madoz Law enacted in 1855 classified the pastures and forests within Val d'Aran's mountains, including those in Naut Aran, as *own resources* whose titles had to be transferred to the municipalities. Through this transfer, "the Aran mountains," according to Aunòs and Ribelles Sans, "even though they remained popularly known as common lands, they actually and juridically belong to town councils and EMDs, and not to the villagers" (2018, 40. My translation).

Thus, the new binary juridical terminology imposed by the Madoz Law shattered the cornerstone of the previous local territoriality. Common lands could only be so if their natural resources had never entered into the market sphere, a premise that was rarely fulfilled, whereas common lands from which the villages had profited had to be classified as *own resources*.[246] Given the crucial income received from the lease of pastures and forests, mayors from Val d'Aran, as the actual village's representatives under the new state-driven territoriality, were thus willing to specify that the money collected from the lease of pastures was never allocated to benefit private enterprises, so the mountains could not be considered a profitable asset. In other words, the mayors' tactics aimed at avoiding land confiscation via privatization, even though this manoeuvre would lead them to register the mountains in the catalogue of MUPs, and hence to

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[246] For a thorough theoretical distinction between the terms common [*comunal*] and own resources [*béns de propis*], see Font i Rius (1996).

consider them *public* instead of *common* lands. This terminological shift had important consequences, since the transfer of previous common lands to municipalities allowed the state to claim a tax on the profits gained through the use of those natural resources. As a result, this tax could be read as the most evident proof of this ownership shift or the evidence that the state managed to break into the previous common property regime. The disentailment campaign thus pushed the mayors from Naut Aran and Alt Àneu to include the village's mountains in the catalogues of Uplands of Public Utility or MUPs, issued in 1859, 1862, and 1901, through a process that must be read as a classic legal formalization of customary rights.

In general terms, the tactics at play by local institutions from Val d'Aran in the face of those state strategies managed to avoid the danger of privatization by achieving exemptions from the disentailment campaign, but they were forced to accept the partial appropriation of their resources. In other words, lands deeds to Val d'Aran's mountains would have partially bent to the new rules of the game insofar as *university* or *terçon councils* were no longer considered a legitimate political-juridical entity. As a result, "the mountains exempted [from the disentailment campaign] were not returned to the community of villagers [or more accurately, to the *village councils*], which used to hold the old rights …, but they were converted into public property assigning their entitlement to municipalities" (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014b, 208). However, in the case of Pujòlo, in which every village has been politically and juridically represented by its own EMD or town council within the municipality of Naut Aran, the new rules dictated by the state would seem to not have fully superseded the old communal patterns. Rather, those state-driven rules have even had to adapt to previous local territorialities.

From a temporal perspective, the disentailment campaign must be understood as a long-term territorial policy through which state strategies to increase control over natural resources clashed with local tactics that aimed to avoid such control through a wide array of mechanisms. For the purpose of this chapter I am not focusing on those that may be deemed as the "weapons of the weak," using James C. Scott's terminology, and which would include fraudulent uses or feigned ignorance of the lease of common resources by local institutions (Iriarte-Goñi 2002, 25). Instead, I am centering on the capacity to adapt to the new rules of the game without losing so much power over former common lands. In other words, I focus on the tactical adaptations to the hegemonic processes driven by the state, that is, "a common material and meaningful framework … that sets out the terms around which and in terms of which contestation and struggle can occur" (Roseberry 1994: 361). My interest thus resides in scrutinizing the extent to which the legal framework imposed by the state and inscribed in the archives through a wide array of official documents was adopted and used by the local institutions to claim their historic rights to former common lands despite the successful attempts to dismantle this pre-modern property regime by the modern state. In doing so, tactics used by the local institutions made "the[ir] weaker position seem stronger" (de Certeau 1988, xx). And this tactical strength can be genealogically connected to the negotiations between the Naut Aran town council and Baqueira Beret in the establishment of the canon in 1982.

Finally, the third wave of state-driven territorialization over Val d'Aran's mountains overlapped with the previous ones, and it has endured to the present. The state, claiming that traditional uses cause soil erosion, sent around forest engineers to study forestry uses to both preserve the environment and increase the forests' profitability and productivity at a time when these two aspects were considered two sides of the same coin. The state undertook two main

endeavours under this new scientific rationale: It enacted the three catalogues previously mentioned, in which it was determined whether certain mountains had to be included as MUPs, and it initiated reforestation projects after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) to increase the production of timber and protect the headwaters of mountain rivers. We should also read as part of this state-driven territorialization process the conservation policies and wildlife programs, such as the one devoted to the reintroduction of brown bears, that were promoted, regulated, and launched by the state in the second half of the twentieth century (Pons-Raga et al. 2021).[247]

### The persistence of the commons in the establishment of the canon between a town council and a private ski resort

The historical genealogy of state territorialization policies over the Pyrenees has been followed since the last third of the twentieth century by "the generalized implementation of conservation areas and ski resorts …, result[ing] in territorial appropriation and urbanization of the landscape for consumptive purposes" (Vaccaro and Beltran 2008, 7). However, the establishment of a canon between the Naut Aran town council and Baqueira Beret reveals the extent to which pre-modern or communal territorial models persist in today's political and legal frameworks. There is a genealogy in the tactics and struggles undertaken by the current local institutions, i.e., the Naut Aran town council, in the face of the occupation of former common lands by a private ski resort, and those brought about by former local institutions, i.e., mayors from each village or community of villages as the heirs of the historic *village councils*, confronting state strategies in the

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[247] See Chapter 4, 5, and 6.

control of territories and populations. This genealogy is illustrated by the units of measurement used to determine the distribution of the tax imposed on Baqueira Beret for the occupation of the former common lands among the villages with historic rights to these mountains. Besides the number of hectares of the two *public mountains* (MUP 297 and MUP 298), the number of fires [*huecs*] of each village dated from 1614 was established as the ratio for allocating the tax revenues to the five villages—Gessa, Salardú, Unha, Bagergue, and Tredòs—with historic rights to those former common lands.

Thus, the pastures in the Vaquèira mountain and the Beret Plain, covered by ski facilities and grazed by livestock, are illustrative of the persistence of a historic shared ownership among different villages that does not exactly fit with the municipal boundaries in parallel with the current legal prevalence of municipal entities. Several historic documents serve to address the puzzling question of ownership regarding MUP 297, which includes the Vaquèira mountain and part of the Beret Plain (see above maps of Val d'Aran's MUPs).

The first document I could dust off from the Naut Aran Municipal Archive regarding property rights was a questionnaire written and sent out by the corps of state forestry engineers and filled out by the Salardú and Tredòs mayors in 1862 ("Circular del cuerpo de ingenieros de montes" 1862). At that time, an official decree had been issued to establish the second catalogue of MUPs within a period in which the state "gave certain room for manoeuvre to the villages by permitting them to draw up dossiers in defense of their lands" (Iriarte-Goñi 2002, 23). After the first set of questions revolving around the subjects of ownership and boundaries regarding the mountain called "Bandolèrs, Dossau, Beret, Ruda, and Aiguamòg" (MUP 297), it was asserted that "the Mountain belongs to the *commons* of these villages [Salardú and Tredòs] … for the

tenure of these lands since times immemorial and for many centuries, endorsed by many Spanish

Kings, as it is proven in the Aran book of privileges [*Querimònia*].”[248] The questionnaire then

asked about the use of pastures or *grasses*. Just before the section “Villagers’ uses,” the two

mayors asserted: “There are no set easements in this mountain except for both *commons* [Salardú

and Tredòs]: only … 20% [of taxes] out of the lease of the *second grasses* [pastures leased to

transhumant farmers] that are paid to the state, once the first ones are held by the *dulas* [249] [lands

grazed by villagers’ livestock] of both commons.”[250] The next question sought to expand on this

point: “Is there a custom to exploit the pastures among villagers or in any other form different

from selling them through public auction?”[251] The answer emphasized two paramount aspects.

Local farmers were allowed to graze their livestock on the villages’ pastures for free and both

villages leased the *second grasses* to foreign farmers, but the mayors immediately underlined that

the money collected through this practice was always invested in accordance with specific tasks

determined by the municipal budgets of the two villages.[252]

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[248] “*El Monte pertenece a los comunes de estos pueblos [Salardú y Tredòs] … por posesión inmemorial y de muchos siglos, confirmadas por muchos Monarcas Españoles, como se ve en el libro de privilegios de este Valle.*” The very same argument appears in other documents, such as in the “File to avoid the deal of the mountains,” written and sent out by the mayors of Salardú and Tredòs in 1888: “That Salardú and Tredòs have been in the quiet, peaceful, and uninterrupted possession and tenure from time immemorial in the common and gratuitous enjoyment of the Mountains mentioned above” [*Que Salardú y Tredos han estado en la quieta y pacífica posesión y tenencia no interrumpida desde tiempo inmemorial en el disfrute común y gratuíto de los Montes arriba expresados*].” (“Copia del expediente mandado en el año 1888 para privar que no se vendan los Montes. Salardú 10 Agosto 1888” 1888. My translation).

[249] Portion of common land where livestock from the village’s neighbours graze on freely or by turns.

[250] “*No hay servidumbres establecidas en este monte fuera de las de ambos comunes: solo de antes el 5 por % de arbitrios, ahora el 20 por % de propios del producto del arriendo de las segundas hierbas, después de poseídas las primeras por las dulas de ambos comunes, que se paga al estado*”.

[251] “*Hay costumbre de que se aprovechen las maderas por repartos vecinales o en cualquiera otra forma distinta de la de venderlas en pública subasta?*”

[252] “Regarding the pastures, there has been and there is the practice of grazing the pro-undivided by the *dulas* of both Commons, and of leasing the *rastrojeras* or second grasses regularly to outsiders, whose revenues have always been invested to meet the duties of the municipal budgets of these commons [*Respecto a los pastos ha habido y hay la práctica de pacer los proindiviso por las dulas de ambos Comunes, y de arrendar la rastrojera o segundas hierbas a forasteros regularmente, cuyo producto se ha siempre invertido para atender a las obligaciones de los presupuestos municipales de estos comunes*]”

Another archival piece that spoke to my inquiries was the first registration in 1929 of *public mountain* MUP 297 in the Land Register. This is a valid legal document that also shows the persistence of key elements from communal territorialities in today's legal framework. A single passage condenses the complex legal pluralism between historic and current property regimes as well as its application to a particular *mountain* by combining a set of terms from different times whose meanings are not clearly defined. Once the boundaries and area of the mountain are listed, the document asserts:

> This property is co-owned by the Tredós *Town Council* with that of Salardú, corresponding to that of Tredós, according to what has been said, twenty-five [25 *huecs* or *fires*] parts of the sixty-eight [68 *huecs* or *fires*] in which the mountain is supposed to be divided intellectually and the *Town Council* of Salardú the other forty-three parts [43] … This mountain is considered *common land*.[253]

Three terms from different periods are bound up in a single sentence: common land, *huecs*, and town council. Common lands and *huecs* are the quintessential territorial and demographic units of measurement from pre-modern or communal times (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), whereas town councils are one of the institutional pillars that allowed the state to spread the project of modernity across the peripheral rural milieux in the Pyrenees in the nineteenth century (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014a; 2014b). To make things more complex, what is first deemed

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[253] *Dicha finca la posee en proindivisión el Ayuntamiento de Tredós con el de Salardú, correspondiendo al de Tredós según queda dicho veinticinco [25] partes de las sesentaiocho [68] en que intelectualmente se supone dividido el monte y al Ayuntamiento de Salardú las otras cuarentaitres partes [43]… Este monte tiene la consideración de comunal.* These considerations are based on a certification enacted by the Mountains Headquarter in 1911.

"common land" turns into "public mountains," thus conflating these two terms: "The Salardú *Town Council* has been holding the indicated 43 undivided shares of the 68 into which the mountain is divided as *public* and since time immemorial without the title of its acquisition being determined."[254]

The use, management, and ownership of common lands, the three layers that composed the conception of property as a bundle of rights (Schlager and Ostrom 1992; Sikor, He, and Lestrelin 2017; Vaccaro and Beltran 2019), have changed over time in Spain (Iriarte-Goñi 2002), and Val d'Aran has not been an exception (Sanllehy i Sabi 2007; Aunós and Ribelles Sans 2018). In the mountains within the municipality of Naut Aran, only a handful of farmers per village benefit from direct use of the village's pastures, while spatial and temporal constraints regarding livestock movements are not strictly regulated anymore. Likewise, municipal entities are the local institutions to manage these pastures through concessions to villagers and lease agreements with transhumant farmers. Archival research shows the legal complexity around these changes, especially considering that historic documents prove both the erasure and validity of the commons as a legal term. Within this legal pluralism, today the commons emerge and persist not only in social parlance and practice—Naut Aran farmers would not even think of taking their livestock to a mountain within the municipality to which their village does not hold rights—but also in official documents providing them with a legal imaginary.

Although the titles to common lands were transferred to municipal entities, the "commons" are explicitly described as inalienable resources for the exclusive use of the villagers

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[254] "*El Ayuntamiento de Salardú viene poseyendo las indicadas 43 participaciones indivisas de las 68 en que se halla dividido el monte en concepto de público y desde tiempo inmemorial sin que pueda determinarse el título de su adquisición.*" The same applies for Tredòs and the remaining 25 parts.

in the Spanish Constitution and the Law of Local Regime (*Llei de Règim Local*). Skimming through this law, we can see that the words "communal" and "common" appear several times, but always in their adjectival forms and preceding the noun "resources," "goods," or "assets." They are thus never accompanied by the term "property" or "land." Following what several forestry technicians told me, this syntactic correspondence aligns with the fact that municipalities and EMDs are the only owners of former common lands recognized by law. Àlvar, a forestry engineer with deep knowledge about the origins and social function of common property regimes in the Pyrenees, assured me:

> Communal rights are not for selling; if you don't use them, you lose them … Funds associated with the exploitation of common resources may have a redistributive value indeed, but *only* with surplus, that is, once villagers who hold rights to pastures and forests have exploited their parts. Then the surplus used to be sold through public auctions … The philosophy underpinning the existence of common lands ties into a way of living that assured people's bonds with the land, reinforcing the social status of the most powerful families but also the survival of all the village's residents. These two features are key functions of the commons … Although the legal ownership is bestowed on municipalities, it is also determined that the villagers hold rights to their exploitation (23/3/2018).

Santi, another forestry engineer but in this case working as a public officer of the Catalan government, also told me that, "We must set a clear distinction between land possession and deeds with all its legal framework, and then the question of the exploitation of land products …

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The ownership of municipal lands [former common lands] is held by the public administration, which are the town councils that represent all villagers … but those who have rights to exploit these resources are the villagers."[255] Drawing on these sources and building on the bundles of rights schema revisited by Sikor et. al (2017), I argue that a legal split or an unsteady duality, using Beltran and Vaccaro's expression (2014a), appears between, on the one hand, ownership and management, and, on the other hand, use. The former belongs to municipal entities as the legally recognized public institutions;[256] the latter belongs to the residents of the villages with historic rights to those former common lands.

The arguments underpinning the establishment of a canon, which endorsed and enforced a communal territorial scheme based on *terçons* and *huecs*—that is, on the endurance of a local communal territoriality despite the legal prevalence of state-driven parameters—reveal the pluralism of rights associated with the persistence of a pre-modern territoriality awakened by the emergence of a hypermodern economy based on alpine skiing. The examination of the canon precisely serves to reveal such pluralism and persistence in which local tactics managed to not completely bend to state strategies. The canon shows that the implementation of those state-driven territorialization campaigns—municipalization, disentailment, and forestry engineering—that pushed the mayors to include villages' mountains in the catalogues of MUPs did not

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[255] "*Hem de fer la diferenciació del que és el domini i la titularitat amb tot el tema jurídic [propietat], i després hi ha el tema de l'aprofitament la titularitat l'ostenten els representants públics, que són els ajuntaments el titular l'administra, que és l'ajuntament, que és el que representa a tots els veïns… però els que tenen dret d'aprofitar-ho són els veïns*" (Santi, 25/7/2019).

[256] In accordance with the Municipal Law there are some exceptions that must be considered under the so-called "open council regime". This regime of collective property holds autonomy from the municipality, although it requires the approval of the Catalan government as well as the town council within which it is formalized in order to be constituted. This local political structure is only allowed today for villages with less than 100 inhabitants, or less than 250 inhabitants in the case the funds received from the use of common resources equate or exceed a quarter of the village's total budget (Article 73 from the Catalan Municipal Law: https://portaljuridic.gencat.cat/ca/pjur_ocults/pjur_resultats_fitxa/?documentId=320821&action=fitxa).

undermine part of the local territorial logics from the pre-modern or communal times. Rather, the canon was implemented following the territorial grid from the sixteenth century, when the former three *terçons* were split into six administrative regions, excluding Arties and Garòs from the *terçon* of Pujòlo, and the seventeenth century (1614), when the number of *huecs* of each village was established to determine the tax to pay to the king (*galin deth rei*). Without calling into question the legal and political authority of the current municipal entities, whether in the form of town councils or EMDs, *terçons* and *huecs* were taken as the valid territorial boundary and unit of measurement the canon had to fit in the 1980s. Interestingly, while the conditions offered by the ski resort to Val d'Aran's villagers to use its facilities—free ski passes for Naut Aran's residents, a reduced fare for Mijaran's, and no discount for Baish Aran's—clearly follow the former division in three regions within Val d'Aran, the land rights to benefit from the exploitation of the natural resources within those two MUPs (MUP 297 and MUP 298), and the ensuing income from the occupation of those lands by the ski resort, derives from the division implemented in the sixteenth century, excluding the villages of Arties and Garòs, and from a more detailed distillation of each village's rights considering the number of *huecs* in 1614.

| MUP 297 | | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Huecs* of each village | Percentage |
| **Salardú** | 43 | 63.24% |
| **Tredòs** | 25 | 36.76% |
| **Total** | 68 | 100% |

Source: Author, based on Bruna Moralejo and Bruna Moralejo (2021, 136).

| MUP 298 | | |
|---|---|---|
| | *Huecs* of each village | Percentage |
| **Salardú** | 43 | 38.39% |
| **Tredòs** | 25 | 22.32% |
| **Unha** | 13 | 11.61% |
| **Bagergue** | 17 | 15.18% |
| **Gessa** | 14 | 12.5% |
| **Total** | 112 | 100% |

Source: Author, based on Bruna Moralejo and Bruna Moralejo (2021, 136).

| | *Huecs* by mountain | Hectares leased to Baqueira Beret |
|---|---|---|
| **MUP 297** | 68 | 5,735 |
| **MUP 298** | 112 | 823 |
| **MUP 297 & 298** | 180 | 6,558 |

Source: Author, based on Bruna Moralejo and Bruna Moralejo (2021, 136).

Figure 60. *Huecs* by MUP and village.

In accordance with the tables presented here and given the amount of 1,509,703.04€ deposited by Baqueira Beret in the municipal treasury after the 2017/2018 season, each of the five villages

received 230.20€ per hectare and 8,387.29€ per *huec*. As a result, each village received the following amount:[257]

- Salardú (town council): 814,455.88€

- Tredòs (EMD): 473,520.86€

- Unha (EMD): 65,513€

- Bagergue (EMD): 85,670.84€

- Gessa (EMD): 70,552.46€

Naut Aran, and particularly Pujòlo, turns out to be, therefore, a revealing case study insofar as all the historic villages—Gessa, Salardú, Unha, Bagergue, and Tredòs—managed to create a politically and legally recognized institutional figure whether in the form of a town council or EMDs.[258] Within this institutional framework and considering the premise that "conflict unveils regulations and the actual legal context of management," it is not so clear that "when conflict occurs," considering the establishment of the canon between the town council and Baqueira Beret as a paradigmatic conflict, "municipal lands can be proved to belong *only* to the municipality [or municipal entities]" (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014a, 28. My emphasis). Nor is it clear that, as Octavio asserted, "skiing has made us talk about municipalities instead of regions, such as Val d'Aran and the Àneu valleys."[259] Instead, I argue that alpine skiing, as a paradigmatic

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[257] Data from a municipal official document under the title "Distribution Canon Season 2017/2018" (in Bruna Moralejo and Bruna Moralejo 2021, 157–60).

[258] While Salardú, as the capital of the municipality, is politically represented by the town council, Gessa, Unha, Bagergue, and Tredòs have, each one of them, their own EMD as the political figure to represent and administer the village's natural resources.

[259] "*L'esquí ha fet que parlem més de municipis i no regions com la Vall d'Aran i les valls d'Àneu*" (Octavio, 21/6/2018).

example of a hypermodern leisure-based activity, presses us to talk about the legal pluralism upon which the commons persist and are mobilized within a field of force epitomized by the clash between local communal territorialities, on the one hand, and state and market-driven modern territorialities, on the other.

The conflict between the town council and Baqueira Beret regarding the occupation of MUPs 297 and 298, as well as its resolution through the establishment of a canon serve to illustrate this legal pluralism and its significance around the commons. The canon must thus be understood as an example of a tactical adaptation in the middle of a conflict resolution that stems from longstanding struggles for the ownership, management, and use of collective natural resources. Whereas the funds from this tax are collected by a unique depositary, i.e., the Naut Aran town council, upon Baqueira Beret's request, these funds are distributed among the five villages following historic land divisions and rights. Thus, a state territoriality funnels through historic local territorialities in which the commons are recurrently advocated as their core principle. The prevalence and endurance of *huecs* in Pujòlo from 1614 as the unit of measurement to calculate the allocation of funds to each village from Baqueira Beret's yearly income via the canon under the concept of occupation of a public mountain becomes the most eloquent proof of the overlap of pre-modern institutional arrangements within the current modern state and market territoriality.

A property analysis through the lens of de Certeau's strategies/tactics framework thus offers a fruitful avenue for examining the mechanics through which the commons have persisted in current times. The renewed presence of the commons in the wake of the success of a ski resort such as Baqueira Beret in the late 1970s presses us to return to Isidre's statement and the

widespread claim that these mountains do not belong to the state. These local considerations may not be fully true, given that the mountains are registered to town councils and that these are part of the state apparatus. They may not be fully false, either. The mountains are registered in the Land Register as "common lands" in the name of the villages, represented by their respective town councils at that time and by the municipality of Naut Aran and each EMD today. In other words, in Pujòlo or the community of the five villages (Gessa, Salardú, Unha, Bagergue, and Tredòs), every village has been politically and legally represented by a municipal entity, either town council or EMD. As a result, they all hold valid juridical status under *the new rules of the game* to claim their respective historic rights to former common lands. In Pujòlo, local tactics partially superseded state strategies, and most of the rights to access and control the natural resources of these mountains have remained in the hands of the villages rather than of the municipality. The canon thus drew from an ingrained community feeling derived from the *terçon* identity, and the ensuing persistence of land rights to each *village's mountain*. *Village lands*, instead of *common* or *municipal lands*, thus seem a more accurate term to refer to the current legal, political, and social status of Pujòlo's mountains given that they are no longer common or municipal.

A lingering question remains unanswered. Are municipalities and EMDs in these mountain rural milieux just an extension of the state, or rather, do they represent the political assemblage in which strategies and tactics merge with each other, epitomizing the overlapping between pre-modern or communal and modern or public land rights in contemporary times? The degree of the legal persistence of the commons depends on this balance. While Beltran and Vaccaro's stance frames municipal entities "as the lower echelon of the state's administration structure" (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014a, 27), and the term "common land" is therefore considered a legal fiction, Iriarte-Goñi's perspective builds on the premise that the amount of public land

that still belongs to local communities, though in the shape of municipal entities, "shows that

the process of capitalist development through which Spain has passed during the course of the

last two centuries [nineteenth and twentieth] has not led to the complete disappearance of the

commons, but rather to their co-existence and to a degree of persistence" (Iriarte-Goñi 2002,

31).

# Nexus: from Baqueira Beret to the bear program

As mentioned at the end of the Introduction, this dissertation is divided into two parts that follow a parallel structure to analyze the production of green and the persistence of the commons through the (in)compatible interactions between Baqueira Beret and the bear reintroduction program, on the one hand, and the remnants of extensive husbandry, on the other. This analysis is infused with an ethnographic approach to historicity that springs from the complex articulation between these three worlds and that is inscribed in the landscape. Thus, the examination is traversed by an interest in the notion of change through an ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape.

In the previous three chapters I examined the urbanization of the landscape at the foot of the ski resort and in the historic villages of Naut Aran, the naturalization of the landscape through the engineered production of green landscapes in the ski areas, and the persistence and mobilization of historic rights associated with pre-modern or communal local territorialities as a way to counter the hegemonic process of territorialization fostered by either the state in the nineteenth century or Baqueira Beret in the twentieth century in Naut Aran. In what follows, I apply the same method to analyze the narratives and policies surrounding the implementation of the bear program in the Catalan Pyrenees as well as the (in)compatible interactions between this wildlife program and extensive husbandry. The shift from Baqueira Beret to the bear reintroduction program is thematic, but also and partially geographical. The ethnographic examination shifts from the Naut Aran *snow reserve* to the Alt Àneu *natural reserve*, and more specifically to the Bonabé valley.

In Chapter 4, the question "where does the bear (conflict) come from?" allows me to revise the timeline of the bear reintroduction program in the Catalan Pyrenees as well as to provide a critical insight into the notions of conflict, prevention, and return around which the reintroduction program's narratives have revolved. An ethnographic approach to the historicity of shepherding practices before the bears were reintroduced serves to challenge the restoration of a previous socio-ecological landscape claimed by the program's proponents. This approach also allows me to conceive the bear program as an anti-politics machine, which both de-politicizes and sets a new political scene among the local farmers and shepherds. Keeping in mind this vantage point, in Chapter 5 the voices from the bear program's proponents show the extent to which restoration, endorsed by the hegemonic idiom of heritage, is coupled with the notion of improvement of the landscape under the green moral ecology of the bear program. In doing so, the naturalization of the landscape or the design of a wild heritage landscape through the renewed presence of a large carnivore such as the brown bear hinges upon a twofold discursive maneuver or trick: *designing-as-if-restoring* and *designing-as-if-improving*. However, the ambiguities or contradictions surrounding the politics of the bear program as well as the bear as a species leads me to challenge the notions of restoration and improvement by revealing how the production of a wild heritage landscape is seen in different, or even opposing ways depending on people's place-embedded biographies. What is proof of improvement for some, is considered rubble by others. Value and waste thus play out dialectically through the multiple layers and voices that compose the green landscape derived from the renewed presence of bears. In Chapter 6, the insight shifts toward the institutional scaffolding underpinning the farming policies surrounding the bear program and the changes they have entailed for the local farmers, the new shepherds, and the shepherding practices on the high mountain pastures through a new

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reformulation of the commons as a collective action under the overlap of different environmentalities and territorialities. Approached this way, the bear program has exacerbated the rural/urban divide as it collided with previous and different herding models.

# Chapter 4 — Where does the bear (conflict) come from? Shepherding before and after the reintroduction program

## The bear reintroduction program in the Pyrenees at a glance: the release of bears and the protection of flocks

The native brown bear (*Ursus arctos arctos*) population in the Pyrenees declined from a few hundred to barely five individuals in the period between 1923 and 1995.[260]

| YEAR | BEARS in the PYRENEES |
|:---:|:---:|
| 1923 | 150 – 200 |
| 1953 | 72 |
| 1971 | 30 |
| 1983 | 13-16 |
| 1988 | 8-10 |
| 1995 | 5-6 |

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[260] The presence of bears is mentioned in written documents from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Sanllehy i Sabi 2014 [1789]; de Gracia 1613) and their arrival in the Pyrenees probably coincided with that of the human beings after the last ice age, around 11,500 years ago.

Figure 61. Number of bears in the Pyrenees in the twentieth century before the reintroduction program (1923-1995). Source: Author, based on Casanova (2002).

One of the first censuses of the entire mountain range was announced at an international congress held in France in 1923, when the number of bears was estimated at around 150-200. However, the first comprehensive work on the brown bear in the Pyrenees was not published until 1953. In this study, Marcel Couturier accounted for 72 individuals in the French Pyrenees and considered that the overall population, including the Spanish side, was less than a hundred (Casanova 2002). In 1971, according to François Melet, the number had fallen to 30 individuals and by the late 1980s the population stood at around just ten. In Catalonia, the brown bear population was considered extinct in 1993, whereas the five or six native bears remaining in the Pyrenees before the start of the reintroduction program lived in the Western or Atlantic districts of the mountain range (see Espinós 2014; Parellada, Alonso, and Toldrà 1995).
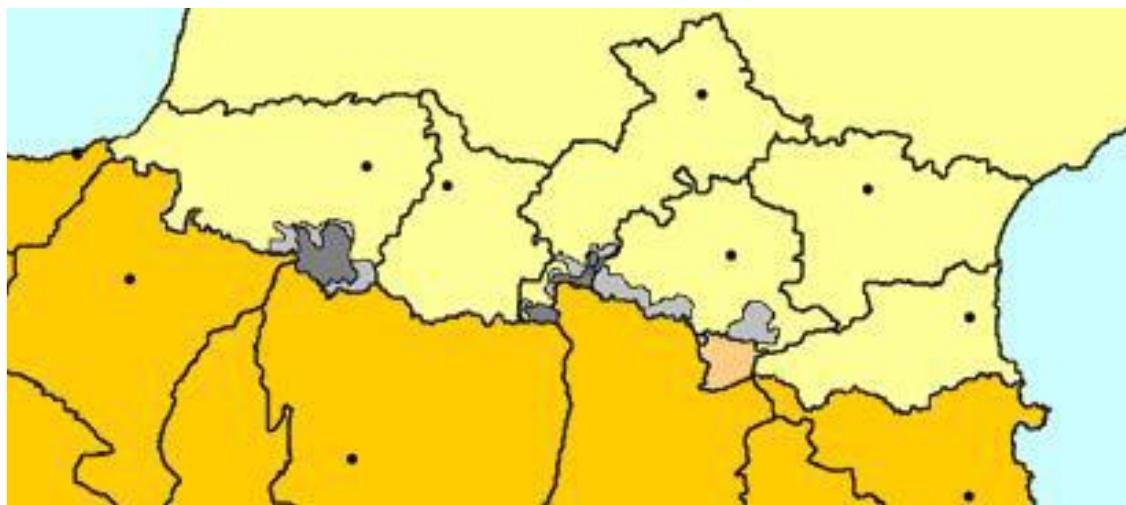
Figure 62. Map of the geographical distribution of the brown bear population over the period 1979-1988. Between 15 and eight individuals were concentrated in two isolated locations, the Western and Central Pyrenees (Quenette 2019).



Figure 63. Map of the geographical distribution of the brown bear population in 1995. There were only five individuals in the Western Pyrenees (Quenette 2019).

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Bear hunting was outlawed in the 1960s, but illegal hunting and isolated hunting accidents continued to happen (Casanova 2002). This situation led the Spanish and French governments to implement conservation initiatives, and bears achieved full legal protection in the 1970s and 1980s. In a short period of time, bears had gone from being hunted to enjoying protected status, ultimately leading to a European Union (EU) LIFE project—the bear reintroduction program—signed in 1993 and launched in 1996, which was led by France in agreement with Spain and the regional Spanish governments.[261]

At a symposium on "European experiences in damage prevention" and "The return of large carnivores in mountain areas" held in the Catalan Pyrenees (municipality of Alt Àneu) in September 2019,[262] a French expert involved in the preliminary stages of the bear program in the Pyrenees provided a concise summary of the context in which the first LIFE project took hold in 1993: "[T]his year [was] very important because there were no more bears in [the] Central Pyrenees, only five bears in [the] Western Pyrenees... population almost extinct... there was only one female. And [the] Central Pyrenees agreed to translocate brown bears ... despite some local opposition." The Bern Convention or the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats in 1979-1982,[263] which was ratified by Spain in 1986 (Caussimont and Herrero 1997), and the Habitats Directive or the Council Directive on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora in 1992,[264] set out the legal framework for the

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[261] The agreement was signed by the regional governments of Catalonia, Aragon, and Navarra, but not of Val d'Aran. At that time, the Aran government (*Conselh Generau d'Aran*) was still not legally responsible for managing environmental policies, including wildlife programs. It was not until 2000 when the Catalan government delegated full environmental conservation powers to the *Conselh Generau d'Aran* following the Aran Law enacted in 1990 (https://dibaaps.diba.cat/vnis/temp/CIDO_dogc_2000_11_20001122_DOGC_20001122_005_006.pdf).
[262] https://piroslife.cat/jornades/programme/?lang=en.
[263] https://www.coe.int/en/web/bern-convention/presentation.
[264] https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/index_en.htm.

implementation of wildlife policies in the EU. More recently, of the 71 EU-LIFE projects implemented between 1992 and 2017 devoted to the conservation of the brown bear in Europe—making it the second species to benefit from these large-scale conservation programs—six of them have been in the Pyrenees: 1993 (two), 1995, 1996, 2004, and 2013 (Quenette 2019).[265]

In this legal context, the bear program should be understood as a translocation rewilding project (Nogués-Bravo et al. 2016), whose main goal is to ensure viability for the brown bear population in the Pyrenees by translocating individuals from Slovenia, given that the autochthonous population was almost extinct by the 1990s (Camarra et al. 2011). There were two main reasons for selecting bears from this region of the Balkans for translocation: their genetic resemblance to the former Pyrenean population—they belong to the same subspecies— and their abundance (Casanova 2002).

Between 1996 and 1997 three brown bears were released in the French Central Pyrenees, in the municipality of Melles, adjacent to Val d'Aran district, because the villagers from the municipality of Alt Àneu had voted against the plan in a referendum (Salvat i Saladrigas 1996). Two females were released in 1996, both of them unexpectedly pregnant on arrival, although one of them was killed, allegedly in a hunting accident. A year after, a male, named Pyros, was introduced and became famous due to its high and almost monopolistic reproductive pattern. These three bears marked the first stage of this program, which was considered by the public administration as a "pilot test" (Salvat i Saladrigas 1996). More than twenty years later and after

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[265] The total budget of these 71 projects was 82,967,052 euros, 54,695,785 of which came from the EU funds.

four waves of releases involving eleven bears translocated from Slovenia to the Pyrenees, the program has been deemed a success in conservation biology terms. In 2020, the population had risen to approximately 64 bears (Réseau Ours Brun 2021), although the Pyrenean lineage was almost wiped out in 2004, when the last surviving Pyrenean female was shot by a French hunter.[266]

| YEAR | BEARS in the PYRENEES |
|---|---|
| 1998 | 10 |
| 2005 | 8 |
| 2006 | 15 |
| 2010 | 20 |
| 2014 | 30 |
| 2016 | 43 |
| 2019 | 52 |
| 2020 | 64 |

Figure 64. Number of bears in the Pyrenees during the bear reintroduction program (1998-2020). Source: Author, based on Batet (2019) and the Office National de la Chasse et la Faune Sauvage (Réseau Ours Brun 2021).

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[266] The number of bears hunted or killed by accident in the Pyrenees since the beginning of the reintroduction program until 2021 amounts to nine.

Five more bears—four females and a male—were then released at undisclosed locations in the French Central Pyrenees, among intense street protests organized by the local farmers. The initial pilot test in 1996 was thus followed by a new wave of releases to reinforce and consolidate the bear population in the Pyrenees. In 2016, ten years later and once the bear population had reached more than forty individuals, most of them located in the Central Pyrenees, another male called Goiat ("guy" in the dialect spoken in Pallars Sobirà district) was translocated to avoid problems of consanguinity within the Pyrenean population, as most of the descendants were genetically linked to the same male ancestor mentioned above: Pyros. For the first time the release was set to take place in the Catalan Pyrenees—Pallars Sobirà district, specifically the Bonabé valley in the municipality of Alt Àneu—and the operation was supervised by the Catalan government under another LIFE project, PirosLIFE, which lasted from 2015 to 2019,[267] and whose partners included the Catalan and Aran governments, the Brown Bear Foundation (FOP),[268] and the University of Lleida (UdL).

In October 2018, two consecutive events set the agenda for the bear program in Catalonia. First, Goiat was captured to change its GPS collar before the batteries ran out.[269] And second, more than twenty years after the launch of the bear reintroduction program the Catalan government promoted the first "Intervention Protocol with Bears in the Pyrenees" in Spain.[270] The Catalan government evaluated extending the period Goiat would be monitored due to the

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[267] https://piroslife.cat/en/.
[268] FOP is the acronym in Spanish for "Fundación Oso Pardo," the most well-known NGO devoted to the conservation of the brown bear in Spain.
[269] It is worth mentioning that the Catalan government lost track of Goiat's movements in October 2020, when the GPS collar was found in the Aragonese Pyrenees after an alarming absence of movements for some weeks (Departament Territori i Sostenibilitat (DTS) nonpublished).
[270] France had already published a protocol in 2006, but the category "anomalous predatory pattern" was not included in it.

"anomalous predatory pattern" it had shown so far. As well as its slightly higher sheep predation rate (see below table on bear predation rates during the PirosLIFE project), what most struck experts, politicians, farmers, and society at large was the numerous casualties this individual was responsible for among healthy horses. Between April and July 2018, it killed nine horses (seven in Val d'Aran, one in Pallars Sobirà, and another in Ariège, French Pyrenees), and 11 out of the 19 horses certified to have been killed by bears in the Catalan Pyrenees between 2016 and 2019. In sum, Goiat was responsible for 63% of the horses killed and 13% of damage to livestock caused by bears in that period (Departament Territori i Sostenibilitat (DTS) nonpublished).

| Bear predations | Val d'Aran | | Pallars Sobirà | |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| (2015-2019) | Cows | Horses | Cows | Horses |
| 2015 | | | | |
| 2016 | 2 (not confirmed) | | 2 (not confirmed) | |
| 2017 | | 3 | | |
| 2018 | | 7 | | 1 |
| 2019 | | 8 | | |

Figure 65. Bear predations in Val d'Aran and Pallars Sobirà (2015-2019). Source: Author, based on "Resum danys provocats per os durant el projecte PirosLIFE" (Nonpublished).

| | Goiat | Cachou |
|---|---|---|
| Predations on sheep | 30 (13,69%) | 4 (11.1%) |
| Predations on horses | 12 (63.16%) | 7 (87.5%) |

Figure 66. Predation rates for Goiat and Cachou (since 2016 and 2019, respectively). Source: Author, based on "Resum danys provocats per os durant el projecte PirosLIFE" (Nonpublished).

Both events—the continued monitoring of Goiat and the introduction of the protocol—were a response to the protests organized by the farming sector and the social alarm among the local populations and the tourism sector in the Catalan Pyrenees following the increase in livestock casualties, including horses, which called the entire bear program into question. At the same time, but on the other side of the range and for the first time in the Western Pyrenees, where the scant native population of bears used to live in the mid-1990s, the French government translocated two more females from Slovenia. These bears were released by helicopter because of the fierce opposition from local farmers (*Lâcher d'ours en Béarn - ONCFS - 4/10/ 2018* n.d.).[271]

Lastly, Cachou, a male born in the Pyrenees in 2015 and a descendant of the only male bear released in 2006, and hence, like Goiat, also with a potentially valuable genetic role in the program, showed an extraordinary and unexpected capacity to kill horses once the monitoring team had fitted it with a GPS collar for geolocation purposes.[272] In September 2019, Cachou

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[271] Clip of the two releases made by helicopter: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=--xSDbjjWIQ (accessed November 26, 2019).

[272] In May 2018, the Catalan government installed several metal cages at strategic sites in the mountains to capture bears and fit them with GPS collars to improve knowledge about their patterns of movement and the measures to protect livestock. Cachou was the only bear geolocated using this method.

attacked and killed five healthy horses in fifteen days in Val d'Aran, and a total of eight horses over 2019. In spring 2020, in the middle of the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, Cachou was found dead in Val d'Aran. What the Aran government first reported as an accident resulting from a feud between two male bears eventually turned out to be a complex case of poisoning which was partially disclosed by the judge responsible for the case in late 2020 and which is still under investigation.

In parallel with the rise of the bear population in the Pyrenees, as a result of both natural growth and the releases between 1996 and 2018, the increase of sheep losses in some valleys in the Catalan Pyrenees led to the implementation of a sheep regrouping policy in the municipality of Naut Aran in 2010 and in Alt Àneu a year later.[273] This measure was fostered, organized, and funded by the Catalan and Aran governments following EU directives as well as the advice of established environmental NGOs working with brown bear conservation, namely FIEP[274] in France and FOP in Spain. The policy consisted of gathering or regrouping the remaining few private flocks to form *collective flocks* in the valleys where most of the bears tend to wander during the summer grazing season.[275] As a result, flocks of around 1,000 animals, comprising sheep from a few local farms in adjacent villages, were established with the support of three protection

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[273] Although some flocks of sheep include goats and there are also a few flocks of goats, for the sake of clarity I use the term "sheep" to refer to mixed and exclusive flocks of sheep or goat, indistinctively. It is noteworthy mentioning that the moment when this policy was implemented may also have been influenced by other contingent factors not closely related to the bear predation rates on livestock. According to Toni, a member of DEPANA (acronym that stands for "Defense of the Natural Heritage" in Catalan), a Catalan environmental NGO involved in preserving the natural heritage since the late 1970s, including the bear reintroduction program, the implementation of this policy in Val d'Aran was probably related to a political change in the Aran government. In fact, an examination of political changes in Val d'Aran reveals that the first regrouping of flocks coincided with a period in which the social democrat party finally came to power (2007-2011) after more than a decade in the hands of the liberal party.
[274] FIEP stands for *Fond d'Intervention Eco-Pastoral*, which is an NGO created in France in 1975 to promote both the conservation of the brown bear and to support pastoralism in the Western Pyrenees.
[275] See Chapter 6 for a thorough description of this policy and its broader implications.

measures: shepherds, livestock guardian dogs (LGDs), and night camps with electrified enclosures.

The pioneer program to regroup sheep flocks was first tested in two valleys in Naut Aran and Alt Àneu, after which sheep casualties caused by bear attacks fell in these areas. The success of this program motivated the public administrations to extend this new policy across the so-called "core bear area," which covers the entire Val d'Aran as well as the northern regions of Pallars Sobirà, including the municipality of Alt Àneu (nearly 1,300 square kilometres in total).
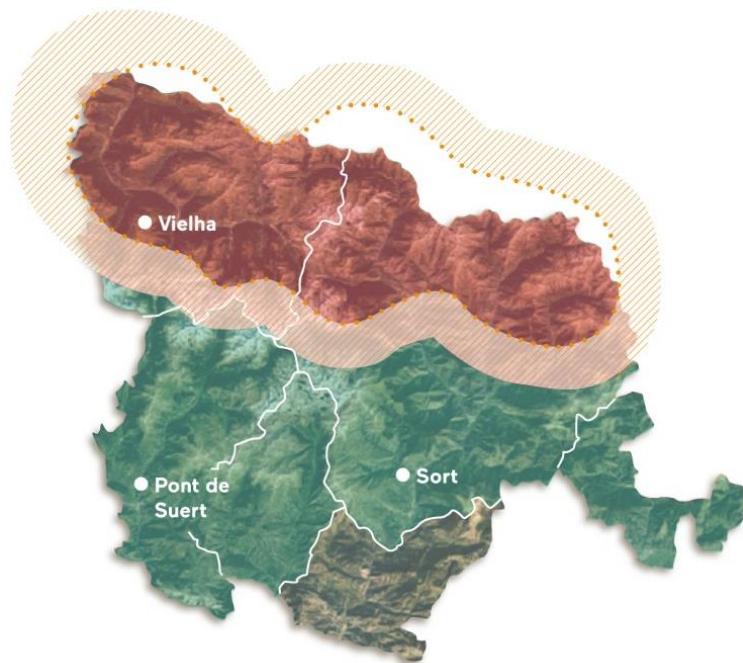


Figure 67. Map of the core bear area in the Catalan High Pyrenees (in orange), which covers mostly the entire district of Val d'Aran, including the municipality of Naut Aran, and the northern regions of Pallars Sobirà, including the municipality of Alt Àneu. The three white dots refer to the main town of each district: Vielha in Val d'Aran, Sort in Pallars Sobirà, and Pont de Suert in Alta Ribagorça ("Informe Layman. Resum divulgatiu del projecte" 2019).

Figure 68. Map of Val d'Aran and Pallars Sobirà. The municipalities of Naut Aran and Alt Àneu are highlighted in yellow. Source: Author, based on IDESCAT.

As a result, in 2019 there were six collective flocks—four in Pallars Sobirà and two in Val d'Aran—totalling around 6,000 sheep owned by thirty local farmers and tended by eight shepherds with the assistance of around fifteen LGDs. These collective flocks accounted for

more than three quarters of the almost 8,000 sheep that grazed the summer pastures in the core

bear area (Departament Territori i Sostenibilitat (DTS) nonpublished).[276]
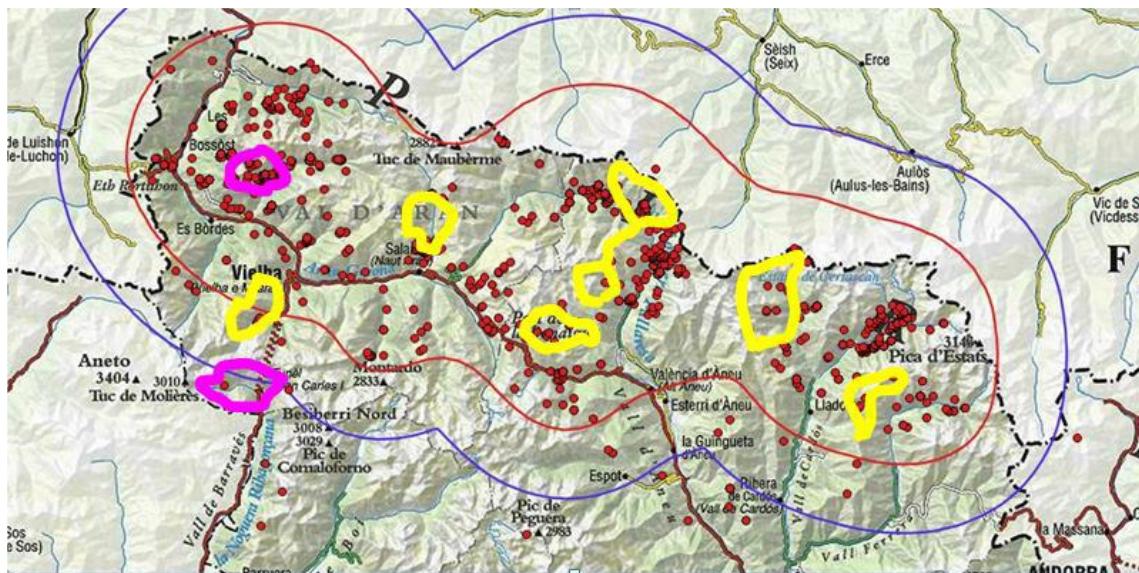


Figure 69. Map of the six collective flocks within the core bear area (in yellow), two in Val d'Aran (Casau-Gausac, on the left of the map, and Vaquèira-Beret) and four in Pallars Sobirà (Bonaigua-Muntanyó and Bonabé-Salau, in the centre, and the other two in the Cardós valley, on the right). The circles in pink indicate the two transhumance flocks in Val d'Aran, around 2,000 sheep, while the red dots represent evidence of bears (Guillén 2019).

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[276] The remaining 2,000 sheep belong to two transhumance flocks that graze Val d'Aran's pastures in the summer. The owners of these flocks implement their own protection measures with some technical support from the Aran government.
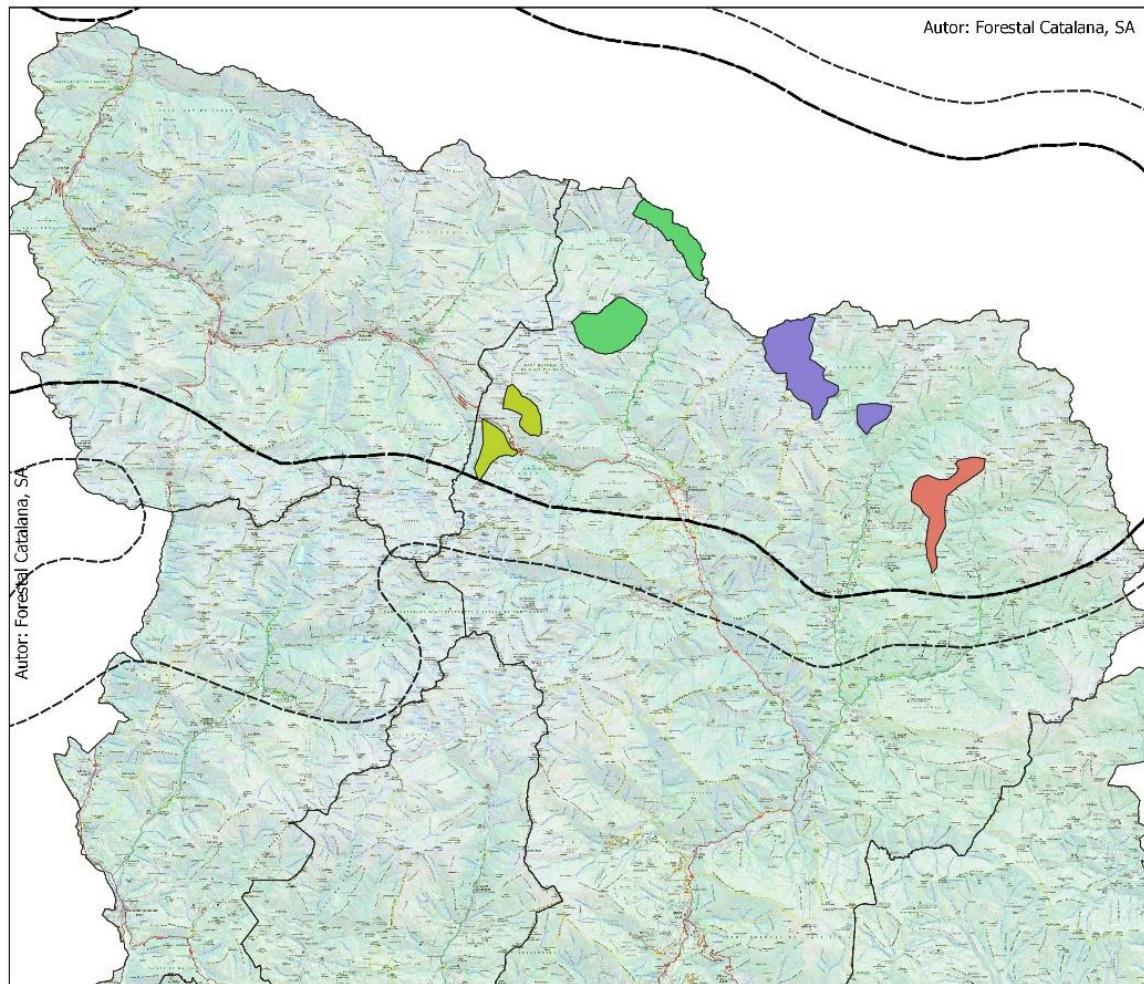
Figure 70. Map of the four collective flocks in the core bear area in the northern regions of Pallars Sobirà. The two grazing lands used by the Bonaigua-Muntanyó and Bonabé-Salau collective flocks are depicted on the western edge of the districts (map ceded by the Department of Territory and Sustainability of the Catalan government).
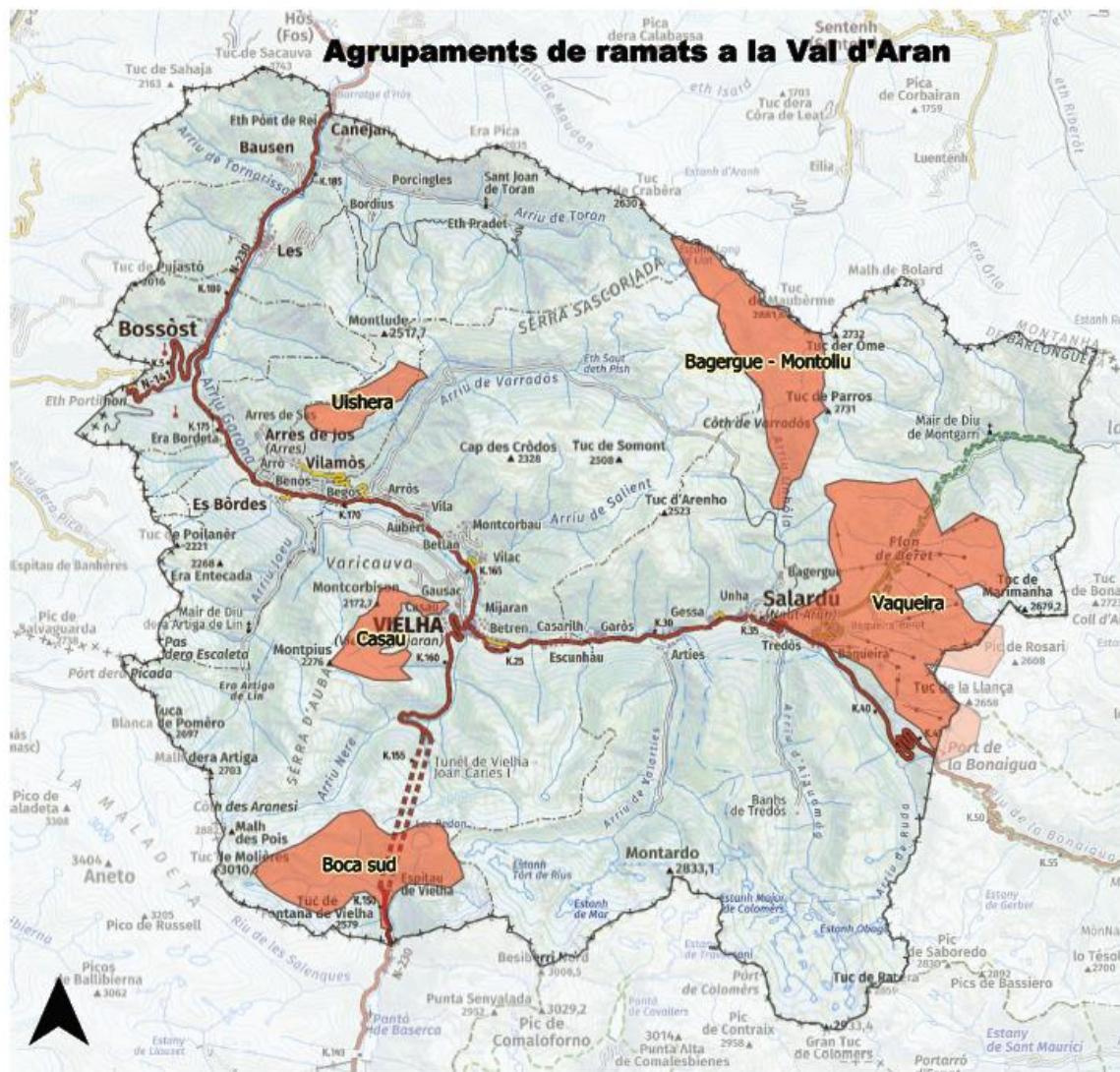
Figure 71. Map of the collective flocks in Val d'Aran in 2019. Bagergue-Montoliu disappeared a year after, while Uishera and Boca Sud are transhumant flocks that ascend to the mountain pastures from flat areas in Catalonia and France, respectively. As a result, the Aran government exclusively manages the Casau and Vaquèira collective flocks (map ceded by the Department of Environment of the Aran government).

After the first collective flock was established in 2011 in the Bonabé valley (Bonabé-Salau), three others have since been introduced in Pallars Sobirà—two further east in 2013 in the valleys of Cardós, in blue and red on the map, and the last one in 2017 in the Bonaigua mountain pass (Bonaigua-Muntanyó), in yellow. In Val d'Aran, and in particular in Naut Aran, the situation has been more unstable. This instability took two forms. Some collective flocks have disappeared, whereas the number and types of protection measures have varied in other flocks over the years. These features have been especially evident in Naut Aran municipality.[277] Specifically, the first collective flock in the Catalan Pyrenees, established in Naut Aran in 2010, was dismantled in 019 due to the lack of local sheep in the area. Another local flock of more than 1,000 sheep owned by a single farmer, which grazes on the Vaquèira mountain and the Beret Plain, has implemented different combinations of protection measures since 2017: a) using a shepherd but not fencing in the sheep overnight; b) not hiring a shepherd in 2018; and c) adhering to the three protection measures in 2019.[278] That year the overall number of bear predations on sheep in the Catalan Pyrenees plummeted to 27. This drastic reduction of casualties was mainly attributed to the protection measures implemented with this large flock, which suffered most of bear predations

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[277] In 2020, the two collective flocks coordinated and funded by the Aran government were formed in the Vaquèira mountain and Beret Plain (Naut Aran), and the Gausac-Casau pastures near Vielha (Mijaran). The former comprised around 1,500 sheep owned by eight farmers, although 1,300 belonged to just one owner; the second flock of 1,000 sheep was made up of small flocks of between 50 and 250 animals owned by 18 farmers.

[278] Most sheep losses caused by certified bear attacks in Val d'Aran over these years—a total of 44 in 2017, 94 in 2018, and 18 in 2019 (Departament Territori i Sostenibilitat (DTS) nonpublished)—affected this flock. Experts hinted at the possibility that they may have been related, among other undeciphered factors, to the changes made by Edgar, the local farmer, on the protection measures.

the year before (about 80 sheep casualties in 2018 out of 101 in the Catalan Pyrenees and 94 in Val d'Aran).

| Overall bear predations on sheep (2015-2019) | Val d'Aran | Pallars Sobirà |
|---|---|---|
| 2015 | 15 | |
| 2016 | 26 | 17 |
| 2017 | 44 | 2 |
| 2018 | 94 | 6 |
| 2019 | 18 | 8 |
| TOTAL | 197 | 33 |

Figure 72. Overall bear predations on sheep (2015-2019). Source: Author, based on Departament Territori i Sostenibilitat (DTS) (Nonpublished).

Due to the lack of consistency in the presence of collective flocks and in the application of the protection measures in Naut Aran, I focus on Alt Àneu to examine the implementation of the bear program and its consequences for extensive husbandry.

Prior to these measures, another sheep regrouping policy had been implemented in Pallars Sobirà. In 2007, sheep farmers from regions further south that were not greatly affected by the presence of bears and who belonged to a major farmer's union (FECOC)[279] began to

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[279] Acronym for the Catalan federation of sheep and goat farmer associations.

receive government funds to build new shepherds' huts or restore old ones as well as to hire shepherds to tend private sheep flocks over the summer. According to one member of the Catalan bear program team and some shepherds and local farmers from Alt Àneu, this policy was based on a glaring contradiction. Most of the local farmers affected by the presence of bears did not meet the two conditions required to access these funds: owning at least 1,000 sheep and belonging to the FECOC. In fact, the farmers affected were actually located in northern regions of Pallars Sobirà. In the same contradictory line, misleading statements and statistics about these preliminary protection measures were issued by both bear program experts and the Catalan government. The bear program specialists published an article titled "Osos y humanos: del conflicto a la coexistencia" (Bears and humans: from conflict to coexistence, Ruiz-Olmo, Jordi et al. 2011, 29), which asserted that despite the increase in the bear population in the Pyrenees the number of sheep losses had been declining since the implementation of the protection measures. The misleading point in this claim is that in 2011 the effectiveness of the protection was assessed in relation to measures implemented since 2007, most of which laid outside the geographical range of the bears' habitat in the Pyrenees. In turn, the Catalan government had issued a press release in 2009, one year before collective flocks were implemented in the core bear area, endorsing this contradiction under the following subheading: "During 2009, there have been no attacks on guarded collective flocks."[280]

Despite these regional geopolitical contradictions surrounding the Catalan and Aran governments' protection measures, once the flocks began to be tended by shepherds with the

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[280]     https://govern.cat/salapremsa/notes-premsa/83536/equip-suport-conservacio-os-inicia-seves-tasques-al-pirineu-catala.

assistance of LGDs and electrified enclosures for the night camps, the fall in sheep losses was widely acknowledged by both local farmers and shepherds and is reflected in the governments' official statistics. Pere, a local sheep farmer from Alt Àneu, assured me, for instance, that "we don't usually have [attacks]. Now, if the shepherd's there and they [the sheep] are fenced off, we don't … Besides, there are also the [livestock guardian] dogs."[281] Robert, a shepherd from one of the collective flocks in Pallars Sobirà, echoed this view, asserting that "[farmers] lose fewer sheep now, with us [shepherds] and bears, than when they would let them [graze] untended. This is true! Cause we look after them… we care about how many [sheep] there are…".[282] Finally, the statistics also show how, despite the steady increase in the bear population, the number of attacks per bear and year has remained below 1.5 since 2010, compared to 2 in the years before the measures were implemented (Palazón 2018). Protection measures have thus succeeded in reducing the negative impact bears have on sheep—only two, six, and eight certified losses among the four collective flocks in Pallars Sobirà in 2017, 2018, and 2019, respectively, out a total of around 4,000 sheep grazing in the core bear area in this district ("Resum danys provocats per os durant el projecte Piros Life (2015-2019)" 2020); however, what they failed to prevent was the emergence and persistence of social conflicts with local farmers.

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[281] "*Però normalment no. Ara si hi ha pastor i tancades, no… I a més hi són també els gossos*" (Pere, 27/3/2019).

[282] "*[Els ramaders] perden menys ovelles ara, amb nosaltres [pastors] i l'os, que quan van sueltes. Tal qual, eh! Perquè nosaltres les curem... perquè mirem més quantes n'hi ha*" (Robert, 21/8/2018).

## The bear program as an anti-politics machine

> "Why is there a problem? This is the question. And I do not have the answer. But I
> am sure it is not … because we [public administration] pay late, underpay, and do not
> protect [the flocks] well. I am sure it is not about this, because this is not the point…
>
> *there are more things*"
>
> (Catalan government's Director of Environment, 13/02/2019. My translation).

Why is it then that the grievances and complaints around the bear program are so persistent within the farming sector? What are the *things* the Catalan government's Director of Environment intriguingly points to?

My intention here is to offer a critical insight into the protection measures in order to better understand the conflict around them despite their success in reducing sheep casualties caused by the bear attacks. This approach unfolds in three interconnected axes: the misleading conflation between impact and conflict, the framing of protection measures as *preventive*, and the claim that these measures meant a return to a long-standing, recent past.

First, protection measures are assessed in terms of reduced damage—the negative impact—to livestock after implementation, resulting in a misleading conflation between the impact and conflict among the local farmers spurred by the renewed presence of bears. Second, these protection measures are deemed preventive, but they have always been implemented *after* not *before* bear attacks had taken place. As such, they neither prevented the social conflict nor the

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negative impacts on livestock. Instead, they served as reparatory actions once the damage had already occurred. Finally, the implementation of such protection measures and the renewed presence of bears are claimed to be a mere return to age-old human-wildlife interactions, only disrupted in recent times when the social figure of the shepherd disappeared and the use of LGDs was abandoned in the Catalan Pyrenees once the bear population had plummeted during the last half of the twentieth century.

By rendering the protection measures technical, preventive, and restorative, I argue that these three converging axes within the bear program perform as an "anti-politics machine," to use Ferguson's famous expression (1990; see also Jenkins 2017), allegedly erasing politics from the scene, but actually generating a new political scenario (Li 2007). The proposed critical insight is thus intended to counter the depoliticization that pervades the protection measures by challenging the reasonings behind those three entwined axes.

**The impact/conflict conflation: reversing a logical syllogism**

"[T]he *bear problem* in the Pallars [Sobirà] … *is about six sheep*"

(Catalan government's Director of Environment, 13/2/2019. My translation). [283]

"Although *prevention* is more expensive than paying compensation, it is better than

paying for the damage caused by bears because it *prevents social conflict*"

(Palazón 2017, 241. My emphases).

Valeria Salvatori, a researcher from the Institute of Applied Ecology in Rome and a member of

the Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (LCIE), made a comment at the symposium on the

return of large carnivores mentioned above that inspired this subsection. After a roundtable with

local farmers and some experts to discuss the main protection measures implemented so far and

how they had managed to reduce the number of sheep losses (i.e., the negative impact), she

warned the audience about a misleading terminological conflation:

> A mistake has been made for many years. Not distinguishing between the impact and
>
> the conflict. The impact is what we can minimize with technical procedures … But the
>
> conflict belongs to the social sphere. The bear does not directly generate the conflict.

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[283] "*[E]l problema de l'os al Pallars … són sis ovelles*].

… What does cause conflict is how the impact is handled. And if we try to relate the amount of damage to the level of conflict, I don't think we get anywhere.[284]

To take these considerations seriously, instead of looking at the number of bear attacks and sheep casualties we should pay attention to the genealogy of the social conflicts that have arisen out of the renewed presence of bears in the Catalan Pyrenees. In other words, while technical procedures—such as providing local farmers with shepherds, LGDs, and electrified enclosures for overnight camps for collective flocks during the summer grazing season—may alleviate the negative impact caused by bears on livestock, these measures do not necessarily ease the social conflict among stakeholders. The opening quotes of this subsection from both the Catalan's governments Director of Environment, who equated the "problem" around the bear program to the total of six sheep certified to have been killed in bear attacks, and the head of the Catalan government's specialist team, who aligned the prevention of social conflicts with those protection measures, illustrate the terminological confusion Valeria Salvatori referred to. Furthermore, a caveat must be noted. Official data on bear attacks do not necessarily correspond to the number of losses suffered by local farmers, since damage caused by a bear attack must be certified by the Rural Agents Corps, and this is not always easy to prove. The case of Hug, a local sheep farmer from Alt Àneu who joined a collective flock after losing more than ten sheep in the summer, illustrates this gap between the impact on the ground and that reported in the

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[284] "*Se ha seguido haciendo un error durante muchos años. No distinguir el impacto del conflicto. El impacto es lo que podemos minimizar con las gestiones técnicas… El conflicto pertenece propiamente a un ámbito social. El oso no hace directamente el conflicto… Lo que sí causa conflicto es cómo se maneja el impacto. Y si tratamos de relacionar el número de daños con el conflicto yo creo que no llegamos a ningún lado.*"

official statistics. Although there were only three sheep losses certified as due to bear attacks on unguarded flocks in Pallars Sobirà in 2016, this farmer shared his experience from that year as follows:

> But for some time, between five and nine sheep had gone missing every year [2014 and 2015]. … And in the last year [2016] we lost 16 sheep, 14 of which we knew nothing about, the fifteenth was the one we found in Bonaigua, certified as killed by a bear, and the sixteenth is a sheep that we found with [my partner], with a broken leg and I had to put it down myself. … I count them all. But the other 14 I didn't know anything … I didn't find a trace of them, neither alive nor dead![285]

Insofar as protection measures are believed to solve the social conflict, Hug's words engage with the downsides of addressing as interchangeable the impacts bears cause to livestock, on one hand, and the conflicts derived from the bear reintroduction program, on the other. This interchangeability hides a crucial hierarchy between these two variables that arises from the following syllogism: if we manage to reduce the negative impacts, the conflict will abate, the bear program's proponents would argue, based on the previous equality [impact = conflict]. The equation turns into a hierarchized separation between the technical management to reduce the

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[285] "*Però d'un temps cap aquí, faltava de 5 a 9 ovelles per any [2014 and 2015]… I l'últim any [2016] mos van faltar 16 ovelles, de les quals 14 no en vam saber res, la que fa 15 és la que vam trobar a la part de Bonaigua, demostrada per la mort de l'os, i la que fa 16 és una ovella que vam trobar amb Victòria, amb la pota trencada i la vaig haver de sacrificar jo… Jo les compto totes. Però les altres 14 no em vaig saber res … és que ni vives ni mortes!*" (Hug, 5/11/2018)

negative impact and the sociopolitical constituency of the conflict [(technical) impact > (social) conflict].

Given this pair of concatenated equalities [impact = conflict and impact > conflict], despite the increasing recognition of the conflicts spurred by the renewed presence of bears, the program's experts still tend to consider them as a secondary realm separate from the negative impacts and the ensuing technical solutions they try to implement to mitigate livestock losses caused by the bear attacks. Within this frame, protection measures are usually conceived through technical lenses that undermine the sociopolitical arena in which those technical measures must be implemented.

This approach was clearly expressed by representatives of the bear program's technical staff from France, Aragon, and Navarra who participated as speakers in a meeting organized by the Catalan government in 2020 before an audience of mainly local farmers from Pallars Sobirà and Val d'Aran. All these experts assured the attendees that they *knew* how to prevent the bear attacks, but they also recognized that they had to deal with hurdles that hinder the implementation of such technical knowledge on the ground. "The solutions… we've got the solutions!", one of the specialists proclaimed. However, once I questioned his claim, he immediately admitted that these solutions should not be considered as such if they cannot be implemented. Oriol, an employee of the High Pyrenees Natural Park employed in the bear program's technical team since 2011 working as the liaison between farmers, shepherds, and the public administration, also illustrated this technical/political dichotomy. Since the figure of the shepherd had not been lost in France, he assured me, protection measures to prevent bear attacks would have been *technically* much easier. However, he recognized that the French farmers' overt

political stance against the bear program undermined this reasoning. This observation aligns with the opinion expressed by a member of the Large Carnivores Initiative for Europe: "The challenge is therefore not so much in terms of not knowing what measures are needed, but rather it lies in *finding ways to integrate different measures into locally adapted and integrated strategies* that both protect livestock and provide a practical and economically viable livelihood for livestock producers."[286]

In other words, the public administrations' efforts to mitigate the negative impacts caused by the bear attacks on livestock have prevailed over the secondary attention given to the genealogy of the conflicts with the farming sector in the wake of the renewed bear presence. Rendering flock protection as a technical matter thus aligns with the conceptualization of the bear program's protection measures as an anti-politics machine.

These considerations urge us to advocate for a new approach to the impact/conflict binary. What I contend here is the need to reverse the hierarchy proposed by the bear program as the first step to repoliticize those measures. Returning to Salvatori's comment, the first premise needs to be dismantled. Since impact and conflict are not the same [impact ≠ conflict], if we want to address the emergence and persistence of social conflicts surrounding the bear program, we need to avoid the parallelisms between impact and conflict drawn by technicians and politicians, and rather focus on the rise of those conflicts beyond the negative impacts caused by the renewed presence of bears. Inspired by Jason Moore's triadic approach to nature as three major and *interpenetrating* forms—human organization; extra-human flows, relations, and

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[286]https://www.lcie.org/Blog/ArtMID/6987/ArticleID/96/A-new-overview-of-the-eternal-conflict-between-carnivores-and-livestock.

substances; and the web of life—whose "boundaries and configurations shift in successive historical-geographical eras," which means that "nature is not just there … [but] is *historical*" (2015, 12), the second step would then consist of looking at how impact and conflict may make up a *historically interpenetrated* unit [impact — conflict], in which technical issues are always subsumed to the sociopolitical arena in which they are implemented [conflict > impact].

Once the syllogism is reversed, we need to look at how these protection measures are defined and claimed by advocates of the bear program. Such insight into definitions and claims may pave the way for a more generative analysis of the genealogy and persistence of social conflicts despite the effectiveness of those measures in reducing sheep casualties. Specifically, I want to critically examine: 1) the definition of these protection measures as preventive; and 2) the claim that they merely represent a return to previous shepherding practices.

**Protection or prevention measures?**

> "The aim is to increase the density of brown bears … and the area of distribution; consequently, the number of attacks will be likely to increase. Therefore, protection measures must be implemented *after* the first attack to avoid more damages"
>
> (Palazón 2017, 241. My emphasis).

If the previous quote by the head of the Catalan government's bear program team was problematic because it reinforces the misleading terminological conflation between impact and

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conflict by stressing that the protection measures prevent social conflicts, the argument put forward in this second quote is also problematic because it makes another confusing comparison between protection and prevention. Guarded collective flocks have always been established *after* sheep had been killed or disappeared (see Hug's case above). Unpredicted sheep losses always preceded the organization of contemporary collective flocks. Reparation rather than prevention thus stands out as the main characteristic of the sheep regrouping policy in the Catalan Pyrenees.

The temporal gap between the release of bears, the ensuing increase of the bear population in the Catalan Pyrenees, and the organization of protection measures to reduce the negative impact on livestock not only questions the label of prevention used to describe these collective flocks by the state representatives—politicians and experts (Departament d'Agricultura, Ramaderia, Pesca, Alimentació i Medi Natural 2014; Palazón 2017; *Mesures de prevenció de danys de l'ós bru al sector primari* 2018)—but it also appears as an instantiation of the political hierarchy between environmental conservation policies, epitomized by the reintroduction and reinforcement of the bear population in the Catalan Pyrenees, and policies supporting extensive husbandry. A comment from 1996 by a former Director of Environment in the Catalan government illustrates this hierarchy through a passive position: "Now that a bear has been released in France, we will see what happens, whether there will be any damage or not" (Salvat i Saladrigas 1996),[287] whereas Hug, the local sheep farmer from the Alt Àneu mentioned previously, was very critical of this position: "What you can't do is launch a reintroduction [program] and watch it from afar to see what happens."[288]

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[287] "*Ara que s'ha alliberat un os a França podrem seguir a veure què passa, a veure si es fan danys, a veure si no es fan danys*"
[288] "*El que no pot ser és fer una reintroducció i mirar-s'ho des de fora i a veure què passa*" (Hug, 5/11/2017).

Reparation versus prevention becomes strikingly obvious from the chronology of damage caused by bear attacks in the Bonabé valley, in Alt Àneu, and the implementation of a collective flock in that area. Based on ethnographic findings out of several encounters with two local farmers, although the first translocated bears caused several sheep casualties in 1996 near Alós d'Isil—one of the two villages in this valley; hereafter Alós—forcing local farmers to bring their flocks inside in early October, two months before usual, it was not until 2011 when the first collective flock was established in this area.

When they hiked up for their weekly check on the sheep grazing untended on the pastures of Alós, a couple of local farmers spotted a female bear and two cubs immediately after the adult bear had killed two of their sheep. Recalling the scene, the eldest farmer, Enric, who was born in 1933, stated that no one had informed them that bears were back in the area:

Enric: Not us, what the hell were we gonna suspect… we didn't suspect bears for anything!

Me: Sure… no one had told you, right?

Enric: Nobody! Nothing! No one had said anything! … And we went one day up there to round them up, and we arrived at the *Borda de Sants* …, [a site] known as *Es Feners* [near Alós]… Maybe there was an inch of snow. And … one of my sheep, there was nothing left but the skin. And you could clearly see bear tracks. They'd eaten it right there. Then, we went up, up … And, of course, we were talking ... and just over the *Planyera El Monte* [local toponym] they [bears] had taken another one of mine, they'd killed it, they'd eaten its ear. And if we hadn't been talking they would've eaten it all,

because then we saw them going up a steep slope, three of them, the female bear and the two cubs.[289]

Considering the time span of fifteen years between this scene and setting up the collective flock in the Bonabé valley, the first one in Pallars Sobirà district, I was curious to know what both the local farmers and the public administration had done in the meantime. I spoke to the youngest of the two men, Pere, who was born in 1956 and is the only sheep farmer from Alós still working who has witnessed the whole process since 1996. Our conversation was revealing on this point, as it showed that both the local farmers and the public administration carried on as though there were no bears in the area:

> Me: How were the flocks managed once the damage started to be significant? Did you hire shepherds?
>
> Pere: No, we didn't! They [the sheep] were grazing freely! The year [1996] they attacked us [referring to their sheep] ….
>
> Me: … And what about the next year? Did you let them graze freely too?

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[289] - Natres no, què cony havíem de sospechar… no sospechàvom res dels óssos!
- Clar… ningú havia informat?
- Ningú! Ré! Ningú havia dit res! … I vam marxar un dia per anar-les a arreplegar, i arribem a d'amón a la Borda de Sants …, que en diuen "Es Feners" [near Alós]. … Potser hi havia dos dits de neu. I … una ovella meva ja només hi havia la pell. I es veia prou, les xafades dels ossos. Se l'havien menjat allí. Llavors anem puiant, anem puiant… I és clar, parlàvom… i d'amón la Planyera El Monte ja n'havien agafat una altra de meua, ja l'havien matat, se li havien menjat l'orella, i sinó perquè vam puiar parlant mos hi foten per dalt, perquè llavors els vam veure que puiaven allà en una pala tres, l'ossa i dos de xics (Enric, 25/11/2018).

Pere: Yes! Until the regrouping was set up, we let them graze untended… What did you expect us to do!? *We couldn't do anything…* you can't tend the flock and get the hay in at the same time.

Me: But… any prevention measures in the following years?

Pere: None. Nothing was done. If there was an attack, they [the Rural Agents] checked to see if it was genuine, they [public administration] paid for it, and that was that. Nobody did anything! Until the regrouping was set up, and that was that.[290]

Given the persistence of the conflicts surrounding the bear program in this particular valley in the Catalan Pyrenees, evidenced by the strong opposition from the local farmers to recent projects included under the program,[291] these excerpts prove that protection measures cannot

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[290] *- Si el 97 són els primers atacs dels ossos i això fa 6/7 anys... en qualsevol cas no en fa 20 anys. Com es gestiona el ramat un cop comencen haver-hi destrosses importants... evidències importants... Vau contractar pastors?*
*- No! Si estaven sueltes! Aquell any que mos van començar a atacar, les vam agafar el mes d'octubre i les vam tancar.*
*- I llavors comença el següent any, i què foteu?!*
*- ... no sé què vam fer! El següent any no en van tocar casi cap...*
*- ... val. Però les vau engegar a l'ample també?!*
*- Sí, les vam engegar a l'ample. Hasta que no hi havia agrupament les vam engegar sempre.*
*- ... però no vau fer una gestió... ningú va gestionar... no dic vosaltres, sinó des de l'administració sobre com resoldre la situació? No va haver-hi cap aproximació...*
*- Bueno, vam pujar els guardes, van fer el parte i ja està...*
*- Però a nivell més preventiu, pel següent any o pels anys que venien....*
*- No, llavors no. No es va moure res. Si hi havia un atac miraven si ho era i el pagaven, i ja està.*
*- Em sorprèn això, que va haver-hi aquests atacs, però no es va canviar la manera... això no va afectar la manera de portar [el ramat]... durant uns anys...*
*- Oh clar, perquè què volies fer?!*
*- No, no dic vosaltres, sinó que ningú va…*
*- No va moure ningú res! Fins que va començar-se l'agrupament, i ja està.* (27/3/2019).
[291] See Chapter 5 for a detailed description and the controversy around a project associated with the bear program that consisted of planting thousands of fruit trees in the Bonabé valley to enhance the natural corridors for the brown bear.

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be considered preventive for two reasons: they neither prevented the social conflict nor were they implemented to prevent the initial negative impacts on livestock. Regrouped and guarded collective flocks were not planned even when damage to livestock caused by bears was patently evident.

When asked about the reasons for the hierarchy between the release of bears and the protection measures, exemplified by the delay or passivity between these two actions, Carles, an expert responsible for monitoring the first bears reintroduced in the Catalan Pyrenees and hence with a broad view of this policy, gave me a sincere and concise answer:

> Because we didn't foresee it… We had data in the French Pyrenees from the mid-twentieth century [from 1968 to 1979], and the estimated bear attack rate was 3.5 sheep per bear each year.[292] And we regarded this number as acceptable… *We thought it wouldn't be a problem, and we were wrong.*[293]

Official statistics throughout the reintroduction program actually resemble those previous studies, since the annual attack rate per bear remained below three between 1996 and 2006, and below two between 2006 and 2018 (Palazón 2018). Accordingly, previous calculations did not

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[292] Jean-Jacques Camarra (1986), from the *Office Nationale de la Chasse et la Faune Sauvage* (ONCFS) reported a fluctuating rate of bear attacks on livestock between 1968 and 1979 in the French Western Pyrenees. While the rate remained between three and four attacks per bear and year in 1968 and 1979, the number of attacks during this period underwent striking oscillations.

[293] "*Teníem una dada que els ossos al Pirineu al cantó francès a la segona meitat del segle XX —anys 60s i 70s—, la mitjana d'atacs era de 3.5 ovelles per os i any. Es va valorar com una cosa assumible". "Al cantàbric eren més baixes perquè no hi ha ovelles". "Es va considerar que no seria una problema, i ens vam equivocar*" (Carles, 13/3/2019). Carles has been recently hired by the Brown Bear Foundation.

differ so much in terms of the negative impact caused by the bears—attacks and casualties—but they did differ in terms of the conflicts they sparked in the farming sector. In other words, the calculations were right, but assessment of the situation was not. These appraisals were permeated not only by the misleading impact/conflict conflation analyzed above, but also by the claim that the protection measures simply entailed a return to long-standing shepherding practices undertaken since time immemorial.

**Back to what? The social extinction of bears and transformations in shepherding in the Bonabé valley over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries**

> "We have now returned to the experience of life over centuries and centuries, which is the
>
> need to protect the flocks, to watch over them, to group them together."
>
> (Catalan government's Director of Environment, 14/9/2018. My translation).[294]

Oriol, the Catalan technical team member who has been heavily involved in the bear program since 2011 when the first collective flock was established in Pallars Sobirà, made me aware of a key distinction regarding the extinction of the brown bear in the Catalan Pyrenees. He explained that the bear had been "mentally extinct" since the mid-twentieth century, and its presence only began to be noticeable around 2008, after the second wave of releases in the French Central

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[294] "*Ara hem tornat a lo que s'ha viscut durant segles i segles, que és la necessitat de protegir els ramats, de vigilar-los, d'agrupar-los.*"

Pyrenees in 2006 and the growth in the overall population to more than 15 individuals. He defined this extinction as "mental," because in addition to the translocations in 1996, 1997 and 2006, studies had also demonstrated the presence of a very small bear population in Val d'Aran and the northern regions of Pallars Sobirà until the early 1990s (Alonso and Toldrà 1993; Parellada, Alonso, and Toldrà 1995). The president of IPCENA, a Catalan environmental NGO with a radical stance in favour of the bear reintroduction program, reinforced this standpoint by recalling that the creation of two "bear reserves" in the Catalan Pyrenees in 1987—one in Val d'Aran and the other in Pallars Sobirà (Bonabé valley)—was irrefutable evidence of the presence of brown bears at that time.[295]

However, the term "mental extinction" implies that local communities had wiped the brown bear out of their daily lives since the mid-twentieth century, when the population had already dwindled to a few dozen across the entire mountain range. In fact, the last official bear hunt in the Catalan Pyrenees was in 1948 (Casanova 2002), which for years marked the date when bears had supposedly disappeared from these regions.[296]

Thus, the brown bear was *mentally* or *socially considered* extinct for half a century in Val d'Aran and Pallars Sobirà before the bear program was launched. The four-decade interval

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[295] "It is clear that the bear has never disappeared in the Pyrenees… and if anyone says the contrary, they are deceiving us. In 1987, with the enactments of Natural Reserves for the protection of endangered fauna, the Catalan government created the first reserve for the protection of the brown bear, nine years before the first reintroduction took place and completely unaware of what would happen… In Bonabé [valley], there has been a reserve declared for the protection of the brown bear since 1987" (IPCENA's President, 1/8/2018. My translation).

[296] In 1987, claims were made for sheep casualties in Val d'Aran, and experts and the public administration recognized that they were caused by a brown bear. This sort of damage to livestock had not happened in the previous decades (Parellada, Alonso, and Toldrà 1995, 129; Salvat i Saladrigas 1996). However, a study by a forestry engineer titled "Estudio de ordenación integral de la comarca del Valle de Arán" still catalogued the bear as a hunting species in Val d'Aran, although he considered, paradoxically, the bear practically extinct despite scattered evidence of its presence (González García-Gutiérrez 1971, 367).

(1948-1993) between the social and the actual extinction warrants this distinction. However, does it really matter whether or not bears were still living in the Catalan Pyrenees a few years before first translocations from Slovenia, considering that there were *no* bears over a two-generation time span according to the experience of everyday life in the local communities? Taking the two terms of political ecology, I am purposefully "putting politics first" or approaching "politics without ecology" for the moment (contra Vayda and Walters 1999). The intention of this analytical approach is not to disregard the ecological side of the story (i.e., the importance of knowing when the bears actually became extinct in the Catalan Pyrenees from an ecological position), but rather to provide a fruitful way of highlighting the social arena in which the sheep regrouping policy took shape. In doing so, I aim to approach the social conflicts with the farming sector surrounding wildlife conservation programs in more generative and prospective ways. Specifically, what I intend here is to repoliticize the protection measures of the bear program, going beyond the two critiques of the misleading impact/conflict and protection/prevention conflations discussed above. By looking at how both the renewed bear presence (considering that evidence of them was found in the Catalan Pyrenees just before the start of the conservation program), and the ensuing protection measures (reappearance of shepherds and LGDs) have been presented as simply a return to age-old practices, I claim that the notion of return, in addition to these misleading conflations, jeopardizes the reasons that have fuelled the conflicts with the farming sector, and it becomes crucial to understand how the bear program plays out as an anti-politics machine.

Inspired by Hirsch and Stewart (2005), an ethnographic approach to the historicity of shepherding practices over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the Bonabé valley serves to counter such depolitization via the notion of return or restoration. Politicians and experts

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often use this notion to frame both the renewed presence of bears and the regrouping policy in non-conflictive terms.[297] Sometimes they refer to the return of bears and collective flocks encompassing an indeterminate long time span (see opening quote of this subsection); in others, restoration narratives admit that the regrouping policy promoted a return to a more specific period—the grandparents' generation—which brought about new inconveniences for today's local farmers:

> I absolutely admit that the bear is one more nuisance for the farmers … because they used to leave the flocks unattended because there were no predators. … Given … the quasi-extinction of the bear … the farmers had … got used to the fact that there was no reason to watch the sheep, and therefore there was a tradition of letting the flocks graze untended and going to check up on them once a week… And that … has changed, and obviously in times of change there are tensions and there is stress, and you may say 'dude, why the hell did they have to make my life so complicated' … There is wildlife here … and I [the farmer] now have to change my habits and *I have to go back to what my grandparents did*, to watch and fence off [the flocks].[298]

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[297] See Chapter 5 for a detailed analysis on how this notion is underpinned by the idiom of heritage and combined with the notion of improvement under the moral ecology of the bear.

[298] "*Jo admeto absolutament que l'os pels ramaders és una molèstia més … perquè tenien l'hàbit de deixar el bestiar sense vigilància perquè no hi havia predadors. … [A]mb … quasi bé extinció de l'os … els ramaders s'havien … acostumat a que no hi havia raons per vigilar el ramat, i, per tant, hi havia una tradició d'aviar al bestiar i anar-lo a veure un cop per setmana aviam com està …. I això … ha canviat i evidentment en els moments de canvi, doncs, hi ha tensions i hi ha estrès i dius «home, per què carai a mi m'han hagut de complicar la vida» … hi ha una fauna aquí … i jo ara he de canviar els meus hàbits i he de tornar al que feien els avis, eh?, de vigilar i de tancar*" (Press conference and Parliamentary speech by the Catalan's government Director of Environment, 14/9/2018 and 13/2/2019). The quotes were retrieved from an open transcript available on the Catalan Parliament website: https://www.parlament.cat/ext/f?p=700:1:::::.

This generation gap relates to the above-mentioned "mental extinction" and it becomes crucial, since neither today's young farmers nor their parents were used to grazing their flocks on mountain pastures where bears lived, nor with shepherds or LGDs. Moreover, the renewed presence of bears has fostered a set of changes in flock management and the use of pastures that also differ from those of their grandparents' times.

The staggering decline of bears caused by legal and illegal hunting, and hence due to specific political and legal frames, 1967 being the turning point when bear hunting was outlawed in Spain,[299] coincided with the collapse of the Pyrenean agrarian economies in the mid-twentieth century. These two processes prompted local farmers to abandon two out of the three protection measures introduced under the bear program: LGDs and shepherds.[300] Electrified night enclosures as such were never used before, although material remains of stone pens dating back to prehistoric times have recently been discovered in high mountain pastures across the Catalan High Pyrenees (Gassiot Ballbè et al. 2017).

LGDs were still present in Alt Àneu before 1940, but according to Hug, "people of my uncle's generation [born in 1949] never had protection dogs,"[301] and they had not been used again since the 1960s, and probably before. Likewise, Enric, the former sheep farmer born in Alós in 1933 who witnessed the bear attacks in the Bonabé valley in the late 1990s referred to

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[299] According to the Spanish law, the bear became a protected species in 1973; it was included in the catalogues of endangered and threatened species in 1986 and 1990, respectively; and finally, bear hunting was considered an ecological crime in 1995 (Casanova 2002). This legal process contrasts with how bear hunting was socially perceived just a few years before: "Until the year 1962 shooting at a bear was not only legal, but also a reason to be proud of oneself and a sign of courage" (in Salvat i Saladrigas 1996. My translation).

[300] Some local farmers do not regard shepherds as a protection measure against the threat of a predator, but as people who help increase or improve their business. Eladi, a local sheep farmer from Alt Àneu, stressed this point when he was interviewed in a TV program: "They [public administration] don't give us a shepherd; they give us a 'bear-watcher' [*osser*] to make sure they don't attack the sheep' (in Solà 2019. My translation).

[301] "*la generació del meu tiet n'havien tingut mai [de gos de protecció]*" (Hug, 11/3/2019).

above, emphatically told me: "Of course there were mastiffs [dogs]! My father tended the Pubill flock [an important Alós family (*casa forta*) that used to have around 3,000 sheep] … and they had four protection dogs to guard the sheep overnight… And one night, the bear wanted to sneak in, and there was a dog they called 'brave'… I heard this story from my father… The dog was so brave that it attacked the bear, but the bear injured it very badly."[302] The recent abandonment of LGDs for shepherding (Ferrer i Sirvent 2004) contrasts with their long-standing use since at least the sixteenth century in Catalonia (Ros 2016). According to Carles, bear expert and current member of the Brown Bear Foundation, "this only means that the number of bears must have already been very low by then [mid-twentieth century]."[303] Indeed, according to Marcel Couturier, there were only sixteen bears in the French Central Pyrenees in 1953 (Casanova 2002, 51).

Although the characteristics of villages and valleys vary across the Catalan High Pyrenees, they all have one thing in common: since the mid-1960s local farmers have no longer hired shepherds in the present core bear area, and since then the flocks from these villages have grazed untended on the pastures during the summer season, monitored with sporadic checks by the farmers themselves. A coalescing set of factors helps explain shepherding transformations since the mid-twentieth century: a) very high emigration flows out of the upper valleys of the Pyrenees to the cities after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), but especially during the 1960s (Guirado 2011); b) the remaining farmers shifted their activity from sheep and horses first to dairy cows, and then to beef cattle, in response to market opportunities, between the 1960s and 1980s; c)

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[302] "*I tant que n'hi havia, home!... I el meu pare guardava el ramat de Pubill... ves comptant... i tenien 4 gossos mastins per guardar a la nit... per guardar les ovelles... I una nit, els hi volia entrar l'os, i n'hi havia un que li deien "valent", de gos... I allò ho he sentit explicar pel meu pare... I tant tant li van da força que se li va tirar a l'os, però l'os lo va mig desfer*" (Enric, 27/3/2019).
[303] "*Això vol dir una cosa: el nombre d'ossos hauria de ser molt baix*" (Carles, 13/3/2019).

the severe decline of the bear population throughout the twentieth century that led to its "mental extinction" in the region; and d) the collapse of the sheep transhumance at the end of the twentieth century driven by economic reasons and the pressure of new public health regulations (Còts 2002; Estrada, Nadal, and Iglesias 2010).

If shepherds vanished from the Catalan High Pyrenees in the late twentieth century, their return must be read through a critical lens. Hug, born in the 1980s, was emphatic about the enormous disparities between the meaning of the social figure of the shepherd in the recent past and what it means today: "The two have nothing in common! Managing sheep with shepherds is 400 or 500 per cent different from what it was sixty years ago [in the 1960s]!"[304]

An ethnographic approach to the historicity of shepherding practices in the Bonabé valley, an area characterized by a long-standing and abundant presence of sheep in the twentieth century as well as a site the bear program targeted for various initiatives due to its stable bear presence both now and historically,[305] serves as an illustrative case study to build a critique of the notion of return attached to those shepherding practices. This ethnographic and historical analysis is especially relevant to examine the transformations of shepherding practices in parallel with the social extinction of bears in the Catalan Pyrenees. Local and transhumant farmers have continuously adapted to shifting ecological, social, economic, political, and legal contexts. Their accounts, gathered through semi-structured interviews, give a precise picture of a set of historical

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[304] "*El maneig des ovelles amb pastors, d'abans a ara ha canviat el 400 o 500% de com era*" (Hug, 5/11/2018).
[305] According to Cèdric, a local farmer from Alós, some 15,000-20,000 sheep used to graze the Bonabé pastures in the first half of the twentieth century, while the bear program has placed the only museum in the Catalan Pyrenees devoted to this species in the village of Isil. Likewise, the reintroduction program has also promoted the plantation of thousands of fruit trees in this valley to improve the bears' nutritional corridors. See Chapter 5 for a thorough explanation of this project.

changes in the shepherding practices in the Bonabé valley before and after the bear reintroduction program. Following Moore (2015, 28), I approach these historical changes "through the dialectical movements of humans making environment, and environment making humans." The notion of return thus crumbles in the face of the set of historical changes in shepherding practices as well as the various shepherding management schemes that preceded the measures implemented through the bear program.

### In our parents' time (the beginnings of the twentieth century)

"Along this road here [the main entrance to the Bonabé valley], which wasn't a road then but a track, 'el Tort' [the most popular and powerful farmer at that time who settled in Alós] brought 6,000 sheep. And Pubill [another important family (*casa forta*) in this village] had around 3,000. Look, the mountains were not leased then!"

(Enric, 25/11/2018)

Enric, born in 1933 in Alós, recalled the time of his parents when sheep were so abundant in the village that most of the mountain pastures along the Bonabé valley—split between the villages of Alós and Isil, which are now politically represented by their own decentralized municipal entity (*Entitat Municipal Descentralitzada* in Catalan, or EMD) within the municipality of Alt Àneu—were not leased for transhumant flock grazing. In the same line, Pere confirmed that the largest grazing lands were exploited by the flocks belonging to the powerful families

(*cases fortes*) in Alós and Isil as well as by the two "village flocks," which consisted of all the small flocks belonging to every household in the village grouped into a single large flock that took the name of each village.

Enric vaguely remembers watching the transhumance from his balcony as Tort's flock travelled from the plains up to the mountain pastures. At that time, the Pubill's and Tort's flocks plus the Alós village flock amounted to about 10,000 animals, in stark contrast to the 600 sheep in Alós today, owned by two farmers who belong to the same extended household.

Although the landscape of the pastures did not change much, since the number of sheep was fairly stable for the next couple of decades, the dismantling of the Tort's flock with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936 brought about a paramount historical change in the Bonabé valley, mainly related to the origins and ownership of the flocks that grazed those pastures. According to Roigé (1995), transhumant sheep flocks comprised 50,000 animals across the entire Pallars Sobirà district in the 1950s. The calcareous soil of the Bonabé valley provides better grazing lands than the predominant granitic soils in the rest of the northern parts of the district, from which it is plausible to infer that a relatively high number of these 50,000 sheep in the district would ascend from the plains to this valley. At that time, two shepherds were responsible for tending and grazing the village flocks from Isil and Alós, whereas each of the numerous transhumant flocks were tended by five or six shepherds apiece. Part of the money each municipality collected from leasing the collective pastures went to pay the shepherds and *rabadans* [shepherds' assistants] who tended the village flock. The rest of their salaries came from the *taxa*, a tax collected from every household that had stakes in the village flock in proportion to the number of sheep they owned.

### The village flock and permanently hired shepherds: Shepherding from 1940 to the 1960s

"The peasant's life was three months of hell and nine of winter"[306]

(Pere, 12/11/2018)

Far from the idealized picture of the past, memories of family life in the mid-twentieth century, such as those shared by Pere, born in 1965 in Alós, tend to be of harsh times spent working the land to scratch a living. Machinery was not used, and every plot of land was valued for its potential to contribute to the annual harvest. Enric described this mindset as follows: "Where there wasn't even room for a car, you would sow some wheat."[307] In order to keep on top of their day-to-day concerns, the local farmers hired shepherds all year long to tend the village flock and move the sheep to the private fields and collective pastures. Although the number of sheep in Alós plummeted to fewer than one thousand animals once the Tort's flock was dismantled, two shepherds were hired all year round to keep the village flock out of the privately-owned cultivated fields surrounding the village from late fall to early spring. Until the last decades of the twentieth century, the day-to-day working of the land resulted in a mosaic landscape of yellow, brown, and green fields for crops (*terres*) and hay meadows (*prats*). A productive landscape kept the advancing forest at bay.[308] For Eladi, a local farmer from Isil born in 1992, the lack of

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[306] "*La pagesia era tres mesos d'infern i nou d'hivern.*" (Pere, 12/11/2018).

[307] "*on hi cabia un cotxe ja hi sembraves blat*" (Edgar, 7/11/2018).

[308] Reforestation occurred all over the Catalan Pyrenees. A study of the spread of the forest area in Val d'Aran shows a steady increase since the 1900s. Pictures from the first half of the twentieth century in the Aran General Archive (*Archiu Generau d'Aran*) provide tangible evidence of these landscape transformations closely related to the land use changes in the Catalan High Pyrenees.

trees and the extensive area of cultivated fields on the slopes surrounding the villages conjured up a sense of dwelling and pride in striking contrast to the notion of abandonment and resignation that emanates from today's forested landscape: "Look how it was… not a single tree. Everything [was] well cultivated, way up there. And look now, this is around here [showing an old picture of Isil and its surroundings], all this used to be fields. Everything is lost!"[309]

At that time, despite the substantial differences in class and power among villagers, the village flock and the ensuing collective management of all the small private flocks provided households with a sense of community. When the sheep from all the village households were gathered in the village flocks to fertilize the private fields surrounding the village it "was like breaking down the boundaries… a way of building community," according to Hug,[310] who did not live through those times, as he was born in 1984, but who absorbed them through the stories told by his uncle, born in 1949.

### The collapse of the local sheep sector: emigration, dismantling of the village flock, concentrated ownership of flocks, and the disappearance of shepherds (1970s-1990s)

According to Eladi's mother, born in 1960, and Pere, born in 1965, the Isil and Alós village flocks remained until the late 1960s and the beginning of 1970s, respectively. By that time, although Pere was still a child, he remembers in detail the livestock count in his village: "Here [in Alós], there were about 800 sheep … [a]nd 150 goats… one [household] had 60, another 30,

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[309] "*Mira, com era abans... ni un arbre. Veus? Tot ben conreat, hasta aquí dalt. I ara mira, tot això de per aquí, tot això eren prats. Tot està perdut!*" (Eladi, 24/10/2018).
[310] "*era com un obrir fronteres… una manera de fer comunitat*" (Hug, 5/11/2018).

another 12."[311] Some years before, a "migratory epidemic," as it was described by Enric, spread through the region. Two factors were influential in this process during the 1960s: the urban industrial boom in Catalonia, which demanded huge amounts of labour power from the peripheral rural areas, and the mechanization of agriculture. The arrival of tractors eliminated one of the main sources of income for local inhabitants. Working horses became worthless overnight. Enric vividly recalls the outmigration flows following new economic opportunities, fearful that "nobody [was] going to remain in these lands." A haunting prediction that practically came true in his view: "And almost no one was left here!"[312]

Enric's ingrained memories of his local area correlate to broader processes of the political economy. A series of structural adjustment reform programs called the Stabilization or Development Plans ushered in the period of history known as *desarrollismo* in Spain, which "established the basis for the 'Spanish Miracle' of the 1960s—a decade of enormous economic growth in which Spain became … the tenth largest industrial nation in the world" (Franquesa 2018, 29). Franquesa continues, echoing Enric's illustrative demographic description: "the effects of the Spanish Miracle on the countryside were profound and multiple, yet none is as visible as, or conveys a sense of crisis comparable to, the rural exodus from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s." In effect, the Development Plans explicitly called "for the generalization of a rural exodus" and they had staggering structural effects on the countryside: "[T]he percentage of active population working in the agrarian sector in Spain decreased from 49.6 percent to 9 percent between 1950 and 1993. In Catalonia, the absolute numbers went from 375,000 people

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[311] "*Aquí hi havia unes 800 ovelles… I 150 cabres… un tenia 60, l'altre 30, l'altre 12*" (Pere, 12/11/2018).
[312] "*això é una epidèmia, que no hi quedarà ningú en aquestes terres... I no hi vam quedar ningú! Casi ningú, sí*" (Enric, 25/11/2018).

in 1900 and 300,000 in 1950 to 67,000 in 2005, with an especially stark decline of more than 100,000 people from 1966 to 1976" (Franquesa 2018, 30). In sum, in Spain "in the 1960s and 1970s, the rural world became a provider of labour power through population exodus, while agriculture, increasingly mechanized, became a consumer of manufactured goods," leaving those farmers who stayed "in a novel position of dependency" (Franquesa 2018, 31). In this widespread general process, the Catalan High Pyrenees and the Bonabé valley in particular were no exception.[313]

According to Pere, the dismantling of the village flock was closely related to these demographic shifts: "Then [during the 1970s] people had already gone and the [village] flock was completely dismantled … because, you know, many people moved to Barcelona [and other cities] … and then everything went down the drain! … Only our house [sheep farm] was left."[314] The dismantling of the village flock had serious consequences for both the management of the few remaining private flocks, and the use of the villages' pastures, which led to another historical change in the Bonabé valley. Even though the total number of sheep in Alós remained fairly steady, as long as the two remaining sheep farmers kept raising their numbers, livestock concentration in so few hands led to the disappearance of a what had been until then a social figure of paramount importance: the village flock shepherds. "When the village flock came to an end [was disbanded], we let them [sheep] graze untended. There was no shepherd anymore,"

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[313] Leaving aside the question of whether the resulting dependency was novel for the local farmers in the Catalan Pyrenees, in Chapter 6 I connect this long-standing increasing sense of dependency and loss of autonomy with the implementation of today's collective flocks as an avenue to better understand the conflicts between local farmers and state representatives through a critical insight into the notion of the commons with regard to the regrouping policy.

[314] "*Llavors es va desfer perquè, clar, molta gent va marxar cap a Barcelona, cap a Mollerussa, cap a Lleida... i llavors ja se'n va anar als collons! Llavors només vam quedar... casa nostra...*" (Pere, 27/3/2019).

according to Pere.[315] The 1970s thus gave way to a new period in which a handful of local farmers began to let their sheep graze untended on the collective pastures while the number of transhumant flocks also began to dwindle, and the total number of sheep grazing those pastures fell dramatically.[316]

| **Isil** | Cows | Horses | Sheep/Goats |
|---|---|---|---|
| Farm units | 4 | 5 | **1** |
| Number of animals | 78 | 85 | **153** |

Figure 73. Livestock count in Isil in 2012. Author, based on "Bases per al Pla de Desenvolupament Sostenible Del Territori de l'entitat Municipal Descentralitzada d'Isil i Alós (T.M. Alt Àneu)" (2012).

| **Alós** | Cows | Horses | Sheep/Goats |
|---|---|---|---|
| Farm units | 1 | 4 | **3** |
| Number of animals | 8 | 59 | **503** |

Figure 74. Livestock count in Alós in 2012. Author, based on "Bases per al Pla de Desenvolupament Sostenible Del Territori de l'entitat Municipal Descentralitzada d'Isil i Alós (T.M. Alt Àneu)" (2012).

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[315] "*quan se va acabar el ramat de poble les vam engegar. No hi havia cap més de pastor!*" (Pere, 27/3/2019).

[316] Pere, for instance, began to run his own farm with 100 sheep in 1985 and reached a maximum of 400 in 2004. According to official data from the Catalan government, in 1979 there were twenty-five farming households in Isil and Alós, in 2006 the number plummeted to thirteen, and in 2019 there were only six, three of them devoted to sheep breeding. In 2000, the livestock census in these two villages counted 5 cows, 450 sheep/goats, and 46 horses in Alós, and 80 cows and 63 horses in Isil.

***The collapse of the sheep transhumance (2000s)***

Sheep numbers during the summer seasons had been fluctuating in the Bonabé valley for a century, but they had always been in the thousands. The collapse of sheep transhumance in the Catalan Pyrenees at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Còts 2002; Estrada, Nadal, and Iglesias 2010) led to the last historical change to pastoralism, which coincided with the bear reintroduction program, namely, the first time in a hundred years that the number of sheep grazing in the Bonabé valley fell to just a few hundred. Since then, expansion of vegetation has been followed by a rapid growth of forest-related fauna, either human-induced or natural, especially deer—red deer, fallow deer, and roe deer—but also bears.

According to Roigé (1995), transhumance fell dramatically from 50,000 sheep in the 1950s to 16,000 in 1993, in Pallars Sobirà district. This decline was also noted in the Bonabé valley. Pere and Eladi remembered one particular transhumant flock that had around 8,000-9,000 sheep in the 1990s. In 2002, the last year before public health regulations prevented this Aragonese farmer from making his usual transhumance to these mountain pastures, his flock had already dwindled to 3,500 animals (Espinós 2014). Àlvar, a forestry engineer, informed me that around 8,000 transhumance sheep would come to the Bonabé valley until the 1990s, while Cèdric, a local farmer from Alós, assured me that some 15,000-20,000 sheep grazed the pastures of Bonabé in the first half of the twentieth century. Without going too deeply into the politics behind the public health policies that banned transhumance at the beginning of the twenty-first

century, Pere considered this moment as a negative turning point in the history of pasture use in the Catalan High Pyrenees since "it did a lot of harm … to many people."[317]

On the other side of the Bonaigua mountain pass, sheep numbers in Val d'Aran also fell dramatically when transhumant flocks stopped coming to the mountain pastures in 1999, allegedly for public health reasons related to outbreaks of brucellosis in the flocks. According to a veterinarian from the government of Val d'Aran, there were 40,000 sheep in the district before this crucial date. This statistic is fairly similar to the 1993 study mentioned above, which reported 34,519 transhumant sheep in Val d'Aran at that time (Roigé 1995). A few years later, between 2003 and 2004, the same veterinarian assured me that Val d'Aran was officially brucellosis free, but most of transhumant farmers no longer came to the area, and Edgar, a local sheep farmer from Naut Aran, emphatically added that "they won't anymore," because they had either found other areas to graze over the summer or ceased their farming activities. Altogether, the government vet estimated that the number of sheep in the Val d'Aran pastures had fallen dramatically from 40,000 before 1999 to 3,500 in 2018.

According to Pau, a local historian and archaeologist, the disagreements between the Catalan and Aragonese administrations over the public health measures taken to tackle brucellosis in the sheep flocks were used as an excuse by the Catalan government to prevent transhumant flocks coming in from this neighbouring Spanish region. This political decision had a major effect in the mountains of Val d'Aran and Pallars Sobirà, since in the late twentieth century most of transhumant sheep farmers came from Aragon. Other internal power struggles

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[317] "*ha fet molt mal… a molta gent*" (Pere, 12/11/2018).

in the farming sector also lay behind this political decision. Edgar also mentioned "the typical feuds from the 'American Far West' between cow and sheep farmers" to explain the situation in Val d'Aran. In short, cattle farmers from Val d'Aran did not want "outsider" farmers bringing their transhumance sheep at a time when, he recalled, fewer than 2,000 cows were coming from outside Val d'Aran (Roigé 1995).

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The set of historical changes in flock and pasture management over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the Bonabé valley, evidenced through this ethnographic approach to the historicity of shepherding practices, challenges the commonplace notion of return to age-old practices that permeates the protection measures introduced in the bear program. In fact, the bear program tells us about another historical change in the farming sector, this time framed within a particular environmental conservation mindset, in what Jevgeniy Bluwstein calls "the biopolitical ecology of conservation" through which "the emergence of conservation biology as a biopolitical science *ecologized* the way rural landscapes of production ought to be perceived" (2018: 162. Emphasis in the original). In the following two chapters I address this new layer of transformation by looking into how the bear program has been morally presented and territorially implemented as part of the production of a particular green landscape and of the arrangement of new collective actions.

# Chapter 5 —Bear tricks. Designing a wild green landscape through restoration and improvement

## Our bear experience

The breeze has blown away all the clouds and the blue sky looks bright and clear. The crests of the mountains draw a perfect silhouette, highlighted magnificently against the radiant sky. While wandering around Salardú after leaving our oldest child at school on this typical fresh, spring morning, my wife runs into Carles, a man in his mid-fifties noted for his knowledge of the brown bear in the Pyrenees. Although he was born in Barcelona, he settled in Naut Aran where he is known as the *bear man*, the person who mediates between bears and local villagers in the municipality. When people greet him, the casual conversations that follow usually turn to the number of bears in the vicinity or where they are right now, and the presence of his dark green four-wheel jeep in the mountains, with its red bear-paw bumper sticker, is a good indication that there is a plantigrade in that area. After all, he has been monitoring the bears since the late 1980s, and since the start of the bear reintroduction program in 1996 he has spotted more bears on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees than anyone else. Over the last week he has been following and observing a female bear with her cubs. The casual encounter with my wife then turns into an invitation to join him that very evening. The trip has just one purpose: to see a wild bear.

Full of excitement we organize babysitters for our two children that evening. Everything is taken care of, and when the clock approaches 6 pm, we jump into his jeep. We have no idea where we are heading to. He keeps it from us at first. Instead, he announces with an ironic smile, "We are going to Aran Park." Aran Park is a wildlife zoo that opened in 2013 where

autochthonous fauna from the Pyrenees, including a couple of brown bears, can be observed in a semi-wild state.[318] Aran Park had already come up in my fieldwork during a casual conversation with Òc, a local politician who owns about fifteen horses. In 2018, his herd suffered several bear attacks resulting in one certified dead foal, another one injured, and two others unaccounted for. When I asked him what he thought about the presence of bears in Val d'Aran today, his sharp answer was clear: "If you want to see bears and wildlife, go to Aran Park. They don't harm anyone there."[319] The institutional discourses of Val d'Aran's public administrations aligns closely with this viewpoint, in which the presence of wild bears is largely dismissed. For instance, I was struck by the complete absence of bears in the promotional tourism video, "Val d'Aran. The essence of the Pyrenees."[320] This video is full of unmitigated praise for the two main tourist attractions in Val d'Aran: the Baqueira Beret ski resort and the natural landscapes, including the abundance of wildlife. Yet it includes not a single shot of the brown bear. When I asked about this detail, Lola,[321] a member of the Val d'Aran's tourism team, admitted that "we have done nothing" regarding the bear, and she added that "I'm not sure if it is because we didn't know how to do it, or rather because we looked away."[322] This statement was reinforced by Toni,[323] a member of DEPANA (Defense of the Natural Heritage), a Catalan environmental NGO created in the mid-1970s that has been involved in the bear program, who once told me: "We're not doing it well because here [Catalan Pyrenees and specifically Val d'Aran], the topic [the bear] is

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[318] Aran Park is owned by a French entrepreneur who decided to expand his business to Val d'Aran once he succeeded in managing a similar park in the French Central Pyrenees, which was created in 1999: The Pyrenees Animal Park ("Parc Animalier Des Pyrénées - Argelès-Gazost 65" n.d. https://www.parc-animalier-pyrenees.com Accessed November 25, 2019). For more information about Aran Park: http://www.aran-park.es/.

[319] "*Si vols veure ossos i fauna salvatge ja hi ha Aran Park, i allà no fan mal a ningú*" (Òc, 13/9/2018).

[320] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gH25c4RW17c.

[321] See Chapter 2.

[322] "*Des de Turisme Val d'Aran no hem fet res [respecte a l'os]… no sé si és perquè no hem sabut com fer-ho o perquè hem mirat cap a una altra banda*" (Lola, 13/1/2020).

[323] See Chapter 4.

not even mentioned as a tourism resource!"[324] Likewise, a tourist once shared with me her surprising experience in the Salardú tourist office when she asked where she could see a bear in Val d'Aran. "We don't have bears in Val d'Aran," the staff member told her, adding, "the only place you can see a bear is in a zoo [referring to Aran Park]." Given these previous reports about the area, was the *bear man* really going to take us to this tourist attraction to see a wild bear? From his smile I doubted it, but I could not be sure.

I am relieved to see we are not travelling in the direction of Aran Park but heading to the Varradòs valley, a semicircular canyon that connects the High and Middle Aran regions and is well known for bear sightings in Val d'Aran—relatively speaking, since bears are still difficult to spot anywhere in the Pyrenees. After driving up the winding cement track running beside the Varradòs mountain stream, we park next to another car with a French license plate. The driver is standing on the track with binoculars around his neck. He turns out to be a member of a French volunteer team involved in monitoring brown bears in the Pyrenees.

The landscape on the other side of the valley is stunning. Abundant streams spring up all over and run down a steep slope, tumbling over rocky cliffs, while an exuberant green embraces the entire scene in those magic hours before twilight in the middle of spring.

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[324] "*[N]o ho estem fent bé, perquè aquí, és un tema que ni surt com a recurs turístic*" (Toni, 13/10/2018).

Figure 75. Landscape of the Varradòs valley in the evening (6/6/2019).

Lowering his binoculars, our guide tells us this is one of the sites where he has spotted bears in Val d'Aran. Among them, he especially remembers a female called Nhèu ("snow" in Occitan).[325] Carles believes this bear's appearance over three consecutive seasons around 2010 marked a turning point in public attitudes toward the renewed presence of bears in the Pyrenees. Photographs of this female were published in the National Geographic magazine, and they managed to shift the critical editorial line of one of the most influential newspapers in Catalonia, *La Vanguardia*, to one of support. He also recalls how that moment laid the foundations for an incipient minority tourist activity in the Pyrenees: bear watching. Given the institutional invisibility of the bears in Val d'Aran, the fact that almost 1,000 people came to the Varradòs

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[325] Naming bears has been undertaken either by the public administrations—Aran, Catalan or French governments—or through participatory processes via social media organized by the DEPANA NGO and in schools from Catalonia (Val d'Aran or Pallars Sobirà) and southern France.

valley to watch this bear during the spring of 2010 must be understood as remarkable. "This is bear country," he states with pride after a long silence.[326]

I cannot stop myself from connecting Carles's proclamation with the sense of awe I feel listening to the relaxing sound of the water in the ravines, the dim light of the sunset and the beauty attached to the wilderness. My ingrained urbanite view of nature and landscape as an object of reverence momentarily dislodges any critical anthropological engagement with those terms, and all of a sudden, through an unconscious "ecotourism discourse" (Fletcher 2009) the bear landscape equates to nature and beauty writ large.

Some minutes later, seeing no evidence of any bears on that steep, lush mountain slope, he prompts us to get into the jeep and go higher up where we might have a better chance of spotting one. As soon as we alight, a rush of chill air blows into our faces. We follow Carles's steps toward a narrow, open trail. A few metres ahead, he lies down on the ground in what seems to be a methodical position for the task before him. Leaning his body back against the slope of the ridge, he uses his right elbow to keep a steady hand as he holds the binoculars in silence. The quietness of the moment is only disturbed by the sound of the wind. I stand right beside him, my hands empty, while my wife walks some metres away holding another pair of binoculars. Minutes pass by with no news as I stare across the valley, with no idea where to fix my attention. Then he says what we've been longing to hear: "A bear… I've seen a bear!" With no attempt to contain myself I yell at my wife: "He's spotted a bear!" I have to repeat it twice or three times because the wind whisks my words away. In the short time it takes her to reach us, Carles

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[326] "*Això és el país de l'os*" (Carles, 6/6/2019).

whispers: "It's gone… It's leaving…" I still have not seen anything, but I am afraid that the bear is about to head over the hill into another valley, so our chance has gone.

We quickly follow his instructions and get back into the jeep. Carles grabs a tripod and a telescope and sets them up. Although I do not see the bear through the lens, a feeling of relief comes over us. The bear is out of sight, but it has just walked down into a hollow, not to the other side of the ridge.

It is close to 8 pm and a cloud anticipates the sunset.

Soon after, a dark brown male bear walks out of its provisional shelter. Through the telescope, binoculars, and even the naked eye we manage to follow its movements. Intermittent patches of snow highlight the visual contrast with its dark brown fur. What strikes me most is the disparity of its movements. While the bear's gait seems slow and awkward as I follow it with my eyes, I am astonished by the distance and steep gradient it manages to cover in such a short period.

The sequence lasts several minutes, and Carles asks me to tell him the moment the bear is about to enter an area of snow so that he can start filming.[327] "It's the king," he affirms. Fascination might be the feeling that best summarizes the sequence.

Once the bear lopes out of sight, there is no evidence of its presence in the landscape, only in our memories. With his fist raised high and a wide-open smile, Carles shouts with joy

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Bear in the Pyrenees (Video).mp4

[327] Clip ceded by Marc Alonso:

into the air: "Hallelujah!" We wrap up the moment with a group hug. He looks as happy as we are, clearly proud of having enabled us to see a wild bear in the Pyrenees. For him, the 148th, for us, the first and only one.

Silence pervades the atmosphere inside the jeep on our way back. Once home, we send text messages, pictures, and videos to our relatives and friends to share our breathtaking feeling of joy.

## The Salau encounter and the unexpected irruption of the bear

That evening on the slope was the most personal, intimate, and tangible encounter I had with a bear during my fieldwork. It was an exceptional moment, "our bear experience," in a context in which the bear was overwhelmingly present, but almost always invisible to the senses. The single glimpse of a live bear contrasts with numerous instances in which I encountered traces they had left or heard about the conflicts over the reintroduction program. Some footprints on a trail as I was hiking in the mountains; tufts of fur tangled in pieces of wire nailed onto a tree trunk as I was going walkabout with the bear program monitoring staff; in-depth interviews with farmers and shepherds about livestock casualties; conferences and talks devoted to the interactions between wildlife and livestock, particularly the symposium on "European experiences in damage prevention" and "The return of large carnivores in mountain areas" held in the municipality of Alt Àneu in 2019;[328] news stories in the media; participating in the documentary *El No a l'os.*

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[328] **¡Error! Referencia de hipervínculo no válida.**

*Crònica d'un conflicte* [Saying no to the bear. Story of a conflict] (Freixa and Camps 2021) shot between 2018 and 2019; or getting involved in a mediation process promoted by the Catalan government between 2019 and 2020 to set up a roundtable with different stakeholders following one of the peaks in the social conflicts over the bear program in the Pyrenees.

One notable instance of the bear's invisible presence occurred the morning I joined an outing in the Bonabé valley organized by the High Pyrenees Natural Park.

I had barely slept three hours when the alarm went off. Our oldest son had been awake with nightmares throughout the night. It was 6.30 am. I hesitated. Should I stay or should I go? In those brief, crucial moments lying in bed, I decided to get up. Maybe it was just the excitement, or I should say anxiety, of doing fieldwork. I did not want to miss *anything* of what was going on. This was the day of the "The Salau encounter," an activity organized by the High Pyrenees Natural Park, starting early in the morning, at 8 am. The Salau mountain pass is situated in the Bonabé valley, Alt Àneu,[329] a point that has historically connected populations in the French Occitania and the Spanish Catalonia. "For the last 31 years," the brochure tells us, "the Catalan and Occitan people have met at this mountain pass in the High Pyrenees Natural Park on the first Sunday of August to vindicate our shared history and our neighbouring languages… Let's make the Pyrenees a place of close association between Occitan and Catalan people."[330] This was the purpose of that day's outing.

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[329] See Introduction and Chapter 4 for the location of this valley and its importance for the historical and current interactions between livestock and bears that have taken place there.

[330] *Cada any, des de fa 31 edicions, catalans i occitans ens trobem el primer diumenge d'agost en aquest port del Parc Natural de l'Alt Pirineu per reivindicar la nostra història comuna i les nostres llengües germanes, però per sobre de tot fem d'aquesta data una jornada festiva en la qual la música i les danses tenen un paper principal, així com el vi català i el formatge occità que compartim tots a dalt del*

There was more traffic than usual along the narrow road leading to the meeting point. It took me around 45 minutes to get there, over the Bonaigua mountain pass, which separates the districts of Val d'Aran and Pallars Sobirà. Most of the cars were travelling up to the starting point for the hike to the Salau pass, but one car passed me going the opposite direction. Given the early hour, I would not be surprised if the car was driven by one of the shepherds hired by the Catalan government to tend the collective flocks as part of the sheep regrouping policy, the goal of which is to mitigate the negative impacts caused by bear attacks on livestock.[331] Perhaps it was his day off.

I arrived on time. The parking lot in front of the mountain refuge where the tarmac ends and the dirt track starts was full of cars. I did not count them all, but at a guess there were around forty. My attention was caught by a vehicle bearing the official logos of the Catalan government and the High Pyrenees Natural Park. To my surprise, Gerard, the park director, got out of the car. My efforts to overcome lack of sleep and tiredness seemed to have paid off. Since meeting him when I began my fieldwork, I had only managed to contact Gerard via email. That day, he would lead the group on a four-kilometre hike with a 700-metre ascent to the mountain pass, 2,100 metres above sea level, so I would have plenty of opportunity to speak and listen to him.

Around fifty people joined the hike. I do not know if they all came altogether, but their attire suggested that most of them had probably travelled from Barcelona on the bus organized by the CAOC (Occitan-Catalan Twinning Circle).[332] Although most were in their sixties, there

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port. *Fem del Pirineu un lloc d'unió entre occitans i catalans, almenys per un dia les nostres llengües es barregen i el sentiment de germanor és més gran que mai* (https://caoc.cat/pujada-al-port-de-salau-la-trobada-occitano-catalana-2/).

[331] See Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 for a critical account on, respectively, the origins of this policy and its conflictive implementation.

[332] https://caoc.cat/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Programa_Salau_2018.pdf

was also a notable presence of young people in their twenties and thirties. Several were wearing Catalan independence flags around their necks. And in the midst of this crowd was a sleepy ethnographer eager to absorb the institutional voice of the natural park director talking on a variety of topics to do with the Bonabé valley. Throughout our hike, I would stick by him, a notebook and pen at the ready and a cell phone for recording.

After half an hour of slow walking, with stops to comment on the historical routes across the mountain pass that were used to connect the Occitan and Catalan populations in times of war, exile or commerce, and in contrast to today's tourism and mining development projects in this valley, Gerard told us, "We've just passed through … a forest with hazelnut trees." And to my surprise, he added: "The hazelnut forest is very important, mostly for wildlife and in the fall, because hazelnuts provide food for many animals… the brown bear, among them."[333] In my recording of this observation, I also picked up a string of whispered comments from the audience: "Here we go, here we go"; "I didn't think you'd say that!"; "the bear comes here to eat?!" Our guide tried to calm the hubbub triggered by the invisible presence of the bear on our hike. First, he responded quickly and to the point: "Yes, it can come here. We are in a real place. But don't worry. A bear will smell you from far off and run away."[334] He then went on to explain what the trending topic in the media and in casual conversations among local villagers had been in the previous weeks: the high number of attacks on sheep, but also horses, caused by a single male bear called Goiat.

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[333] "*Ara hem passat … lo que és bosc d'avellaner, d'avellanosa. El bosc d'avellaner és molt important, sobretot de cara a la fauna, a la tardor, perquè les avellanes serveixen d'aliment a molts animals. Entre ells l'ós bru*" (Gerard, 5/8/2018).
[334] "*Sí pot venir aquí; estem en terreny autèntic. Però no patiu, un os … a un quilòmetre ja t'olora i ja ha fotut el camp*" (Gerard, 5/8/2018).

Goiat had been fitted with a GPS collar and released by the Catalan government in 2016, and after evidence of its high predatory behaviour in the following year, the foundations of this translocation rewilding project were shattered in 2018.[335] More than thirty articles were published over three months in two local (Val d'Aran and Pallars Sobirà) and two national (Catalan) newspapers, plus one article published in *The Guardian* on 22 July, 2018, titled "Goiat the bear may be expelled from Pyrenees over horse killings. Brown bear's fate could be worse still after he riles farmers with attacks on livestock."[336] Goiat's persistent attacks on horses—three killed in two and a half months—and sheep, sometimes very close to villages where the flocks were fenced off, were followed by a sequence of connected events in which local farmers, environmental NGOs, and the Aran and Catalan governments addressed and took a stance on this conflictive topic:

- On June 8, a meeting between the Aran and Catalan governments was held to examine and discuss Goiat's predatory behaviour;

- On June 11, persuasive measures were debated to prevent Goiat attacking livestock;

- On June 15, the Aran government asked the Catalan government to capture and expel Goiat from the Pyrenees;

- On June 28, some local farmers from Pallars Sobirà organized a demonstration calling for Goiat's capture;

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[335] See Chapter 4 for a detailed explanation of the chronology of the bear reintroduction program, the waves of translocations carried out by the French and Catalan governments over the last twenty years, and the relevance of this individual to overcome consanguinity issues within this reintroduction program. In May 2021, Goiat came back to the newspapers headlines, once it was suspected that this individual was responsible for the sudden increase of bear attacks on sheep in Val d'Aran.

[336] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/22/goiat-the-bear-may-be-expelled-from-pyrenees-over-horse-killings.

- On July 9, the Catalan government tabled a debate on the presence of bears in the Pyrenees in the Catalan Parliament;

- On July 14, the Catalan government announced that they would expel Goiat from the Pyrenees;

- On July 17, the Catalan government announced that Goiat's GPS batteries were running down;

- On July 18, the president of IPCENA, a Catalan environmental NGO with a radical stance supporting the presence of bears in the Pyrenees, blamed the local farmers for the increasing number of bear attacks, arguing that they were leaving their livestock in the high mountain pastures untended;

- On July 25, this NGO started a campaign to collect signatures against removing Goiat from the Pyrenees;

- Finally, in the same week as I was participating in "The Salau Encounter," the Unió de Pagesos, the largest farmers' union in Catalonia, organized a series of meetings to protest about the damage to livestock in the mountains caused by protected wildlife species, while a meeting in a Catalan hamlet near Val d'Aran titled "Coexisting with the brown bear. Conferences and debate about the brown bear in the Pyrenees and the coexistence with wildlife" attracted an unexpected number of attendees (mostly local farmers) to hear guest speakers from two environmental NGOs that had played a vital role in the bear reintroduction program: DEPANA (Defense of the Natural Heritage) and the Brown Bear Foundation (FOP in Spanish).

This series of events set the context for the scene between the director of the High Pyrenees Natural Park and the audience.

"Look," our guide went on with his explanations, "the only problem is that Goiat likes horse meat." He backed up this casual, slightly ironic, comment with a scientific discussion of brown bear nutritional patterns. "Bears are 80% herbivore, 20% carnivore. And the carnivorous part," he stressed, "is usually carrion… dead animals that they find in the mountains." But then he added a caveat: "They can also hunt live animals," of which "sheep are the easiest to attack." Given this scenario, he posed a pair of rhetorical questions: "So, what have we done about it? […] We have a good damage prevention policy for the sheep flocks. And how do we manage to do that? Well, by doing a bit of what our grandparents used to do… ever since the Neolithic times."[337]

Although this event was organized to commemorate the historical bonds between two regions—Catalonia and Occitania—within their respective states—Spain and France—the bear sneaked onto the centre stage. Gerard, our guide and director of the natural park, framed the current protection measures, funded and promoted by the Catalan government, as simply a return to what farmers and shepherds had been doing since time immemorial,[338] while also pointing out the relevance of hazelnut trees in the landscape to provide an important nutritional

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[337] "*A veure, el Goiat, el problema que té és el tema que li agrada la carn de cavall… la dieta dels óssos és 80% herbívora, 20% carnívora. I la part carnívora, normalment mengen carronya. Animals morts que es troben per la muntanya… Però també pot caçar animals vius. Entre ells, l'animal més fàcil d'atacar és l'ovella… I llavors, què s'ha fet des d'aquest punt de vista? … Una bona prevenció de danys en els ramats d'oví. I com s'aconsegueix això? Pues, fent una mica el que feien els nostres avis… des del neolític*" (Gerard, 5/8/2018). See Chapter 4 for a critical insight into the label of "prevention" accompanying the protection measures implemented by the public administrations to mitigate the number of sheep casualties caused by the bear attacks.

[338] See Chapter 4 for a critique of the notion of return to a certain past through an ethnographic approach to the historicity of shepherding practices in the Bonabé valley.

component in the bears' diet before they go into hibernation. In his view, hazelnut trees were an asset in the landscape since they improve the bear habitat. In short, Gerard brought up the two main points I will discuss in this chapter: restoration and improvement linked to the reintroduction of brown bears in the Pyrenees.

In the Bonabé valley, where the Salau pass is situated, the passive expansion of hazelnut forests was also coupled with an active environmental engineering project. Toward the end of the PirosLIFE project, an EU-funded program managed by the Catalan government (2015-2019) whose main goal was to consolidate the bear population in the Pyrenees,[339] a controversial task was carried out in the fall of 2018: fruit trees were planted to enhance the bears' natural corridors. The project was backed by the Brown Bear Foundation and the local council of the villages of Isil and Alós (Decentralized Municipal Entity or EMD of Isil and Alós) and with funding from a hydroelectric company,[340] and claimed to improve not only the bear habitat but also the landscape in general. The following excerpt from a recorded interview with Sílvia, the former mayor of these two villages, strikingly illustrates the extent to which these landscape improvements tie into the notion of restoration or the return to a certain origin:

> Sílvia: We're trying it out to see what happens… I can't tell you this will … [be good]
> … but you know, planting some of these [fruit trees] won't be bad for us.
>
> Me: Does the EMD get anything from it? Or is it simply…

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[339] See Chapter 4 for an explanation about the goals, achievements, and failures of this project.
[340] See Chapter 3 for a description of the institutional role developed by EMDs within the town councils of Naut Aran and Alt Àneu. Isil and Alós are the two villages grouped in one single EMD within the municipality of Alt Àneu. These two villages hold rights to Bonabé's collective pastures and forests.

Sílvia: No, we don't. We just give them permission to plant… We transferred the land…

Me: … and that's it… for the use of common lands… this isn't like the cows [that come in transhumance and pay a tax] that contribute to… [municipal funds].

Sílvia: That's not the case, because we believe *this is an improvement for the territory* … Here there's also some work … that will be carried out in spring [2019] that consists of clearing twenty hectares of scrubland… It's part of the same project: planting and clearing to turn scrub into pastures, *to return [the landscape] to its origin, what it used to be like before.*[341]

The bear program thus links together restoration and improvement through discursive maneuvers or tricks that justify the renewed presence of brown bears in the Pyrenees. Following Tania Li (2007), I approached both restoration and improvement through estrangement. Departing from this vantage point, in the rest of this chapter I will critically engage with both to reveal the ways in which the bear program produces a new landscape rather than restoring a previous one, and why this *bear landscape* is not always considered as evidence of improvement.

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[341] *- Intentem fer la prova a veure què passa... jo no te puc assegurar que sigui... però bueno, mal no ens en fa de plantar unes quantes d'això...*
*- Això l'EMD s'emporta alguna cosa? O senzillament...*
*- No, només donem un permís perquè puguin plantar... Hem fet una cessió...*
*- Ja està... per l'ús aquest dels comunals... no és com les vaques que aporten un [ingressos]...*
*- No, perquè entenem que és fer una millora al territori. Entenem que ho fem en funció de fer una millora. Aquí junt amb això també hi va un tema … que el farem a la primavera... que és desbrossar unes 20 hectàrees … Dins del mateix projecte hi ha la plantació i el desbrossar... per convertir-lo en prat... per retornar al seu origen, com era abans* (25/11/2018).

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The dual process of *designing-as-if-restoring* (as our ancestors have been doing since Neolithic times) and *designing-as-if-improving* (the bear as a species that improves the landscape) is underpinned by the hegemonic idioms of heritage (Franquesa 2013) and moral ecology (Griffin, Jones, and Robertson 2019b; Jacoby 2001), and it unfolds through two kinds of trick: time displacements and moral assumptions, both fraught with ambiguities and contradictions. The combination of heritage and moral ecology leads to a twofold *naturalization* process, in which the renewed presence of bears is both *naturalized* or taken for granted, based on the allegedly hegemonic values provided by heritage-making processes, and presented as making the Pyrenees more natural; and a *naturalizing* element that improves the landscape in accordance with the green moral ecology of the bear program. Considering that "the representation," and even more the design "of landscape is not innocent of a politics" but rather the political arena in which power relations unfurl (Darby 2000, 9), the examination of how heritage and moral ecology operate together in the production of a *bear landscape* through the notions of restoration and improvement must serve to counter this dual naturalization.

## Restoration and its tricks: space, time, and heritage

"The bear was coeval… Although people were not aware of it, there were bears until recent times"

(Toni, Member of DEPANA)[342]

Although the translocation of bears from Slovenia to the Pyrenees is defined as a reintroduction program, it is also conceived to be a recovery project. The Catalan Director of Environment pointed out the difference between these two terms—reintroduction and recovery—in the Catalan Parliament. The former assumes that a species has become extinct, whereas the latter implies an active plan to prevent it from being wiped out. Paradoxically, the bear program in the Pyrenees combines the two options. The Director of Environment implicitly explained this paradox as follows:

When the so-called 'reintroduction' began [in 1996],[343] which is actually a recovery project, there were four or five bears left in the Western Pyrenees. In the Central part [of the range] … not one remained, however.[344]

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[342] "*L'os és coetani, encara que la gent no fos conscient, hi havia ossos fa molt poc*" (Toni, 13/10/2018).

[343] See Chapter 4 for an overview of the origins and the chronology of the waves of releases of bears translocated from Slovenia into the Pyrenees.

[344] "*Quan es comença això que en diuen 'la reintroducció,' que de fet és un projecte de recuperació, … quedaven quatre o cinc ossos a la part occidental del Pirineu. A la part central, que és la nostra, … ja no*" (13/2/2019). The quote was retrieved from an open transcript available on the Catalan Parliament website: https://www.parlament.cat/ext/f?p=700:1::::::.

At the symposium on damage prevention in the face of the return of large carnivores, an expert involved in the first wave of releases in the French Pyrenees clarified this controversy by recalling who took this decision and why it was taken:

> It's always surprising that the last brown bears were in the Western Pyrenees at the end of 1980s; the bear had disappeared in the Central Pyrenees, and we decided to translocate in the Central and not in the Western Pyrenees… In the Western Pyrenees … the political situation never supported translocation…, [whereas] in the Central Pyrenees we had local agreement with several mayors, and locally the population [in the French Central Pyrenees] was in favour of brown bear restoration. And that's why the French Ministry decided to translocate in this area. It was an opportunistic decision.

In sum, what was supposed to be a *recovery* or *restoration* project to reinforce the waning population of brown bears settled in the Western Pyrenees turned out to be a *reintroduction* program in the Central part of the mountain range, where bears were already extinct in 1996.[345] Toni, a member of DEPANA (see opening quote of this section), who monitored the scant evidence of bears in Val d'Aran over the late 1980s and early 1990s in collaboration with Carles, the *bear man* from

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[345] See Chapter 4 for a discussion around the notion of "extinction," and the distinction between "actual" and "mental or social" extinction of bears in the Pyrenees.

Salardú (see Alonso and Toldrà 1993), added a socioeconomic factor to this decision in an in-depth interview at my apartment:

> The French valleys on the other side [of the mountain range] are the poorest ones in France. They are broke! They are completely ruined. And the French [local governments], which are always more clever at dealing with international issues, said to themselves: 'We'll set up something… For the money.' This is how it goes… And here [in the French Central Pyrenees], there was a political opportunity… And they [mayors from the French Central Pyrenees] thought: 'If they [mayors from other parts of the range] are stupid and the money is coming here, we'll take it.' And that's it. That's why you have these signposts: 'Welcome to bear country' … 'Houses of the bear' [museums devoted to the brown bear], all this. And sure, there was a relative acceptance, but in the end, they thought, look, this is what it is [money and territorial survival]. And well, that's why it [the bear] was put here [in the Central Pyrenees].[346]

The geographical dissonance between where the bears from Slovenia should have been released following a conservation biology criterion—Western Pyrenees—and where they were actually translocated for political and socioeconomic reasons—French Central Pyrenees—reveals the extent to which a regional political ecology prevailed over the strict conservation of the brown

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[346] *"Les valls d'aquest costat de França són les més pobres de tota França. No tenen ni un duro. Estan en una situació de ruïna absoluta. I els francesos, que sempre són més llestos amb el tema internacional... van dir, bueno, pues muntarem algo... Per la pasta ... És així... I aquí, va haver l'oportunitat política... i aquests van dir, si aquests [els del Pirineu Atlàntic] estan fotent el gilipollas i aquí va pasta [Pyrénées Centrales], ens l'ha quedem nosaltres. I ja està. Per això tens aquests cartells: 'Bienvenue au pays de l'ours.' Tot això que tenen aquí. Cases de l'os, i tot això. I sí, acceptació relativa ... però bueno al final van dir, mira, això va de lo que va. I bueno, per això es va posar aquí"* (Toni, 13/10/2018).

bear in the Pyrenees in the foundational actions of this reintroduction program. In order to better understand the conflicts that have arisen with the farming sector since the outset of the program, it is crucial to focus on the politics that have controlled its decision-making processes.

Considering that "space is linked to concepts of power" (Darby 2000, 15) and following the spatio-temporal approach to locality proposed by Arjun Appadurai, who stressed that the production of locality is "intended to open up the question of 'time' and 'temporality'" (1995, 227 f.n. 2), I contend that the bear program operates through the politics not only of space but also, and principally, of time. In other words, the *bear country* or the *bear landscape* has been construed *in* space, but above all *through* time.[347] The notion of restoration underpinned by the idiom of heritage becomes crucial at this point.

According to the director of the High Pyrenees Natural Park and the Catalan Director of Environment, the bear program is purely and simply the restoration of an enduring landscape in which the local farmers are asked "to do a bit of what [their] grandparents used to do… ever since the Neolithic times," that is "to watch over and fence off [the flocks]." Applying the notion of restoration in this rough time span, from the mid-twentieth century (the grandparents' times) back to the Neolithic era, is problematic since it undermines both historical changes in the farming sector, specifically over the last century, and the ongoing transformations in shepherding practices that the renewed presence of bears has entailed for most local farmers.[348]

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[347] See Conclusions for further explanations on how both Baqueira Beret and the bear program have produced the landscape transformations *through* time.

[348] See Chapter 4 for a thorough examination of the historical changes through an ethnographic approach to the historicity of shepherding practices over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the Bonabé valley, and Chapter 6 for the new territorialities and the ensuing conflicts the renewed presence of bears in the Catalan Pyrenees brought about.

Such critical insight into the notion of restoration ties into the term *time-tricking* and the two ways it can be understood, according to Felix Ringel: past-tricking or tricking knowledge about the temporal processes (i.e., the construction and contents of the succession of before and after) and future-tricking or tricking the contents of time (Ringel 2016a). Restoration involves both, since it not only attempts to trick the knowledge about the past, but also to draw a smooth timeline from the past to the future. Restoration thus conjoins the temporal politics of the past, in which "what is tricked is the social, contextually concrete reference to the presumed past" (Ringel 2016a, 25), and the politics on the future, in which what is tricked "is the presumed ontological openness of the future" (Ringel 2016a, 28). In other words, restoration prompts us to ask which past times we are restoring, but also whether or not we are actually dealing with the past when we speak of restoration. While in the previous chapter I addressed the issues raised in the first part of this inquiry through an ethnographic approach to the historicity of shepherding practices, in what follows I will show how the bear program produces a new landscape while claiming to restore an old one. Through what I call *designing-as-if-restoring*, the bear program purports to restore a certain earlier landscape by retrieving some of its socioecological components (i.e., bears, shepherds, and livestock guardian dogs) while it actually designs a new landscape. The transition from restoration to design follows two steps.

First, the bear program as a translocation rewilding strategy, with its focus on "species introductions and reintroductions as a way to restore ecosystem[s] … before [they] were profoundly altered by human impacts" (Nogués-Bravo et al. 2016, 87), follows Noel Castree and Bruce Braun's analysis on how nature has been construed over the last decades. "[F]ormerly productive landscapes," these authors assert, "languish or become remade both materially and semiotically through the practices of 'ecological restoration'" (1998, 2). And second, this

ecological restoration brings forward a new landscape that requires an environmental engineering process in which nature is no longer understood to be just protected but also designed (Beltran and Vaccaro 2019). The time displacements of ecological restoration reside in the combination of looking back, toward the past, and looking forward, toward the future. "Time's irreversible arrow," as David Lowenthal puts it, "makes restoration an ultimately impossible ideal" that is nonetheless "habitually den[ied] or wish[ed] away, as seen especially in efforts to recover … 'natural' landscapes" (Lowenthal 2015, 20). Time-tricking in terms of the production of landscapes as restoration aligns with what Albert Pèlachs, a geographer from the Research Group on Mountain Areas and Landscape (GRAMP in Catalan), succinctly pointed out in reference to the ingrained ontological and epistemological ambiguity of any given landscape:

> The landscape is never the same in the same place. Landscapes are constantly changing … and this is part of their very essence … Therefore, … any intention to recover [or restore] landscapes from the past makes no sense at all. The landscape can only be contemplated in terms of the future, even though it is studied from the past.[349]

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[349] "*Els paisatges estan en continu canvi ... i això forma part de la pròpia naturalesa del paisatge... Per tant, ... pretendre recuperar paisatges del passat no té cap sentit. El paisatge només es pensa en clau de futur, tot i que s'estudia en clau de passat*" (http://www.pirineustv.cat/2019/05/03/el-paisatge-canvia-i-aixo-es-inevitable-i-bo/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+pirineustv+%28Not%C3%AD cies+a+Pirineus+TV%29). This idea was already pointed out by the GRAMP research group: "The relationship between environmental geohistory researchers and environmental managers is essential. Incorporation of a long-term perspective is necessary to making decisions for the future. *The error is found in attempts to replicate the past because the choices made will always be arbitrarily based on a point in time and space that cannot be repeated*. Therefore, the past may be an imperfect model for the future, but it is an essential consideration because it reveals the possibilities for biodiversity" (Pèlachs Mañosa, Soriano López, and Pérez Obiol 2017, 125. My emphasis).

Following Melissa Baird, who considers that the "[a]nthropology of heritage landscapes is about the sociopolitical contexts of landscapes as heritage" and "[h]eritage landscapes … include … wildlife management and wilderness areas" (2017, 4), heritage is also crucial to understanding the justifications made by the bear program's proponents. Specifically, the bear program must be understood as a heritage-making process that produces a wild heritage landscape following a necessary three-stage valuation sequence: loss, latency, and restoration (Pons Raga 2015; 2020). Through this sequence new values are added to tangible (objects, places, species) or intangible (knowledge and practices) elements when they enter the realm of heritage. The first phase of loss presupposes the disappearance of a certain element in a given moment in time; the second phase of latency is not usually explicitly stated, but it is actually a crucial factor for adding heritage values to the *lost element*. Heritagizable elements must pass through a liminal state in which they are no longer used or conceived of as they would have been in the past, but they are not still valued as they will be in the future. They are neither one thing nor the other, to use Turner's terminology (1970). Interestingly, how long the liminal or latent state lasts may be relevant in the heritage-making valuation of the element to be restored. Finally, the restoration phase consists of a process that claims to save elements from a fragmented past but by transposing uses and values (del Mármol 2012). In the production of a wild heritage landscape that is underpinned by the notion of restoration, the bear has thus become the crucial element of a translocation rewilding project that follows this sequence. The erasure of bears from the local farmers' minds, or what Oriol, an expert from the bear program described as the "mental extinction of the bear,"[350] over a period of roughly two generations, would equate to the liminal or latent phase,

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[350] See Chapter 4.

in which bears were neither hunted nor protected, but simply considered extinct by society. As a result, the brown bear, as Robert, a young shepherd from a collective flock once told me, "disappeared… [and now] it is 'our panda.'"[351]

This sequence of valuation draws on the analysis of heritage-making processes through keeping and selling, developed by Jaume Franquesa in light of Annette Weiner's work (2013). Approached this way, heritage is an economic mechanism upon which an object, a place, or in this case a wildlife species, which has been kept away from the market for some time, may become an asset "at the complex intersection of temporal, cultural, and social factors" (Appadurai 1986, 15), whether it has been *kept for* or *against selling* it (Franquesa 2013). In this case, the bear is valued and adds value to the landscape it is part of by activating a double heritage-making process: the bear is presented as both the quintessential environmental hallmark for biodiversity conservation, whose renewed presence serves to restore lost Pyrenean natural heritage values from the past; and it is also catalyst for the restoration of vanishing sociocultural heritage values represented by the social figure of shepherds and the shepherding practices in the high mountain pastures.[352]

Consequently, the bear is often presented as an opportunity for and even the saviour of the primary sector, considered to be in dire straits regardless of the bears' presence in the Pyrenees. Given this apocalyptic or at least uncertain, devalued present, both opportunity and salvation hint at hopeful and revalued futures tied to a leisure-based economy underpinned by the idiom of heritage. In line with this view, Toni, the member of DEPANA mentioned earlier,

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[351] "*aquest animal va desaparèixer… és el nostre 'panda' ara*" (21/8/2018).
[352] See Chapter 4 and Chapter 6 for a description and analysis of the return of shepherds through a regrouping policy organized by the Catalan and Aran governments with EU funds.

argued that the bear should be considered a potential asset that could benefit the local population, as in other parts of the world:

> Unfortunately, the primary sector here is broken, with or without bears. And yes, maybe you can say, 'bears, that's the final straw!' But it could be seen in another way. It could be interpreted as an opportunity, which is the interpretation that's missing … the one that is hard to do… even twenty years later. But the bear is a world-class tourist asset! Wherever you go bears are a top tourist resource ... everywhere but here![353]

The president of the Brown Bear Foundation also argued that the bear should be seen as an asset in rural settings, given the widespread depopulation experienced in most rural areas since the mid-twentieth century:

> The bear will not revive the economy of a region, for sure. Not at all! But it all adds up. And given the situation in the rural areas, I think everything that makes a contribution is interesting. … [The bear] is an asset that brings much [economic] activity and attraction. This is undeniable."[354]

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[353] "*Aquí, desgraciadament, el moviment, el sector primari està fatal, amb ossos i sense ossos. Sí, potser, 'és que només ens faltava l'os!'. Sí, potser sí, però també es podria fer la lectura com a oportunitat, que és la lectura que manca... o que és difícil de fer. I que ara, i que 20 anys després segueix semblant difícil de fer. Però l'os és un recurs turístic de primer ordre a tot el planeta! Vagis on vagis on hi ha ossos és un recurs turístic de primer ordre... menys aquí!*) (Toni, 13/10/2018).

[354] *Todo esto, evidentemente, no va a levantar la economía de una zona. De ninguna manera! Pero suma. Y como el medio rural está como está, todo lo que suma creo que es interesante… Es un recurso que genera mucha actividad y mucha atracción. Eso es innegable* (Pablo at a conference about "The bear and ecotourism" held in Pallars Sobirà, 12/6/2019).

The Catalan Director of Environment also emphasized that the increase of big fauna in the Catalan Pyrenees should be considered as an economic opportunity: "There are countries that take great advantage of their big fauna like bears to do business. And we, knowing that the bear *is* here, can also consider using it to make a profit."[355]

All these viewpoints highlight the potential benefits of the renewed presence of bears despite the local farmers' anxiety, especially given the already impoverished situation of the primary sector. Besides these potential benefits, which look forward, the bear program is also presented, looking backward, as nothing other than the restoration of both natural and cultural heritage, epitomized by the bear and shepherding practices, respectively. However, what appears to be a win-win scenario that local farmers should accept has turned into a deeply embedded conflict with the primary sector.

Civil society, NGOs, and social scientists increasingly extol heritage as a way to add value to the farming sector and herding practices, and it is indeed often embraced by a wide range of social actors to vindicate the value of extensive husbandry. The president of the French NGO FIEP (Fond d'Intervention Eco-Pastoral) asserted, for example, "that both shepherds and bears must live in the mountains. They both are part of the Pyrenean identity. They are … natural, cultural, and social heritage for us."[356] On a more local scale, the Aran Association for Natural Heritage has attributed cultural heritage values to herding practices in recent times, following the dramatic reduction in the number of local farmers since the 1960s.[357] Similarly, one of the goals

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[355] Retrieved from a TV program ("Tens debat sobre el futur de l'os bru al Pirineu" 2018).
[356] "*tienen que vivir en el monte el pastor y el oso. Ambos forman parte de la identidad del Pirineo. Son patrimonio natural y cultural, y social para nosotros. Y quiero decir que el uno no puede estar sin el otro*" (1/8/2018). FIEP is an NGO created in France in 1975 to promote both the conservation of the brown bear and the support for pastoralism in the Western Pyrenees.
[357] https://patrimoninaturauaran.org.

of the Àgata project, carried out by a Catalan university (UVic), is to "promote ecological and sociocultural heritage values associated with extensive husbandry." In an informal conversation with the project's main researcher, whom I met while she accompanied a group of local farmers selecting their sheep in the mountains, told me that the project's main goal was to make farming practices visible and to give them renewed value through heritage-making processes. Likewise, a group of scholars, including myself, explicitly analyzed the connections between herding practices and heritage-making processes in a panel at the 2019 SIEF Conference titled "Transforming transhumances: pastoralism, 'heritagization', and new rural economies."[358] Finally, the idiom of heritage also chimes with another set of stakeholders: new young shepherds recently hired to tend the collective flocks set up by the public administrations to protect the sheep from bear attacks.[359] Robert, one of these shepherds, enthused: "But I'm proud of the word 'heritage'! If someone tells me that my job is heritage it means … that is something we must preserve because it gives an added value; it provides Catalonia or this region with character."[360]

Despite the increasingly widespread use of heritage to add value to extensive husbandry, I draw on Franquesa to address the bear program's failure to gain farmers' acceptance by considering that "heritage is not only a *hegemonic idiom* articulating hegemonic and counterhegemonic projects but also and foremost an *idiom of hegemony*, framing conflicts in terms

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[358] The panel is going to lead to the publication of a book under the title *Grazing Communities: Pastoralism on the Move and Biocultural Heritage Frictions* (Bindi in press).

[359] See Chapter 6 for a thorough analysis on the role developed by these social actors in the new network of relationships between the public administrations and the local farmers.

[360] "*Però jo em sento orgullós de la paraula patrimoni! Si a mi em diuen que la meva feina és un patrimoni, no és que s'està a punt d'extingir, i que és algo que hem de preservar perquè li dona valor afegit, que li dona caràcter a Catalunya o a aquesta zona*" (Robert, 21/8/2018).

that, by concealing their connection with broader issues of political economy, are advantageous to dominant groups" (2013, 347). Franquesa uses the dual meaning of "hegemonic" to "pay attention to the articulation of both *consent* and *conflict*" with regard to the idiom of heritage (2013, 347 f.n. 1). Win-win narratives attached to heritage values, which claim to benefit multiple stakeholders—shepherds/farmers, biologists, politicians, tourists, etc.—or even society at large, crumble in the face of the stubbornness of grounded realities and how these realities are experienced by the local farmers. The notion of restoration underpinned by heritage as an idiom of the hegemony, regardless of its portrayal as a simple, straightforward process, is actually fraught with the uncertainties and unpredictability of any landscape design. Furthermore, although this idiom may recognize the value of local farmers' knowledge and practices as intangible cultural heritage values, most of these farmers do not recognize their practices under the idiom of heritage. Therefore, heritage ends up enlarging rather than closing the chasm between the conservation/tourism and the farming sectors. This analysis is inspired by the approach to "recognition" put forward by Svarstad and Benjaminsen, who stressed that recognition is one of the key elements from the radical justice tradition in political philosophy that "concerns who is given respect (or not) and whose interests, values and views are recognized and taken into account" (2020, 1). These reflections also draw on Toncheva and Fletcher's argument in their analysis of the cohabitation of humans and bears in Bulgaria (2021); these authors highlight the importance of recognition in the success of environmental policymaking.

Restoration weaves into and is also reinforced by the notion of improvement underpinned by another hegemonic idiom, namely moral ecology, which provides the bear program with the discursive scaffolding to display the landscape produced by and through the renewed presence of bears as proof of improvement. In the next section, I will examine the

discursive maneuvers or tricks of the bear program's green moral ecology and point out its ambiguities and contradictions, which revolve around equating design to improvement through what I call *designing-as-if-improving*.

## Improvement and its tricks: the green moral ecology of the bear program

In September 2019, a big event took place in the municipality of Alt Àneu. Funded through the PirosLIFE project, a two-day international symposium on "European experiences in damage prevention" and "The return of large carnivores in mountain areas" brought together a handful of local farmers and shepherds, but a large number of experts and scientists working on the brown bear in different parts of Europe—mostly France, Italy, Slovenia, and Poland. The talks were given in a spacious auditorium in a large, bioclimatic building in the heart of the countryside opened in 2002 "to raise awareness … of sustainable development, and nature and landscape conservation."[361] At one of the round tables titled "Large predators, an asset for the territory," both the president of the Brown Bear Foundation and a Spanish scientist, a member of the Institute of Nature Conservation in Krakow, Poland, argued that the brown bear may benefit the territories where it lives in terms of wildlife biodiversity values and economic revenues. In the Q&A session after their contributions, I asked about the specific ecological role this large carnivore plays in a given ecosystem.

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[361] https://monnaturapirineus.com/ca/que-es-monnatura.

The main aim of my question was to explore whether such scientific explanations could be used as an alternative idiom to that of heritage and the notion of restoration, which might open up new avenues among stakeholders in the wake of the conflicts caused by the renewed presence of bears in the Pyrenees. In other words, I was eager to find out to what extent the reintroduction of the brown bear could be regarded as an ecological asset beyond its image and the imaginary of a large carnivore linked to wildlife biodiversity or natural heritage values; beyond the banner of "our panda," to borrow the shepherd's expression mentioned above. These ecological reasons may recognize and be recognized by both the conservationist and farming sectors.

I borrow the term "moral ecology" from Karl Jacoby (2001) to analyze the answer I received at the symposium on the return of large carnivores in mountain areas as well as other ethnographic data from different interviews and observations, including several visits to the House of the Bear museum in the village of Isil. However, instead of using the term "as a specific attempt to explain the dwelt experience of conservation as locally practised" (Griffin, Jones, and Robertson 2019a, 7) to counter what Brockington et al. refer to "the mainstream conservation discourse" (2008), I propose, following Jacoby (2019), to use moral ecology in the plural form, *moral ecologies*, to stress that natural heritage values attached to protected wildlife species such as the brown bear are also imbued with a moral ecology. Approached in this way, the analysis of the moral ecology of the bear program reveals the extent to which the notion of improvement around the renewed presence of this species in the landscape is fraught with ambiguities and contradictions that spark contestation.

In the remaining pages of this chapter, I will split into two parts the analysis of the moral ambiguities and assumptions associated with bears' supposed contribution to improving the landscape. First, I will address the biological characteristics of the bear as a species, focusing on the ecological categories of "large carnivore" and "umbrella species." And second, I will critically scrutinize the production of the *bear landscape* as proof of improvement by analyzing a project to plant thousands of fruit trees in the Bonabé valley.

**The bear: a large herbivorous carnivore and a green umbrella**

The Spanish scientist's answer to my question about the specific ecological contributions brown bears might make to the ecosystem leads on to one of their biological ambiguities: as a species, bears are large carnivores that are essentially herbivorous. "Well, they contribute...," the scientist replied hesitantly. "We don't know everything they contribute to nor the entirety of their interactions," she admitted, "but we are now working on the hypothesis [that they are] blueberry dispersers, because there seems to be a very close relationship… Blueberries depend on the bear and vice versa."[362] Considering that the symposium previously mentioned was designed to bring together experiences from different European countries about the tensions between large carnivores and livestock to shed light on the case of the brown bear in the Catalan High Pyrenees, I was dismayed by this answer. I imagined that the bears' role as blueberry dispersers may not be a sufficiently consistent argument to convince those who do not necessarily share

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[362] "*Bueno aportan... No tenemos conocimiento de todo lo que aportan y de todas las interacciones, pero... nosotros ahora mismo estamos trabajando con la hipótesis de dispersores de arándanos, porque parece que hay una relación muy cercana. O sea, pensamos nosotros que el arándano depende del oso, y también al revés*" (21/9/2019).

the biodiversity or natural heritage values attributed to the bear to accept its renewed presence. Was the dispersal of blueberry seeds such an important ecological task as to warrant spending millions of euros to translocate brown bears from Slovenia into the Pyrenees and to tackle the heated debates and increasing tensions with the farming sector? In addition, this reply also revealed an inherent ambiguity or contradiction. To what extent should the brown bear be labelled as a large carnivore or apex predator when its main ecological role is to disperse blueberry seeds?

The answer dismayed me, but it came as no surprise. Through my fieldwork I had already collected data from experts and sources that hinted at the dubious ecological role of the brown bear as a species within a given ecosystem.

When I asked Norbert, a member of the technical staff from the government of Val d'Aran, to define the bear in ecological terms, putting aside all the social and symbolic aspects, his response was striking: "The bear is a 200 kilo boar."[363] This equivalence was iterated by the same expert one year later, at a seminar dealing with the "compatible threshold" of bears in the Pyrenees, when the question of their ecological role was broached among the audience. "I always doubted it [the capacity of the brown bear as a large carnivore to regulate the population of other species]," he stated. "A brown bear," he added, "may equate to four or eight boars, depending on its size."[364] Toni, the member of DEPANA, also explained to me that "[the bear] is a carnivore… but its ecological function is very similar to a boar… They both occupy almost the

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[363] "*És un porc de 200 kilos*" (Norbert, 27/11/2018).

[364] "*Jo sempre l'he posat en dubte. Un os equival a quatre o vuit porcs, depenent de la mida*" (Norbert, 12/12/2019). The equivalence between bears and boars does not only relate to their ecological role; their physical resemblance has led some experts to make up a new neologism: "Jabaloso" (in Spanish this term derives from combining the semantic roots of *jabalí*—boar—and *oso*—bear—).

same niche. Because they are generalists, with a preference for plants, but they can eat anything… The role [bears] play is hard to [say]… They work as seed dispersers."[365] These explanations contrast with the definition of the brown bear as a large carnivore and the ensuing biodiversity values attached to it.

Following several studies about the ecological function large predators may play in a given ecosystem beyond their taxonomic identity (e.g., apex predator) or origin (e.g., native versus reintroduced) (Davis et al. 2011; Ritchie et al. 2012; Soulé et al. 2003), at the same seminar on the "compatible threshold" of bears in the Pyrenees mentioned above, a biologist assured attendees that brown bears have no proven capacity to control meso-predator or wild ungulate populations. Thus, these studies would challenge the ecological role of bears as large carnivores or apex predators. As a result, the brown bear is defined as a large, essentially herbivorous carnivore, or as a relative predator, since it is mostly inclined to eat ants, honey, and carrion (PirosLIFE. Butlletí 6, 2019),[366] and its only prey is not wild animals but livestock, mainly sheep but also foals and horses.

The permanent exhibition of the House of the Bear, located in Isil at the bottom of the Bonabé valley, provided a peculiar response to this ambiguity. A large display board with a message devoid of any explanation shows an adult bear climbing up a tree in search of fruit. The message reads: "The repentant carnivore."

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[365] "*perquè és un carnívor... però la seva funció ecològica és molt semblant a la del senglar… Pràcticament ocupen el mateix nínxol. Perquè són generalistes, amb predilecció pel menjar d'origen vegetal, però que aprofiten qualsevol cosa… El rol que juguen és difícil de… El paper ja es veu que … és dispersió de llavors*" (Toni, 13/10/2018).
[366] The percentage of nutrients of vegetal origins in a bear diet is estimated at 75-80%.
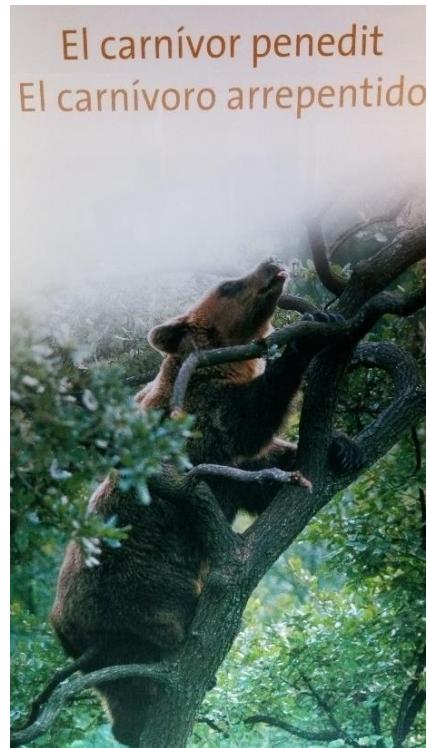
Figure 76. "The repentant carnivore." Picture of a display board from the House of the Bear, Isil, taken on August 10, 2017.

As bears evolved, they shifted from a carnivorous to an omnivorous diet and their jaws and teeth evolved accordingly. Although Carles, the *bear man* from Salardú, gave me this scientific explanation to justify the term in an informal conversation, the use of the word "repentant" in the museum was, to my mind, suggestive of a Christianity-inspired anthropomorphism; the

image seemed to humanize the bears' behaviour and convey an implicit message of remorse for attacking and killing livestock.[367]

Ethnographic data provided me with enough evidence that the values attributed to bears are not measured according to their ecological contributions as large carnivores, since they do not play such a role (e.g., controlling wild ungulate populations), but according to their powerful appeal to urban communities as repositories of lost natural values.

This appeal is also reinforced by two other scientific terms. The brown bear is defined as an *umbrella species* "with such demanding habitat and large area requirements that saving it will automatically save many other species" (Simberloff in Barua 2011, 1429) and a flagship species, that is, "an emblematic species that has become a symbol and leading element of an entire conservation campaign" (Simberloff in Barua 2011: 1429). Both categories are "inherently metaphorical" (Simberloff in Barua 2011, 1429). It is thus useful to approach them from Charles Peirce's semiotic principles.[368] Following this framework, the bear in the Pyrenees works both as a sign—umbrella—and as an icon and symbol—flagship—of a highly preserved natural environment tied to a conservationist green moral ecology, according to which the renewed presence of a large carnivore improves the landscape. In this equation, I contend that the bear

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[367] The aesthetics and the approach offered by the exhibition gave me the impression that it was planned and thought for children and a familial audience providing a Walt Disney-humanized image of the brown bear. While an interactive display composed of several wooden pieces with right-or-wrong questions printed in them, which the visitor had to roll down to find out the answer asserted that cubs and babies show a similar behaviour because "both spend the entire day doing pranks, playing or fighting with each other," the voice-over from the video clip that closes the exhibition asserted that "May triggers the months of love for bears."

[368] Considering the shifting interpretation of dreams by the Runa people, oscillating from metaphoric to literal, Eduardo Kohn departs from Peirce's sign-icon-symbol triadic system to develop a semiotic framework to better understand human-animal interactions. While Kohn's interest resides in the "space that the hyphen [between human and animals] seeks to bridge" (2007, 5), mine revolves around the moral values attributed by the bear program's proponents to a metaphorical term such as umbrella species.

is not only a sign of an allegedly unstoppable urbanite leisure-based conceptualization of the Pyrenees as a *natural reserve* but, crucially, it is a spearhead of this conceptualization.

The moral ecology of the bear program thus consists of connecting the presence of the bear to the banner of improvement. Interestingly, the umbrella species category acts as a sign of the quality of the environment, but it does not bring about its improvement *per se*. In fact, although umbrella species may seem to engage with the concept of biopower, "nurturing and sustaining life" (Fletcher 2010, 175), the bear epitomizes the canonical dictum expressed by political ecology scholars: who gains and who loses (Neumann 1992, 95). In other words, it may nurture the life of some at the expense of others.

As a result, the win-win scenario depicted by the biopower concept in line with the notion of improvement actually conceals a disparity between the role attributed to the bear in abstract biodiversity and concrete ecological terms. This disparity fits with the way bears are ambiguously classified as "large, essentially herbivorous carnivores," and this ambiguity sparks rather than appeases political contestations in light of the bears' ongoing harm to livestock, whether through direct attacks or by frightening and scattering them across the high mountain pastures.

I will use a case study of fruit tree planting in the Bonabé valley to show the extent to which the green moral ecology of the bear program goes beyond the biological characteristics of the species to encompass the landscape its presence produces. The *bear landscape* is not always seen as an improvement, so the possibility of improving the landscape through the renewed presence of bears crumbles. Fruit trees are much more tangible than the usually invisible bears. Equally tangible is the spread of hazelnut trees onto fields once cultivated by local farmers in

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the mid-range mountains. Given that the production of a *bear landscape* in the Pyrenees is surrounded by different moral ecologies, its production should follow the foundational dictums in both political ecology and technopolitical studies, which are deeply ingrained in this wildlife conservation program: nature is a contested terrain (Brechin and Fortwangler 2003); nature, and hence the bear, is "thick with politics" (Bijker 2007). The different values engendered by the renewed presence of the bears hint at the need to take into account the multiple moral ecologies surrounding this rewilding project.

**Planting trees in the Bonabé valley: Improving the landscape?**

Just as the *bear man* considered Varradòs to be the quintessential hallmark of *bear country* in Val d'Aran, Bonabé has the same reputation in Pallars Sobirà. Several historical facts and ecological features warrant this parallelism. Older farmers still recall the abundant presence of bears during the first half of the twentieth century as well as their shocking reappearance following their release in 1996. In between those distant and recent memories, the Catalan government gazetted one of the two Bear Reserves in 1987.[369] Today, around fifteen video cameras placed in specific locations help staff to monitor the bears' movements in this valley, and the House of the Bear is located in Isil, one of the two villages at the bottom of the Bonabé valley. For good reason Sílvia, the former mayor of the Isil and Alós EMD, defined Bonabé as the "jewel in the crown," because of its geomorphological and ecological conditions, and it was chosen by the experts

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[369] See Chapter 4.

from the Catalan government and the Brown Bear Foundation as the site to release Goiat in 2016.

In the fall of 2018, Bonabé was also chosen as the site to plant nine thousand autochthonous fruit trees, including apple and whitebeam, and other plants such as raspberries and umbellifers that had disappeared or were becoming less common in recent years. According to the Brown Bear Foundation, the purpose was "to improve the trophic quality of the brown bear in areas of connectivity in the Catalan Pyrenees and hence to reinforce its movements and territorial spread."[370] Planting thousands of fruit trees was claimed to improve not only the bears' habitat, though. "We understand it as an improvement for the territory,"[371] Sílvia assured me.

This claim derives from the concept of umbrella species, based on two critical, consecutive equivalences: improving the bears habitat equates to improving the environment, which in turn also translates to improving the landscape and territory. However, if it is questionable that the presence of bears improves a given ecosystem *per se*, since an umbrella species is allegedly merely an indicator of the quality of a habitat, then it is also questionable that its presence leads to the improvement of the landscape or territory as a whole. The design of a new landscape through the mostly invisible renewed presence of bears and the strikingly visible presence of apple and other fruit trees is thus deemed to improve the landscape through the discursive trick of *designing-as-if-improving*.

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[370] "*El objetivo de la acción de plantaciones y desbroces que coordina la FOP es mejorar la calidad trófica del oso pardo en zonas de conectividad del Pirineo leridano que facilite sus movimientos y dispersión*" (Brown Bear Foundation, 3/1/2019).
[371] "*entenem que és fer una millora al territori*" (Sílvia, 25/11/2018).

Figure 77. A herd of cows graze near one of the parcels where apple trees have recently been planted; the clearly visible white tubes in the landscape provide protection for the trees from damage by wild ungulates or livestock (23/6/2019).

The Bonabé valley is not only famous as the heart of *bear country* in Pallars Sobirà, however; it is also known as *sheep country* by its local inhabitants, especially the remaining sheep farmers in the two villages of Isil and Alós (three farmers belonging to two households who have around 1,000 sheep altogether). Probably for the same well-established geomorphological reasons that inclined the mayor to conceive Bonabé as "the jewel in the crown" (i.e., its calcareous soils and a maritime climate facing the Mediterranean watershed), the valley holds vast and valuable mountain pastures maintained by a historically high density of livestock, which rose to about 15,000 sheep a century ago, according to both the former mayor and Cèdric, a local farmer from Alós who

told me that "they said that there used to be around 14,000 sheep in Bonabé."[372] Compared with other grazing areas in the Catalan High Pyrenees, this activity still persists nowadays. In 2018, according to the official data in the Isil and Alós municipal archive, the livestock grazing on the Bonabé pastures amounted to 772 sheep (from local farmers), 930 cows (including bulls and calves; 135 from local farmers and 795 from transhumant herds), and 146 horses (including foals, all belonging to local farmers). More specifically, beyond the historical fluctuations in the number of horses and cows, this area currently hosts one of the six collective flocks in the Catalan Pyrenees—the Bonabé-Salau flock with around a thousand sheep in 2019—and the first one implemented in the district of Pallars Sobirà in 2011.[373] Next to the Salau pass is the Salau Hut, an ecological, energetically sustainable shepherds' hut, built with no expense spared to replace the previous stone-built ruin. This hut is used by the shepherd of the collective flock for a couple of months over the summer grazing season.

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[372] "*Aquí parlaven de 14,000 ovelles a la ribera*" (Cèdric, 7/11/2018).
[373] See Chapter 4.

Figure 78. The Salau Hut. A brand-new construction, built in August 2016 (29/8/2017).

Although some of the sites chosen to plant the fruit trees are close to the shepherds' hut where the collective flock stays overnight, protected in an electrified enclosure during July and August, or to other pastures where local horse farmers usually let their herds graze untended, the former mayor of Isil and Alós assured me that the fruit tree project had nothing to do with the bear attacks on sheep.[374] Likewise, the representative of the Brown Bear Foundation aligned planting the fruit trees in the Bonabé valley with "objective 2" of the PirosLIFE project: "To design and improve a network of spaces of connectivity for the bear." According to Àlvar, a forestry engineer responsible for overseeing this project, these actions were addressed to an urban-based

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[374] "It has nothing to do. Bears' diet is about 80% of plant origin, and 20% of animal origin, including honey" (Sílvia, 25/11/2018).

audience, whereas "the local farmers cannot understand why is so much money spent on such a senseless thing."[375] In line with this view, Cèdric explicitly complained about these and previous similar actions, when cherry and pear trees were planted next to the village of Isil, highlighting what seemed to him an outrageous contradiction: "How is it possible that they plant [the trees] next to the village and then they say they don't want bears to be near the villages?!"[376] To him, the answer was crystal clear: "The bear [program] is just another waste of public funds."[377]

The local farmers do not, therefore, see the design of a *bear landscape* by planting thousands of fruit trees in the Bonabé valley as an improvement. Indeed, if the biological characteristics of the bear—a large carnivore whose main ecological task is purportedly to disperse seeds—did not seem to provide consistent enough arguments to convince the local farmers about the need to reintroduce brown bears in the Pyrenees, the moral assumptions attached to the production of a *bear landscape* as proof of improvement, whether epitomized by the presence of an umbrella species or the fruit tree project in the Bonabé valley, appear to have the same outcome. The moral ecology of the bear program, attached to whether the ambiguities or contradictions of the bear's biological characteristics or the assumptions of improvement around the production of a *bear landscape*, thus expands rather than closes the chasm between the farming and the conservationist sectors.

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[375] "*els pagesos del territori no entenen que es gastin tants calers amb una cosa que no anirà enlloc*" (Àlvar, 6/11/2018).
[376] "*Com pot ser que ho plantin vora el poble i després diuen que no volen que [els ossos] s'acostin als pobles*" (Cèdric, 7/11/2018).
[377] "*Això dels ossos un altre malversació de fons*" (Cèdric, 7/11/2018).

**Letting hazelnut trees spread: Where moral ecologies meet**

In a proposal to move toward the use of moral ecology in the plural form and away from the critique of the correlation between the design and the improvement of landscapes, I resort to several ethnographic techniques—going walkabout and cultural mapping (Strang 2010) plus photo elicitation (Zanotti, Glover, and Sepez 2010)—I used on the other side of the Bonaigua mountain pass, in the Ruda valley, in Naut Aran, to reveal a binocular vision of landscape (Olwig 2008), and to draw attention to the epistemological triad of embedded biographies, simultaneous multivocality, and landscape as a palimpsest.[378] By taking the active production of green landscapes through planting fruit trees in the bear program as complementary to the passive spread of hazelnut trees, my analysis draws attention to the dialectical relationship between the notions of improvement and *rubble*, in which value and waste must be scrutinized ethnographically.

Delaminating the synchronic layers of meaning and practice is a pertinent ethnographic method to show the extent to which the moral assessments around the bear program under the banner of landscape improvements must be read through the historicities between people and places, or what I call *place-embedded biographies*.[379] In other words, "the bedrock of moral ecology" derives from "both *place and taskscape*—a space of human activity defined and bounded by the

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[378] Kenneth Olwig distinguishes two different senses of landscape linked to different ways of seeing. The binocular vision stands for "movement, and knowledge gained from a coordinated use of the senses in carrying out various tasks," whereas the monocular vision refers to a detached gaze that "constructs a feeling of possession and staged performance in a hierarchical social space" (2008, 81). See also Introduction and Conclusions to expand on this term as well as the intertwined concepts of embedded biographies, simultaneous multivocality, and landscape as a palimpsest.

[379] See Introduction, Chapter 1, Chapter 4, and Conclusions for a thorough scrutiny on the concept of historicity and its application as a method to examine landscape transformations in this research.

practices performed therein" (Griffin, Jones, and Robertson 2019a, 10. My emphasis). Assessments on past, present, and future landscapes are therefore not detached, but rather spring from these historicities. In light of Bruce Braun's warning that "[a]lthough the Anthropocene time might come toward us from the future, … the past continues to haunt the present and … ignoring this leaves us poorly equipped to address crucial social differences in how we face the future" (2015, 240), and as a challenge to the main tenets of historicism, the analysis of the future must thus not be separated from the analysis of the past. Place-embedded biographies therefore allow us to better understand the simultaneous multivocality around the landscape produced by the bear program, and subsequently to shift our analysis toward the moral ecologies, in plural, and hence the political ecology that emerges from a given landscape.

Although the director of the natural park framed the hazelnut trees as an ecological asset during the Salau Pass hike, while I was drawing lines and noting down toponyms on a cultural map of the Ruda valley I was making with Sebastià, a local cattle farmer from Naut Aran,[380] he unexpectedly defined the hazelnut trees in opposing terms:

> Me: And these Planhères de Pontirs [former meadows and fields] is where the hazelnut trees are now?
>
> Sebastià: Yes, you can't even see the fields now! … They used to be fields, but they they've been filled up with rubble [*runa*]!

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[380] See Introduction for more details on how this method was carried out, and Chapter 1 for some of its results as well as for a portraiture of Sebastià.

Me: With rubble?!

Sebastià: Well… with rubble… with trees [referring to hazelnut trees].[381]

Considering that rubble [*runa*] "can help us understand the ruptured multiplicity that is constitutive of all geographies as they are produced, destroyed, and remade" (Gordillo 2014, 2) and waste needs to be understood as "the economic and moral antithesis of value" (Gidwani 2012, 277), I consider that defining a hazelnut forest as rubble, which is not merely anecdotal but a fairly widespread analogy among local farmers,[382] aligns with the concept of waste in a dialectical relationship with framing both the passive spread of hazelnut forests and the active planting of fruit trees as landscape improvements. In other words, all these definitions perpetuate a particular moral ecology tied to the historicity embedded in those landscapes that must be read in dialectical, and hence historical terms.

Sebastià's moral ecology of this hazelnut tree landscape springs from a spatio-temporal knowledge that fits in his place-embedded biography as a Ruda valley farmer; a farming moral ecology that dialogues with the notion of taskscape as a "pattern of dwelling activities" devised by Tim Ingold (1993, 153) as well as with the notion of landscape as a "old palimpsest composed

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[381] - *I aquestes Planheres [de Pontirs] és on hi ha ara tots els avellaners?*
- *Sí sí... ara ni es veuen els prats! Això eren prats... el que passa és que s'han anat emplenant de runa.*
- *De runa?!*
- *Bueno de runa... d'arbres...* (5/7/2018).

[382] Another elderly farmer—Hug's father—expressed a similar opinion with regard to the negative impact of the spread of hazelnut trees. In this case, he associated them with an infection or plague, asserting: "Oh, everywhere is infested with hazelnut trees!" (21/8/2018). Some months later, using the photo elicitation technique, Hug confirmed that hazelnut trees tend to initiate the ecological succession thanks to their capacity to spread very quick their seeds (Hug, 5/11/2018).

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by centennial layers" (Nogué 2007, 20). Giving voice to these biographies serves to partially

decipher the set of superimposed layers of practices and meanings on space and over time that

sediment in the landscape "striking through" without "wiping out" the previous ones.[383]

Following Gordillo's approach, which considers that rubble deglamorizes ruins as it "resonates

with the sensuous texture of actual places and objects," whereas ruins are "part of the abstraction

of space" that "highlights … the pastness of the past … separated from the present" (2014, 7–

8), I contend that the use of the term rubble carries a significant moral assessment regarding, but

also beyond, the ecological succession from fields and meadows to hazelnut trees. In other

words, this local farmer did not mean that *all* hazelnut trees equate to rubble. Rather, those

particular trees, which grew on former meadows and fields that used to be mowed or cultivated,

and which prevent this historical change from being traced back, were classed as rubble. Framing

this patch of land as rubble reveals that the farmer's conceptualization of this ecological

succession does not merely consist of a land-value change, but rather of an absolute loss of any

kind of value. In other words, what makes a patch of land rubble or waste is the invisibility of

any change or transformation in it. When replacement succeeds, rubble or waste appears.

Cultural mapping thus allows us to counter this process by revealing how the presence of

hazelnut trees, as fruit trees, do not just mirror an ecological succession, but an overarching,

though invisibilized socioeconomic transformation from a production-based to an amenity-

based capitalist view of natural resources (Walker 2003).

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[383] This distinction follows the keynote speech given by Tim Ingold in the SIEF Conference 2019: "Strike-through and wipe-out: tactics for overwriting the past" (2019). Whereas the action of striking through would allow the reader to figure out what lays written behind the crossing line, wiping out refers to a total erasure of the previous contents as the eraser does on a blackboard.

Planting fruit trees adds another layer to the passive spread of hazelnut trees on previously cultivated fields or grazelands. As part of the production of the *bear landscape* fruit trees epitomize the clash of moral ecologies through the dialectical relationship between improvement and rubble. This dialectical relationship mirrors the one between value and waste, in which the former is the reversal of the latter (Gidwani 2012; Franquesa 2018). The ethnographic approach presented in this chapter hints at the need to turn this clash into a confluence of moral ecologies derived from the dialectics between improvement and rubble, value and waste. A shift that departs from a critical insight into *bear tricks*, discursive maneuvers around the notions of restoration and improvement underpinned by the hegemonic idioms of heritage and moral ecology.

# Chapter 6 — The troubling imposition of the commons. Collective flocks across (un)bounded pastures

Since 2010, small flocks belonging to several local farmers from adjacent villages have been regrouped to form larger collective flocks that graze on the high mountain pastures within the "core bear area" (Val d'Aran and northern regions of Pallars Sobirà).[384] The management of sheep on the summer pastures thus seems to have undergone a process of commoning—the (re)production of a group practice in common (De Angelis 2010)—that resembles an old and hitherto abandoned shepherding model: the village flock. This shepherding model aligned with the core principles of a communal collective action (Ostrom 1990; Agrawal 2001; Bringué 2003), both in terms of governance—villagers had full responsibility for its organization—and outcome—an enduring sense of community among the villagers. Mimicking this model, the state-led regrouping policy has brought about collective arrangements, yet under a new collectivity of stakeholders underpinned by overlapping forms of environmentality (Agrawal 2005; Fletcher 2010). [385] The hierarchical two-party relationship between farmers and shepherds has given way to a more complex network of stakeholders that can be read through the rural-urban divide. The movements of the collective flocks across high mountain pastures have resuscitated historical boundaries in former common lands. While the regrouping policy has

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[384] See Chapter 4 for a summary of the chronology of the regrouping policy and the formation of the collective flocks.

[385] For the sake of clarity, in this chapter I use the term "state" to refer to the Catalan government. Although the Spanish government is also fully involved in the bear reintroduction program, all the decision-making processes this chapter is devoted to have been exclusively undertaken by the Catalan government. In addition, local farmers—especially from Pallars Sobirà—recognize the Catalan government as the main political institution responsible for the actions surrounding the bear program.

been vindicated by the public administrations as a mechanism to make the renewed presence of bears compatible with extensive husbandry as well as to improve conditions for sheep and local farmers' livelihoods, the imposition of sheep management under a new territorial grid has upset this claim. The collective flocks thus stand out as a generative case study to revisit and rethink the commons in high mountain settings—as a collective management of private flocks and a territorial ordering of collective pastures—through the lens of imposition.

In this chapter I address two sorts of conflicts surrounding the formation of the collective flocks promoted and funded through the bear program: conflicts between local farmers and the public administration; and conflicts between big (cows and horses) and small (sheep and goats) livestock farmers from adjacent villages. Created in 2011, 2016, and 2017, respectively, the Bonabé-Salau, the Vaquèira-Beret, and the Bonaigua-Muntanyó collective flocks allow me to delve into these two conflicts.
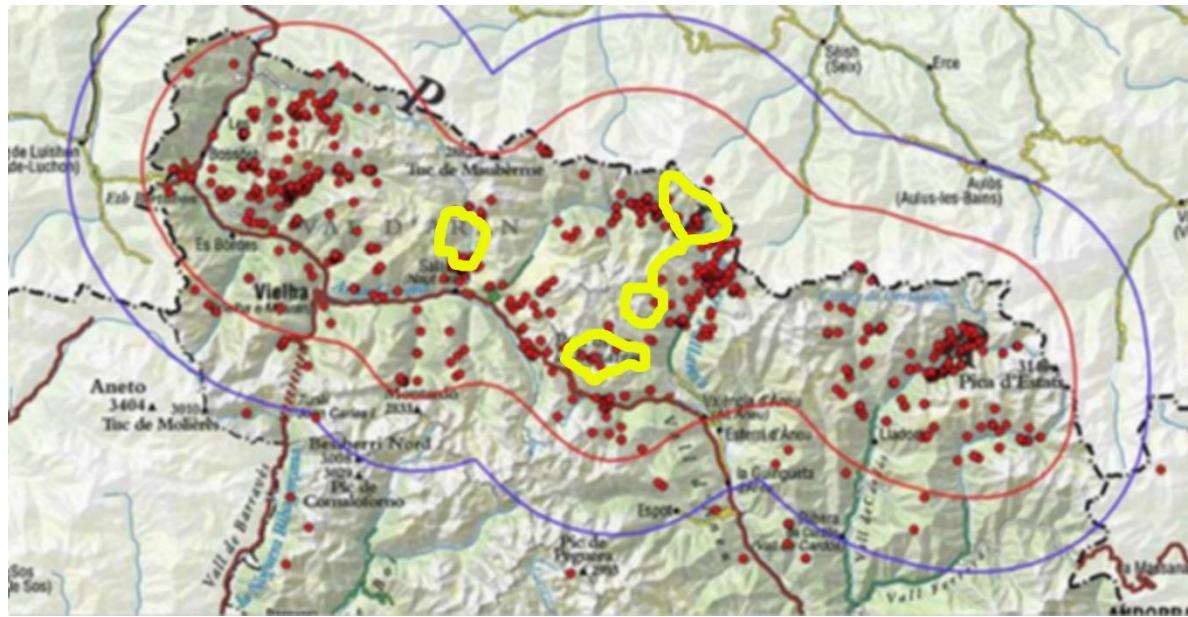
Figure 79. Map of the core bear area marking the three collective flocks that I examine in this chapter. From left to right: the Vaquèira-Beret in Val d'Aran, the Bonaigua-Muntanyó (the lowest yellow circle), and the Bonabé-Salau (two yellow circles connected by a line) in Pallars Sobirà. Source: Author, based on (Guillén 2019).[386]

Inspired by Agrawal's call "to investigate common property arrangements and associated subject positions with greater historical depth" (2003, 244), and taking as a necessary corollary the ethnographic approach to the historicity of shepherding practices,[387] the examination of these conflicts leads me to deem the regrouping policy as a missed opportunity and to advocate a negotiated territoriality that would take into account both the power-laden relationships between stakeholders with different vested interests (i.e., state, farmers, shepherds, and environmental

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[386] See chapter 4 for maps of all the collective flocks in Val d'Aran and Pallars Sobirà.
[387] See Chapter 4.

NGOs) and the historic rights to collective pastures held by local populations beyond contemporary public environmental rationalities.

# When imposition overrides compatibility: the conflicts between farmers and the public administration

"… To a certain extent, [we are doing] what has been done *historically*, but now it is the [*public*] *administration* that bears the *expenses… Times have changed*. We want a shepherd as skilled as fifty years ago, but in current times"[388]

(Guillem, a bear program technician. Shepherds School, 1/4/2019)

In this section I examine the conflicts between local farmers and the public administration by challenging the conceptualization of the sheep regrouping policy as the revival of an old communal shepherding model, the village flock. To do so, I scrutinize this policy through the lens of power, nurtured by the three main approaches in the political ecology literature: Weberian actor-oriented perspectives, neo-Marxist structuralism, and Foucauldian poststructuralism (Svarstad, Benjaminsen, and Overå 2018). The combination of these approaches to power unfolds through the dissection of the main stakeholders involved in this policy—shepherds,

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[388] "*Fins a cert punt, el que s'ha fet històricament, però ara és l'administració qui es fa càrrec de les despeses… Els temps han canviat. Volem tenir un pastor amb les aptituds de 50 anys, però amb els temps d'ara.*"

state bodies and agents, and farmers—and the triangular interplay between them. Likewise, this perspective allows me to draw attention to the overlapping forms of resource governance the regrouping policy has operated under: sovereign, disciplinary, and neoliberal environmentalities (Fletcher 2010). The resulting different herding models that coexist today in the high mountain pastures derived from the renewed presence of bears have given way to feuds between big and small livestock farmers. In the next section I address these conflicts.

The bear program has produced a landscape made of bears, shepherds, and livestock guardian dogs (LGDs) that at first glance may resemble an earlier scenario, in which private flocks from the same village grazed together as village flocks when the local populations in the Catalan High Pyrenees were still acutely aware of the presence of bears in their region.[389] However, a similar landscape may translate into a different territoriality, that is "the unfolding of society over a territory" (Vaccaro and Smith 2014, 3), in which the collectivities involved, the managerial models deployed, and the resource governance undertaken all differ. Focusing on the institutional scaffolding and the underlying rationalities and goals underpinning the regrouping policy, I examine the logics behind the conflicts these collective flocks have triggered between local farmers and the public administration.

The regrouping policy has laid down a mapping of power relations among a new collectivity of stakeholders. The tangible presence of the state has transformed the hierarchical, two-party relationship between farmers and shepherds that lasted until the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, when the village flocks were still present in the Catalan High Pyrenees,

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[389] See Chapter 4 on the mental or social extinction of the bear throughout the second half of the twentieth, and on the disappearance of shepherds—last quarter of the twentieth century—and LGDs—first half of the twentieth century in these Pyrenean valleys.

into a more complex, triangular set of interactions, involving state agents and environmental NGOs. Likewise, the arrival of the collective flocks has entailed the transition from a farming resource governance to a state-driven conservation governmentality or an environmentality of flocks and pastures, in which conservation policies act as a "generic mode of conducting [the local farmers'] conduct" (Fletcher 2010, 178). This "historical change," to use Moore's (2015) terminology, has nonetheless been claimed by the bear program decision-makers to suggest that the program has made the renewed presence of bears compatible with extensive husbandry. Moreover, this claim has been reinforced by the alleged improvement of conditions for both sheep and for the local farmers' livelihoods. Yet, those local farmers have perceived this transformation as an imposition from the outside on their own way of managing flocks and herds on the summer pastures. Compatibility collided with a sense of external imposition. This collision mirrors and exacerbates the canonical urban-rural divide and lies at the core of the conflicts between the local farmers and the public administration. Imposition thus overrides compatibility in the contested terrain of the interplay between livestock and wildlife, unsettled by the bear program regrouping policy.

**The collective flocks through a new triangle of stakeholders: shepherds, farmers, and program decision-makers[390]**

The High Pyrenees Natural Park (an IUCN Protected Landscape) created by the Catalan government in 2003, the Shepherds School founded by local social activists to revitalize the primary sector in Pallars Sobirà in 2009, the Rural Agents Corps, and environmental NGOs such as the Brown Bear Foundation (FOP in Spanish), have woven a conservation-pastoralism network, which the regrouping policy fostered by the bear reintroduction program has put to work since 2010. Mountain shepherds, mostly trained in the Shepherds School, are recruited and hired by the public administration to tend the collective flocks, while a natural park employee responsible for organizing these flocks acts as the liaison between local farmers and shepherds. The technical staff, whose members belong to either the High Pyrenees Natural Park or the Brown Bear Foundation, carry out two main tasks: monitoring the bear population, and assisting farmers and shepherds to implement and maintain the protection measures. Finally, the rural agents are responsible for officially certifying bear predations. The resulting triangle of stakeholders with different vested interests—state agents, shepherds, and local sheep farmers—represents a complex network.

This triangle portrays two polarized and one ambiguous vertex—local farmers in opposition to state decision-makers, on the one hand, and shepherds, on the other. The shepherds share their ambiguous position with the people I name *grounded experts*, mostly

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[390] Due to the delegation of powers to the Val d'Aran government (*Conselh Generau d'Aran*) from the Catalan government and the resulting political autonomy of the former with regards to environmental and agro-ranching policies, the institutional description that follows mainly refers to the situation in the district of Pallars Sobirà. Decision-making processes as well as operational actions are substantially different in Val d'Aran.

biologists or engineers hired by the public administration for their technical expertise. Their tasks mainly involve fieldwork, whether monitoring the bear population or assisting local farmers to organize, implement, and maintain protection measures as well as helping to certify damage to livestock caused by bear attacks. Grounded experts answer to *state decision-makers*, who include politicians but also other experts involved in the bear program whose offices are located in Barcelona, far away from where the events take place. Apart from case-by-case situations, another noteworthy difference between grounded and decision-maker experts relates to labour conditions: the former are usually hired on temporary contracts with no guaranteed job continuity.
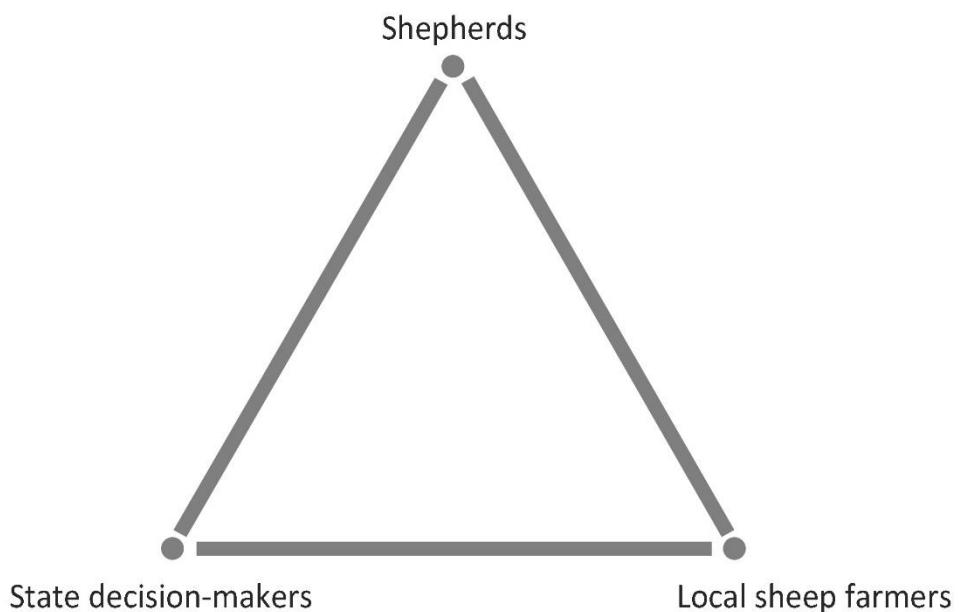


Figure 80. The new triangular network of stakeholders in the regrouping policy laid down by the bear program.

The resulting power relations within this new triangular network of stakeholders serves as the basis for a comparative analysis with the old village flocks, the previous communal management of sheep, that highlights the rural-urban divide. The transition in shepherds' status from villagers at the lowest end of the social scale to professionalized workers often from urban backgrounds and lacking any close-knit bonds with the farming sector or, more specifically, with the local farmers, is of paramount importance in this analysis.

### The shepherds and the power that hinges upon them

Who are the shepherds the public administration pays to tend the local farmers' sheep over the summer grazing season? The answer to this question highlights the crucial role of the Shepherds School. This training project was part of a larger, earlier endeavour, *Rurbans*, which was set up in 2003 to revitalize the district of Pallars Sobirà and move away from the hegemonic regional development schemes based on real-estate speculation and tourism. At that time, the massive exodus to towns and cities between the 1950s and the 1980s had stabilized and the migratory tide had even turned in some of the district's valleys due to the tertiarization of the economy (Guirado 2011).[391] The *Rurbans* project worked in line with this demographic trend by encouraging recent graduates to return to fill a generation gap in the primary sector.

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[391] According to Roigé (1995), since 1960 until 1991 the population numbers in Pallars Sobirà plummeted from 10,000 to 5,400 people, although they stabilized between 1981 and 1991. See also Chapter 3 for more data on demographic fluctuations in Val d'Aran and Pallars Sobirà, encompassing a more extended time span.

Despite these underlying goals, right from the outset the Shepherds School has had to cope with a large demand from students from outside the area, together with the partial reluctance or skepticism on the part of the local farmers. According to Aina, one of the women who currently run the project,[392] the main challenge has always been related to the clash between two agrarian models. Whereas the Shepherds School promotes a model of extensive husbandry based on the values of agroecology, sustainability, and cooperativism, the system implemented in the region is underpinned by fairly hierarchized structures aimed at a more conventional or industrial production. These two opposing positions boil down to the following binary scheme: *the farmers from the country* or *the rural insiders*,[393] who own the scarce private lands, and *the shepherds from outside* or the *urban outsiders*, who tend the local farmers' flocks, some of whom want to purchase some land and run their own farms in the near future. As a result, the division between rural farmers and urban shepherds is played out through the state-led regrouping policy.

Naming the initial project *Rurbans* was in part an attempt to overcome this double divide—rural insiders/urban outsiders—which is actually encountered in and has been reinforced through other conservation conflicts.[394] The insider/outsider binary has also turned into a canonical analytical divide in social science studies on landscape through the relations of power and knowledge (Darby 2000), while the term *rurban* had already been used by Henri

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[392] It is noteworthy to underline that the project has always been managed by women. This detail takes even more relevance considering how much the farming sector in the Catalan High Pyrenees still represents a masculinized world.

[393] The etymology of the term "country" provides here a felicitous polysemy insofar as local farmers would attach to both "the territoriality of the [region]," and "the land that [is] agriculturally productive" (Darby 2000, 19). Likewise, the term "rural" may also encompass different meanings, such "country, countryside, wilderness, agricultural, or outback" (Cloke 2006, 18).

[394] In his analysis on the conflicts surrounding the conservation policies in the Cabo de Gata-Níjar Natural Park, in southeastern Spain, José Antonio Cortés-Vázquez highlights, for example, the extent to which "the different representations of the Park appear closely linked to processes of collective identification … that … serve to define not only a 'we,' but also an 'other,' delimiting boundaries between different groups" (2012, 259).

Lefèbvre to highlight that "the 'urbanity—rurality' opposition is accentuated rather than dissipated, while the town and country opposition is lessened" (1996, 120). The regrouping policy dialogues with these analyses since most of today's mountain shepherds were born in or come from urban settings, shortening the geographical distance between the country and the city, but at the same time accentuating the opposition between urbanity and rurality, since they are deemed to represent an urban-based view of the rural as opposed to the alleged rurality embodied by the local farmers.

However, mountain shepherds occupy a rather ambiguous position between rural insiders and urban outsiders, respectively *personalized* by the local farmers and the state decision-makers, and *animalized* by sheep and bears.
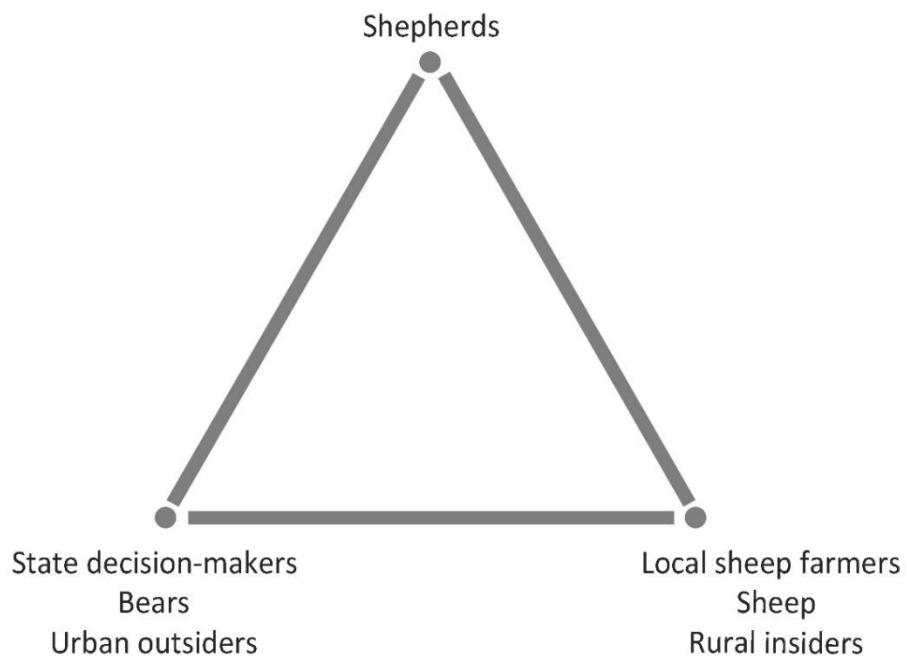


Figure 81. The ambiguous position of the new shepherds between urban outsiders and rural insiders.

Unlike the mid-twentieth century shepherds, their modern counterparts are partially framed as *outsiders* who earn their living from the presence in the mountains of bears rather than sheep. "When I complain about the bear," Robert, one of the collective flock shepherds, once told me, "they [some local farmers] reply, 'But that's what you live off!',"[395] an observation that Robert actually agreed with, noting that "without it [the bear], we [shepherds] wouldn't be here!"[396] These statements illustrate the extent to which today's shepherds are caught in, to use E. P. Thompson's metaphor (in Roseberry 1994), a "field of force" composed of farmers and sheep on one side and state decision-makers and bears on the other.

The "urban origin" of the bears brought from Slovenia to the Pyrenees under a state-driven rewilding project was sharply illustrated in the main banner of an early demonstration in Pallars Sobirà against the bear program in the 1990s, which stated: "Bears to the Parliament, politicians to the reserve."[397] This slogan was repeated with a small twist—replacing "reserve" with "zoo"—in a more recent protest against the bear program by some local farmers in the summer of 2019 ("Manifestació contra l'os al Pallars" 2019). Likewise, both Isidre, a former mayor of Naut Aran, and Ernest, a local cattle farmer from this municipality, reflected the extent to which the local inhabitants in the Catalan High Pyrenees perceive bears as urban intruders.[398] "I would have put the bears in the Plaça Catalunya [Barcelona's most famous square],"[399] stated the former mayor, while the cattle farmer recalled a scene from a meeting with some bear experts

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[395] "*Quan jo em queixo de l'os em diuen, però és que tu vius d'això*" (Robert, 21/8/2018).
[396] "*És que sense ell [os] nosaltres [pastors] no viuríem*" (Robert, 21/8/2018).
[397] See Introduction for a comprehensive analysis of the connotations endowed on the term "reserve" in the municipalities of Naut Aran (Val d'Aran) and Alt Àneu (Pallars Sobirà).
[398] See Chapter 3 for a detailed description of both interlocutors.
[399] "*Els ossos els hauria fotut a la Plaça Catalunya*" (Isidre, 30/8/2019). Catalunya Square is Barcelona's most famous square, considered to be its core landmark.

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that took place in Barcelona when the first bears had just been released: "How easy it is," he exclaimed, "to make decisions in the neighbour's backyard!"[400] Hug, a local sheep farmer from Alt Àneu, went one step further, likening the bears to squatters [*okupes*] on their private and collective lands:

> In a city, if squatters break into a block of flats, a factory, your apartment… Hell! The police can come, someone can come … it will take you more or less time, but you might get them out … But here, with the deer and the boar, now the bear … they are destroying private property! I pay a tax on my lands, don't you know?! Whether they are fallow or cultivable. They are our squatters. They are the squatters of the rural world![401]

The rural insiders/urban outsiders abstract separation boils down to how bears are regarded as urban intruders or "the squatters of the rural world." Likewise, the shepherd's specific work/job divide also illustrates this separation on the ground. Whereas their passion lies in their work tending the sheep, they are hired, on self-employed contracts, by the public administration through the bear program. More specifically, although they feel as though they belong in the farming sector and their work takes place in the high mountain pastures—the quintessential peripheral rural setting—they are paid by and their job was designed by Catalonia's Department

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[400] "*Què fàcil és prendre decisions a casa del veí!*" (Ernest, 16/7/2018).
[401] "*Una capital, se te foten es okupes en un bloc de pisos, en una fàbrica, en un pis teu... òstia! Pot venir la policia, pot venir no sé què... tardaràs més o menos, però potser els fotràs a fora... Però aquí, entre es daines, es cabirols, es jabalís, ara l'os...se mos estan fotent la propietat privada! Jo pago un IBI des meues finques, saps?! Siguin erms o siguin cultivables. Són es nostres okupes. Són es okupes del món rural!*"

of Environment—the urban/state locus that is the object of most of the local farmers' grievances.[402] Thus, the shepherds' ambiguous position is illustrated by a puzzling balance between economic dependency on environmental conservation funds and their social attachment to the farming sector.

The story of Robert, the shepherd who has tended the Bonaigua-Muntanyó collective flock since 2017, fleshes out the label of *urban outsiders* some local farmers give the new shepherds. Robert was born in the late 1980s in a well-off neighbourhood of Barcelona and enrolled in the Shepherds School in his mid-twenties in 2012, although he did not work as a mountain shepherd in the Pyrenees until 2017. As he is not from a farming family, he describes himself as a "*neorural pixapí*."[403] He cuts an odd figure in his fashionable brand-name glasses, and he has a talent for languages, with a remarkable though eccentric knowledge of Japanese, besides English and French, and his mother-tongues Catalan and Spanish. Before entering the farming sector through the Shepherds School, he studied for a BSc in biology.

This biographical and professional profile is a long way from a local farmer's idea of a shepherd.[404] Older farmers recall perfectly how previous shepherds used to work. Their idealized

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[402] Shepherds' salary does not come from the Catalan's Department of Agriculture. This nuance is relevant since the Department of Environment is responsible for the management of wildlife, whereas the Department of Agriculture runs agro-ranching policies and the management of hunting species.

[403] "Pixapí" is a colloquial adjective in the Catalan parlance that stands for a pejorative description of urbanite tourists—normally coming from Barcelona and its surroundings—that is coined by the rural inhabitants. It literally means "the one who pees on a pine tree."

[404] Although this shepherd may represent a peculiar case, he actually shares some common features with other students enrolled in the Shepherds School. The shepherd who tends the Bonabé-Salau collective flock, for example, does not come either from a peasantry household, although his uncle owns a hundred of sheep and his father used to be a farmer. In geographical terms, he comes from a rural area in Catalonia, although from the plains. Another case would be that of a young boy in his early twenties who was finishing the course doing practices as I was going walkabout with Robert while he was ascending the flock toward the high mountain pastures in 2017. This student began the course after having lived in an abandoned *masia* [farmhouse] for two years, living off the land.

memories from "the good old days" tend to conceal another important aspect. Throughout the twentieth century, shepherds did not earn much money, sometimes just working for food and accommodation: "'Before' [a loose period not easily defined]," Pere, a local farmer from the Bonabé valley born in 1965, once told me, "the shepherd was paid in grain in the winter, and in *pesetas* [former currency in Spain] in the summer. The shepherd was hired for the year on All Saints' Day [1 November] … and sometimes he was from the village."[405] Shepherds thus occupied the lowest status in rural mountain communities. According to Hug, "Here, the figure of the shepherd has mostly been that of… a beggar… because he was someone like … 'that's the shepherd!' [contemptuously]. The shepherd's job is at the bottom of the social hierarchy and was looked down upon and socially devalued."[406] Some farmers remember shepherds in their day as skilled although poor, in contrast to their idea of today's shepherds. This view derives from an overarching critique of the new-generation shepherds that unfolds in two interwoven axes: their overrated economic conditions, and their inexpert knowledge. [407] Pere, for instance, claimed:

> If the older [people] saw these young shepherds, they'd chop their heads off… The
> only thing they [today's shepherds] know how to do is make the dog move about
> continuously and … lie there, and turn around, and nothing … making the sheep go

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[405] "'*Abans' el pastor el pagaven en gra a l'hivern, i a l'estiu amb pessetes. Es llogava el dia de Tots Sants [1 de novembre] per tot l'any... de vegades era del poble*" (Pere, 12/11/2018).

[406] *La figura del pastor aquí ha sigut com molt de... pordiosero perquè era una persona com... 'aquest é el pastor!' [despectivament]. L'ofici de pastor es troba al darrer eslavó de la jerarquia social i es tractava d'una feina mal vista i degradada socialment."* (Hug, 5/11/2018).

[407] Current shepherds earn a gross salary of 3,000 euros per month, from May/June to October. These economic incomes were questioned by Robert, though, since he assured me that the net salary, once taxes and personal expenses were taken out, was of 1,600 euros per month. Besides, he complained about the fact that they were receiving the money in ninety days time in 2017.

crazy … that's what they do. The sheep need to be calm in the summer. It's a walk in the park! All you have to do is follow them, and that's it. But of course, if these people [from the Shepherds School] just teach them [today's shepherds] how to do that…[408]

Likewise, Edgar, a local sheep farmer from Naut Aran,[409] defined the new shepherds coming out of the School as "mountain flock companions" rather than "real shepherds."[410] The explicit negative connotation of this definition is that rather than herding the flock on the mountain pastures, a shepherd's most arduous, important and valued task is helping the sheep to lamb on the farm to make the farmer's business more productive. "The shepherd," Edgar pointed out, "makes his money in the lambing shed."[411]

Despite the criticism they receive from some local farmers, the new shepherds usually frame them as "the weak characters in the story," implicitly classifying the state decision-makers as the "strong ones." In the shepherds' view, bears and wildlife align with state decision-makers as the urban locus where power resides, whereas sheep and local farmers represent the rural powerless.[412] The apparently conflictive scenario between farmers and shepherds thus conceals

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[408] "*La gent gran que hi havia llavors agafessin aquests pastors joves d'ara els tallarien el coll a la meitat… Només saben fer que "batanar" el gos i… jau allà, i volta, i no res… fer-se malear [marejar… a les ovelles]… fan [he refers to a single shepherd who tend Bonabé's herd over two grazing seasons, and whose main feature was his overuse of dogs to drive the flock]. L'ovella a l'estiu té que estar tranquil·la. Si no costa res de guarda-la. Només has de fer que anar-la seguint, i prou. Però clar, si aquesta gent [from the Shepherds School] els ensenyen només que a fer allò?!*" (Pere, 12/11/2018).

[409] See Chapter 3 for a description of this interlocutor.

[410] "*Acompañante de ganado de montaña*" and "*pastors de veritat*" (Edgar, 3/7/2018).

[411] "*El pastor on se guanya el pa és a la paridera*" (Edgar, 3/7/2018). See Chapter 4 on the difference between a shepherd, which tends the sheep, and a "sheep caregiver against the bear," as it was underlined by a young sheep farmer from the Bonabé valley, as well as for a local farmers' critique of the definition of shepherds as part of the protection measures against the bear attacks.

[412] This stance contrasts, however, with the opinion of a biologist recently designated as the coordinator of the High Pyrenees Natural Park's scientific committee. Through a long semi-structured interview, he defined the farming

the underlying structures of power in the wake of this state-led regrouping policy and the ensuing

clash between, in Walker's terminology (2003), a production-based economy, advocated by the

local farmers or rural insiders, and an amenity-based economy, boosted by the bear program

decision-makers or urban outsiders. In the middle of this clash, the new generation of mountain

shepherds plays a pivotal role in the field of force comprising the state/urban outsiders/bears,

on the one hand, and the farmers/rural insiders/sheep, on the other. The new shepherds thus

reveal the extent to which the conflicts between local farmers and the public administration tie

into the rural insiders/urban outsiders divide. In other words, the renewed presence of bears

informs us about the power relations between local farmers and the state via the ambiguous

locus occupied by the mountain shepherds. Ada, who works in the public administration and is

married to Edgar, clearly summarized this polarized scheme once she and her husband decided

to adhere to the bear program protection measures in 2019 after having lost around one hundred

sheep the year before: "At the end of the day *we* must do what *they* want us to do… They want

to change the entire village!".[413] *We* and *they* may both refer to the farmers/state and the

rural/urban populations. Two divides that, far from being tackled and overcome, have been

exacerbated through the bear program and are now a burden shouldered by the new shepherds.

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sector as one of the two main strong lobbies that influence the most the state decision-making processes on these territories. A member of the bear program technical staff reinforced this idea by adding that one of the major issues encountered in the Pyrenean mountains is the control of the "common lands" by a set of farming lobbies, which would, according to him, demand to obtain all the benefits from those lands without any trade-off.

[413] "*Al final hem d'acabar fent el que volen…. És que al final ens volen canviar el poble sencer!*" (Ada, 4/6/2019).

**Overlapping environmentalities: compatibility under the insidious imposition and dispossession of rights**

> [C]onservation has often been described as a form of 'green' governmentality intended to inculcate an environmental ethic by means of which people will self-regulate their behaviour in conservation friendly ways… '[E]nvironmentality' aimed at the creation of 'environmental subjects—people who care about the environment'
>
> (Fletcher 2010, 175–76).

Whereas the increase of the bear population is taken for granted because of the strict protection status it is granted under European Union directives and Spanish legislation as well as its recent growing numbers in the Pyrenees (around 70 individuals),[414] the funds to maintain or even expand the protection measures do not enjoy such guarantees. As some biologists have already pointed out,[415] the bear population has the potential to expand into more dispersed habitats across the Pyrenees, which raises the question of whether the public administration will have the economic and human resources to expand the protection measures into territories the bear has not yet colonized. The collective flocks were actually devised, as Robert heard from a bear program grounded expert in 2018, as a "demonstrative policy" to prove to local farmers that the bears and livestock could coexist in the high mountain pastures. Robert therefore feared that the

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[414] See Chapter 4.
[415] A member of the Forest Science and Technology Center of Catalonia (CTFC, acronym in Catalan), specialist in the monitoring of wolves, at a conference about "The bear thresholds" held in Naut Aran in December 2019 as part of the mediation process started up by the Catalan government at the end of the PirosLIFE project.

state could roll back this policy at any moment. In his own words: "If it is 'demonstrative' it has an expiration date. And when the money has gone, then what?!"[416] This lack of guarantees has unleashed anxiety among local farmers, which could be compounded by the global health and economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, over the possibility that they might have to cover the costs associated with the new management of flocks. As Cèdric, a young sheep farmer from the Bonabé valley, warned, "'Before,' [referring to the mid-twentieth century] there was so much livestock that they [local farmers] could pay the shepherd, but now, … we couldn't afford to do that." Consequently, he added, "If the administration stops paying for the shepherd, it's over. I would have to give 80% of my production to [pay] the shepherd in the summer. Or we would have to take drastic action [in reference to having to kill a large number of bears]."[417] Likewise, Eladi, another young sheep farmer from the same valley criticized what he saw coming, which might be called the *certainty paradox*, since the farmers' certainty about the increasing presence of bears aligns disturbingly with an increasing uncertainty, namely the growing economic dependency on ever more external and spread out public sources of income: "All this goes on with no planning whatsoever, you know? And now there is money, and in four days' time the money will be gone, and we'll still be here, with loads of bears."[418] Although the Catalan and Aran governments have continued to organize and implement protection measures, as well as monitoring the bear population since the PirosLIFE project ended in 2019, Edgar described the increasing spread of dependency as a lost battle: "The *Conselh* [Aran government] has no

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[416] "*Al ser 'demonstratiu' té una data de caducitat. I quan s'acabi els quartos, què?!*" (Robert, 21/8/2018).

[417] "*Abans … hi havia tant de bestiar que podien pagar el pastor, però ara … no el podríem pagar*"; "*si s'acaba lo de pagar el pastor per l'administració, malament. Jo hauria de donar el 80% de la producció meva al pastor de l'estiu. O hauríem de prendre mesures dràstiques [en referència a haver de matar un nombre considerable d'ossos]*" (Edgar, 7/11/2018).

[418] "*És que això va tot amb una sabata i una espardenya, saps? I ara hi ha calers, i d'aquí quatre dies s'acabaran els calers, i mos quedarem aquí, amb una garbera d'ossos*" (Eladi, 24/10/2018).

voice. None! They don't even take a stance. They can do paperwork for you, but all this comes from Europe [European Union]! And it is signed by the [Spanish and French] governments… It's a lost battle. Completely lost. Cause it's Europe. And they will release [the bears] whatever happens."[419] Likewise, the protection measures are usually implemented in June, when the flocks go up to the high mountain pastures, but they do not cover the critical period in the spring (between April and May) when the bears awake from their winter hibernation in search of food while the flocks graze untended on the fields and pastures near the villages and stay out overnight without any electrified enclosures.

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[419] *El Conselh és un cero. Un cero! Que ells ni opinen. Te pueden tramitar los papeles, però és que això ve d'Europa! És que això ve d'Europa, i està firmat pels Governs… 'Es una lucha perdida'. Completamente perdida. Porque es Europa. Y digo, los van a echar sí o sí*" (Edgar, 3/7/2018).
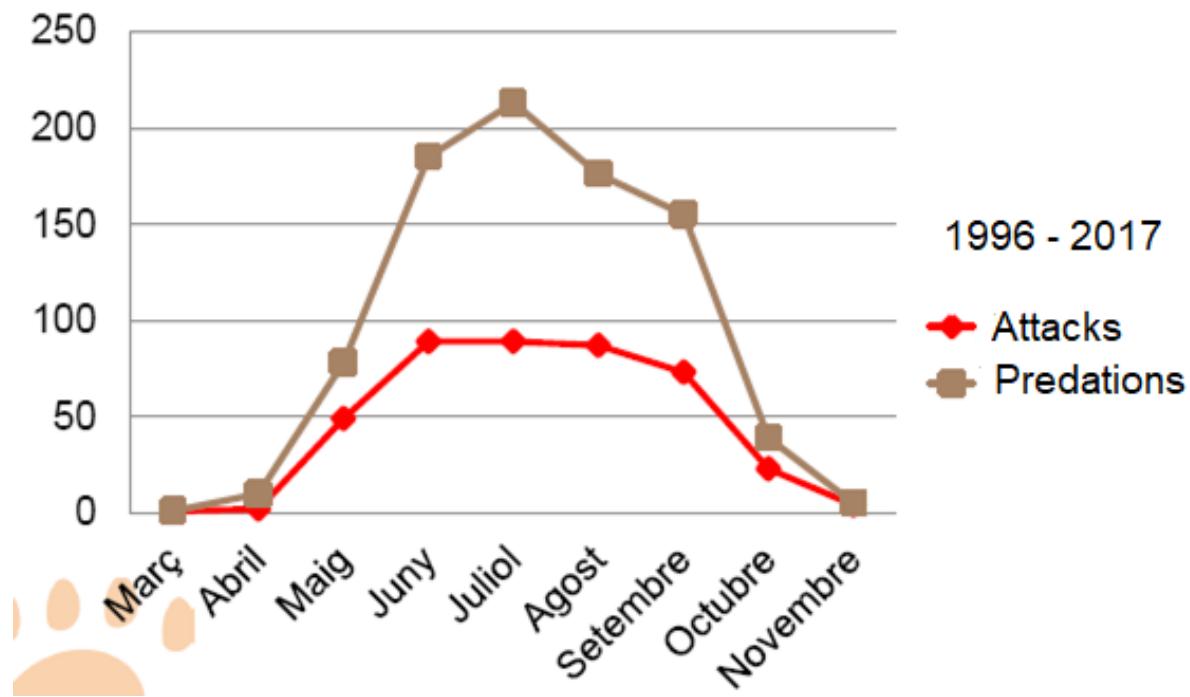
Figure 82. Average bear attacks (red line) and predations (light brown line) over a year between 1996 and 2017. Before the summer grazing season, between April and June, when the collective flocks are not yet set up, bear attacks and predations may also occur in the mid-range pasture areas and the fields near the villages. Source: (Guillén 2019, 6).

In addition, around a dozen of the Naut Aran farms have fewer than twenty sheep, which are kept for home consumption. These animals do not usually go up to the high mountain pastures, but graze in the fields and mid-range pasture areas near the villages all year round. This herding model falls outside the protection measures since these sheep never join a collective flock nor are they tended by a shepherd.

To put it bluntly, the renewed presence of bears is taken for granted and local farmers must adapt to this new scenario. The proponents of the bear program claim that this adaptation, which takes shape through the implementation of the protection measures and the ensuing changes to shepherding practices, will make the renewed presence of bears compatible with extensive husbandry in the Pyrenees, just as it has been since time immemorial.[420] In contrast, most local farmers perceive the changes in the management of their flocks as an imposition derived from a full-fledged top-down decision: the translocation of bears. A new environmental governmentality (Agrawal 2005) has therefore clashed with the farming governance of flocks and pastures as well as the local territorialities prior to the regrouping policy. In this context, local farmers have been waging a tug of war with the state and the bear program proponents in a fight to see who adapts to whom. This riddle was solved by Cèdric in the following sharp statement: "With the collective flocks, the Catalan government has not adapted to us, but the other way around. Before each regrouping, they should have studied each mountain area."[421] Local farmers have thus felt forced to adapt or have resigned themselves to it. As a result, the ultimate goal of the collective flocks, which is to ensure compatibility between bears and livestock, loses its point. Beyond what the regrouping policy meant for the farmers' livelihoods and for the sheep, the ways in which it has been implemented precludes any chance for farmers to adopt a positive attitude toward these measures. In other words, the imposition experienced

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[420] See Chapter 4 for a critique of the notion of a return to indeterminate old times, which the bear program regrouping policy is fraught with, based on an ethnographic approach to the historicity of shepherding practices in the Bonabé valley.

[421] "*Això dels agrupaments la Generalitat no s'ha adaptat a nosaltres, sinó al revés. Abans de cada agrupament haurien d'haver estudiat cada zona de la muntanya*" (Cèdric, 7/11/2018).

by the local farmers quashes any chance of compatibility proposed by the bear program decision-makers.

The distinction Schlager and Ostrom make between "rights at an operational-level and rights at a collective-choice level" becomes crucial to understand the prevalence of imposition over compatibility in the case of the regrouping policy. These authors stressed "the difference between exercising a right and participating in the decision of future rights to be exercised" (1992, 251). Both levels of rights may align with collective actions, but they are, according to the bundle of rights schema revisited by Sikor et al. (2017), specifically hierarchized in two major orders: use rights, and control and authoritative rights. Following this degree of rights, local farmers and the other villagers would still hold use rights to the collective pastures—former common lands—beyond land ownership deeds and the ensuing authoritative rights attached to them.[422] In this case, those authoritative rights are granted to the Catalan and Aran governments, municipalities and EMDs (Catalan acronym for Decentralized Municipal Entities),[423] or "societies of owners" (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014a). Between use and authoritative rights, what seems to be truly at stake with regard to the regrouping policy are the second-order or control rights "to determine the scope of … use rights" (Sikor, He, and Lestrelin 2017, 339), which are divided into the following actions: management, exclusion, transaction, and monitoring.[424] Although the renewed presence of bears has not *per se* modified farmers' authoritative rights to

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[422] According to these authors authoritative rights are divided into definition and allocation: "*Definition* or the right to define the discretionary space for the exercise of control rights and *allocation* or the right to assign control rights to particular actors" (2017, 340. My emphases).
[423] See Chapter 3 for a description of the powers delegated to these municipal entities, which hold a lower political and legal status than municipalities.
[424] According to these authors, "management refers to the right to regulate use and transform the resource; exclusion to define who has use rights; transaction to handle the activities required for the realization of benefits; and monitoring to track the use of benefits and state of the resource" (Sikor, He, and Lestrelin 2017, 340).

collective pastures, what the bear program has indeed evidenced is that the farmers' control rights have plummeted to very low levels. The keyword here is thus "choice" or the "right to choose" which actions will be collectively undertaken. In other words, farmers still hold the right to use, but not to choose how to use the village's pastures, how to tend their livestock as they graze on the high mountain pastures, or how to manage wildlife populations, although they continue to regard the villages' mountains as common lands and hence *their mountains*. The absence of those higher rights stems from a long history of dispossession of local communities by the state since the mid-nineteenth century (Beltran and Vaccaro 2014a; Pons-Raga et al. 2021), but the renewed presence of bears made this absence more tangible, and hence contestable. Right from the beginning, "there was a general sense of grievance that went beyond the subject of the bear and engaged with the uses and ownership of the territory" (Jiménez Setó 2003, 64. My translation).

Although the Catalan government's Director of Environment claimed "There is no problem" because "in Pallars [Sobirà], … the advantages [of joining the collective flocks] mean that practically all the sheep … have been grouped together,"[425] the fact that most local farmers from the core bear area in this district adopted and adapted to the public administration's protection measures does not necessarily solve the problem or address the conflict. Approached this way, the compatibility must be read as an attempt to hide power behind the scenes, which may effectively cover up, but not solve the conflicts. In line with this frame of analysis, in the organized outing to the Salau Pass (see previous chapter), Gerard, the director of the High

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[425] "*Al Pallars, … el benefici que porta la cosa [agrupaments] fa que pràcticament tot el bestiar oví … s'hagi agrupat. Per tant, no hi ha problema*" (13/2/2019). The quote was retrieved from an open transcript available on the Catalan Parliament website: https://www.parlament.cat/ext/f?p=700:1::::::.

Pyrenees Natural Park, stated that the farmers who do not adhere to the regrouping policy "do so on purpose… because they are against the bear and want to prove that it is incompatible [with extensive husbandry]."[426] The reverse side of compatibility, that is, incompatibility, brings power back to the fore as a form of resistance to conservation, but it leads us to an unsolvable conundrum. Taking compatibility or incompatibility as a goal thus prevents us from looking into the processes through which one or the other is achieved. In doing so, it distracts us from the political roots of the conflict between the farmers and the public administration.

Inspired by Robert Fletcher's Foucauldian frame of analysis (2010; 2017), I propose to approach the regrouping policy through the analytical framework of environmentality to disentangle the conundrum into which the frame of (in)compatibility leads us. The bear program has unfolded, I contend, through the interplay of sovereign, disciplinary, and neoliberal environmentalities imposed in different ways on the farmers. A top-down wildlife reintroduction program merged with a long-running disciplinary process via economic incentives in the meantime. First, the release of bears from Slovenia aligns with a sovereign or public environmental governmentality, "in which compliance is sought via top-down injunctions backed by a punishment threat" (Fletcher 2017, 312), epitomized by the brown bear's legal status as an endangered and protected species under European Union and Spanish legislation. Second, the ensuing transformations of shepherding practices have followed the overlap of disciplinary and neoliberal environmentalities (Fletcher 2010). The disciplinary form, "in which subjects are enjoined to internalize particular norms and values by means of which they become compelled to self-regulate" (Fletcher 2017, 312), is enacted through the articulation of the hegemonic

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[426] "*Ho fan expressament. Perquè estan en contra de l'ós, i així volen demostrar que és incompatible*" (Gerard, 5/8/2018).

idioms of heritage and moral ecology. As shown in the previous chapter, by considering the renewed presence of bears as both a mere return to a longstanding landscape and proof of landscape improvement, the articulation of heritage and conservation moral ecology idioms aims to put the local farmers' herding practices on the "right track" in the long run. In the meantime, the public administrations provide economic incentives in the form of funded protection measures and offset policies to prevent or compensate for bear attacks on livestock, thus aligning with a neoliberal environmentality "seeking to govern via external incentives rather than internalized norms and values" (Fletcher 2017, 312). Local farmers have responded to sovereign, disciplinary, and neoliberal forms of environmentality with resistance and resignation. The bear program thus appears as a territorializing agent that, despite claiming to ensure the compatibility of the renewed presence of bears with extensive husbandry, also and above all, insidiously imposes a dispossession of local farmers to self-govern *their* means of production: flocks and pastures. Thus, the local farmers' feeling of dispossession is not an abstract or empty one. Rather, it is filled by a tangible outside force in the form of wildlife, in general terms, and bears, more specifically, regarded as the "squatters of the rural world," in Hug's words. This force challenged the farmers' taskscapes, that is "the pattern of dwelling activities" (Ingold 1993, 153), by literally displacing their flocks from their mountains.[427]

Once bears had been translocated into the Pyrenees following a classic top-down conservation policy, the ultimate goal of consolidating the bear population pushed the program decision-makers to more nuanced disciplinary grazing management mechanisms. The taken-for-granted renewed presence of bears, valued as an incontestable heritagized landscape

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[427] See next section for an analysis of the troubles caused by these movements.

improvement, has given way to an insidious, rather than overt, imposition of shepherding practices; an insidious, rather than an outright, dispossession of local farmers' control rights over their private flocks and their collective pastures. The adjective "insidious" draws on the sort of dispossession through capitalist relations recounted by Tania Li (2014) and Jaume Franquesa (2018). Instead of the classical Marxist accumulation by dispossession, farmers from the Pyrenees, similarly to their counterparts in southern Catalonia in the wake of the wind bubble or even the highlanders from Indonesia entering the cocoa market, seem to have lost control of their natural resources—flocks and pastures—in less dramatic and more insidious ways. Such a loss would translate into the separation of direct producers—farmers—from the means of production—sheep and pastures—to stretch Jason Moore's reflections, which asserted that "the notion that social relations (humans without nature) can be analyzed separately from ecological relations (nature without humans) is the ontological counterpoint to the real and concrete separation of the direct producers from the means of production" (2015, 19).

Although farmers are under no obligation to follow these measures, Guillem, a bear program grounded expert, admitted that not doing so might be a risky decision: "It's a good idea to stick to them [protection measures] in the medium/long term."[428] Following this thread, Oriol, the grounded expert who acts as the liaison between the public administration and local farmers, believed that the bear program would have to be assessed in ten years, by when recently implemented protection measures would have become established. This view prompts me to raise Polanyi's critique of the (neoclassical) economic theory regarding the notions of change and adaptation: "Economic theory will speak to us in 'long-run' terms, but this perspective is

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[428] "*És bo acollir-s'hi per tal de tenir viabilitat a mig/llarg termini*" (Guillem, 1/4/2019).

unacceptable… If the immediate effect of a change is deleterious, then, until proven otherwise, its final effect will also be so" (2016, 96. My translation). The regrouping policy thus operates as a state-driven long-run plan. In the meantime, whether or not local farmers adhere to it, they have been dispossessed of the right to self-govern their own flocks and the villages' pastures. As a result, considering the vast literature on the history of conservation as dispossession derived from state policies (West 2016), I propose that the interplay of sovereign, disciplinary, and neoliberal environmentalities has led to an insidious *dispossession by conservation*. While the term "dispossession" tends to be placed at the end of Marxist-based expressions in line with "primitive accumulation," such as "accumulation by dispossession" (Harvey 2011) or "conservation as dispossession" (Griffin, Jones, and Robertson 2019b), I prefer to place it before the term conservation for two reasons. First, my approach centres on the ways in which a wildlife reintroduction program has changed herding practices. Thus, I take conservation as the epistemological means through which to understand those changes and why they have caused controversy among their receivers (i.e., local farmers). Second, as already mentioned, I connect conservation policies, and specifically the bear program with a historical genealogy of dispossession imposed on peasants from the Pyrenees. The order in the expression "dispossession by conservation" thus highlights these two analytical purposes in a similar way to the "accumulation by conservation" coined by Bram Büscher and Robert Fletcher (2015).

In a nutshell, while the farming sector perceived the reintroduction of the bear as an outright imposition, the ensuing transformations of shepherding practices must be understood as an insidious dispossession. This analysis aligns with Sikor el al.'s approach to compensated exclusions as they "do not involve local people's outright dispossession from natural resources but exclude them from direct resource benefits and governance in other ways—yet

simultaneously seek to compensate their losses through the provision of indirect benefits" (2017, 346). The overlapping forms of environmentality allow us, therefore, to examine how compatibility clashes at a previous level with a peculiar sort of insidious imposition on and dispossession of local farmers in the way they manage their flocks and pastures, as well as how this confrontation results in the clash of different herding models.

### The clash of different herding models

"Some things have changed… It's no better with the collective flocks. Without them it is freedom. Some years we would let the sheep out on May 15 to graze untended on all the pastures. Not better, we're worse off."[429] Cèdric's bold statements not only illustrate the farmers' stand against the sheep regrouping policy, but also hint at the different herding models over time. Sheep, but also sheep farmers, wandered freely on the mountain pastures until the public administration decided to set spatial and temporal boundaries on shepherding practices. His depiction of a freedom-oriented local territoriality allows us to compare three main herding models followed throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Although he was born in 1990, Cèdric has a good knowledge of his family's shepherding practices in the Bonabé valley before that time,[430] meaning that his words perfectly illustrate the specific period from the 1970s until the introduction of the collective flocks in 2011. This period

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[429] "*Han canviat vàries coses... Amb els agrupaments no estem millor. Sense els agrupaments és la llibertat. Nosaltres hi havia anys que el 15 de maig les havíem engegat i recorrien tot lo territori soles. Millor, no. Estem a pitjor*" (Cèdric, 7/11/2018).
[430] See Chapter 4 for a detailed ethnographic approach to the historicity of shepherding practices in this valley over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

does not cover the times of the communal or village flock. Rather the opposite: it refers to an *individualized loose* management of private flocks. As Hug emphasized in the documentary *El No a l'os* (Freixa and Camps 2021), Cèdric's statements urge us to distinguish between two clear-cut periods of shepherding prior to the implementation of the regrouping policy: "Before," highlighting that 'before' referred to the period just prior to this policy, but not in the elders' times, "the flocks would graze more freely, which might mean they started grazing earlier in the morning and ruminate [*murriar*] when the sun came up." In contrast, "Today [with the collective flocks], they'll never graze before 7 am." Another aspect to keep in mind, he added, "is the sheep's capacity to anticipate sudden weather changes; this capacity is impeded by this organization [regrouping policy]."[431] At the same time Hug, who was born in 1984, recognized that compared with the times when every household owned some livestock, today's local farmers "are very individualist. When there was a shepherd, shepherding [practices] were done in common. Everybody would go up the mountain together. Today it is not like that. I have as many animals [sheep] as there used to be in the entire village, and I go alone. Or, I'd like to go alone. It's easier. I don't need to fight with anyone … I do what I want to do, I do it my way… I mean, we stopped … collaborating with each other."[432]

However, both collective communal and individualized loose shepherding models unfolded through the same type of resource governance, since in both cases it was the farmers

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[431] *Abans, els ramats tenien més llibertat, i això podia implicar tant el fet que comencessin a menjar de matinada i murriessin tot just comencés a fer sol i calor, mentre que ara per molt d'hora que les engeguis no sortiran mai abans de les set del matí. També podia implicar que poguessin fer moviments anticipant-se a arribades de mal temps, que poden ser nevades que també tenen lloc durant l'estiu*" (Hug, 25/6/2019).

[432] *Avui en dia, som molt individualistes. O sigui, quan hi havia pastor, era comú. Tothom anava a muntanya per anar tots junts. Ara no, avui en dia, jo tinc el ramat que tenia tot el poble i jo vaig sol. O voldria anar sol. O si vaig sol ser que estic tranquil, no m'haig de barallar amb ningú, … faig i desfaig a la meva manera… Vull dir, mos hem mal acostumats amb l'aspecte … del col·laborar els uns amb els altres* (Hug, 5/11/2018).

who developed and endorsed the two herding models. In short, they held legitimate responsibility and authority, and hence they felt they were the owners of the mountain pastures. In contrast, the collective flocks today have been designed and implemented under the interplay of overlapping environmentalities, in which the state has steered the way the local farmers behave. Thus, collective flocks may be *collective*, but local farmers did not *freely choose* to be part of this collectivity. Therefore, the resulting flocks should be defined as *public* rather communal since they belong to and depend on the state. The freedom Cèdric advocates is thus especially relevant because it is the counterpoint of the same feeling of imposition and dispossession through which most local farmers received and adopted these changes with resignation. Imposition also contrasts starkly with the previous farming resource governance based on "herding without boundaries," as Hug described the new local territoriality in which the livestock of all farming households moved freely, once the village flocks had been dismantled between the late 1960s and early 1970s. The following table presents a comparative analysis of different herding models considering the following variables: historical periods; format; management; mobility of livestock; resource governance; and territoriality.

| Herding models over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Alt Àneu | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Period** | 1900-1970 | 1970-2010 | 2010-to date |
| **Format** | Communal | Private | Public |
| **Management** | Collective | Individual | Collective |
| **Mobility** | Customary boundaries | No boundaries | New boundaries |
| **Governance** | Farming | Farming | Environmentality |
| **Territoriality** | Local | Local | State |

Figure 83. Herding models over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Alt Àneu.

Inspired by Agrawal's proposal of a "diachronic examination of common-property arrangements" (2003, 259), the inversion of the farmers' status in relation to shepherds—from strength to weakness—is revealing to compare the historical contexts in which the three shepherding formats—communal, individual, and public—have taken place throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the Catalan High Pyrenees. In effect, the communal management of sheep through the village flock—from the 1900s to the 1970s—was underpinned by a hierarchical two-party relationship between farmers and shepherds, in which the former were fully empowered in the decision-making processes. In contrast, the set of relationships among farmers, shepherds, and state decision-makers under the bear program and within the current collective flocks—from 2010 onwards—illustrates the transition from dual—farmers and shepherds—to a triangular and more complex interplay, in which the presence of the state has turned the local farmers' hierarchical position upside down. In between these two

distinct collective shepherding management formats, the remaining handful of local farmers developed an individual loose model from the 1970s until 2010.

Whereas the first two shepherding formats (communal and private) were underpinned by a farming governance of natural resources (sheep and pastures), the last model, which pursues the compatibility between wildlife and livestock, has revolved around different forms of environmentality. This state-led environmental governance contrasts with a farming governance either intended to take the maximum benefit from pastures and sheep (in times of the communal flocks) or to thrive with resignation (in the times of the individualized flocks). Focusing on the types of resource governance rather than the management typologies is useful to understand the conflicts between local farmers and the public administration. Shifting the focus toward the resulting spatial and temporal patterns of livestock mobility across the high mountain pastures helps us to better understand the issues between big and small livestock farmers. The next section is specifically devoted to these conflicts.

## (Un)bounded pastures. Wildlife awakens the conflicts between big and small livestock farmers

"Ordering means ordering, and it entails problems"

(Grounded expert from Navarra's government).[433]

"The inhabitants of [Val d'] Aran and Pallars [Sobirà] have always felt they were the lords of their mountains"

(Forest engineer from Catalan's government).[434]

"The conflicts around the collective flocks … relate to forcing some farmers to move their sheep to another mountain… The trauma or reluctance to the regrouping [policy] comes from 'moving them from their mountain'"

(Bear program grounded expert from the Catalan team).[435]

The regrouping policy has uncovered old boundaries and reawakened conflicts. As reflected in the three opening quotes, moving the flocks into different pasture areas to protect them from

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[433] "*Ordenar significa ordenar, y eso implica problemas*" (23/1/2020).

[434] "*Tant a l'Aran com al Pallars els seus habitants s'han sentit senyors de les seves muntanyes*" (Santi, 25/7/2019).

[435] "*Els conflictes dins dels agrupaments no vénen pel nombre de ramaders que hi participen, sinó en casos en què el fet de constituir un agrupament força algun ramader a traslladar les seves ovelles a una altra… El trauma o aversió a un agrupament vindria per "moure'ls de la seva muntanya*" (Oriol, 27/6/2018).

bear attacks resulted in a new state-driven territorial ordering of small livestock: sheep and goats. Ordering here has the double meaning of both arrangement and mandate. Given that the inhabitants of these Pyrenean districts, specifically the local farmers, have always "felt they were the lords of the mountains," this dual ordering process has sparked conflicts among them. Long-standing disputes between small and big livestock farmers resurfaced in the wake of the regrouping policy. Although some big livestock farmers may sympathize with the owners of small livestock, they tend to follow a herding model that conflicts with the sheep regrouping policy.

The case of the Bonaigua-Muntanyó collective flock is especially appropriate to examine collective rights and boundary-related issues following the implementation of the regrouping policy. The four different land tenure regimes in this area, the *public mountain* known as Bonaigua Pass Mountain (MUP 183), and its adjacent territories, have derived in a complex bundle of rights. Right from the start of the policy implementation in 2017, two flocks were combined from the two villages of Borén and València d'Àneu [València hereafter] that have belonged to the municipality of Alt Àneu since 1970, although they retain distinct historic rights to different pasture areas. In the two following years (2018 and 2019), the movement of flocks reawakened long-standing boundary-related disputes between farmers from three different villages in the municipality of Alt Àneu: Sorpe, Borén, and València.

Figure 84. Map of the villages of Alt Àneu in the district of Pallars Sobirà. The villages of Sorpe, Borén,

and València are underlined in red. Source: Author, based on Montori (n.d.).
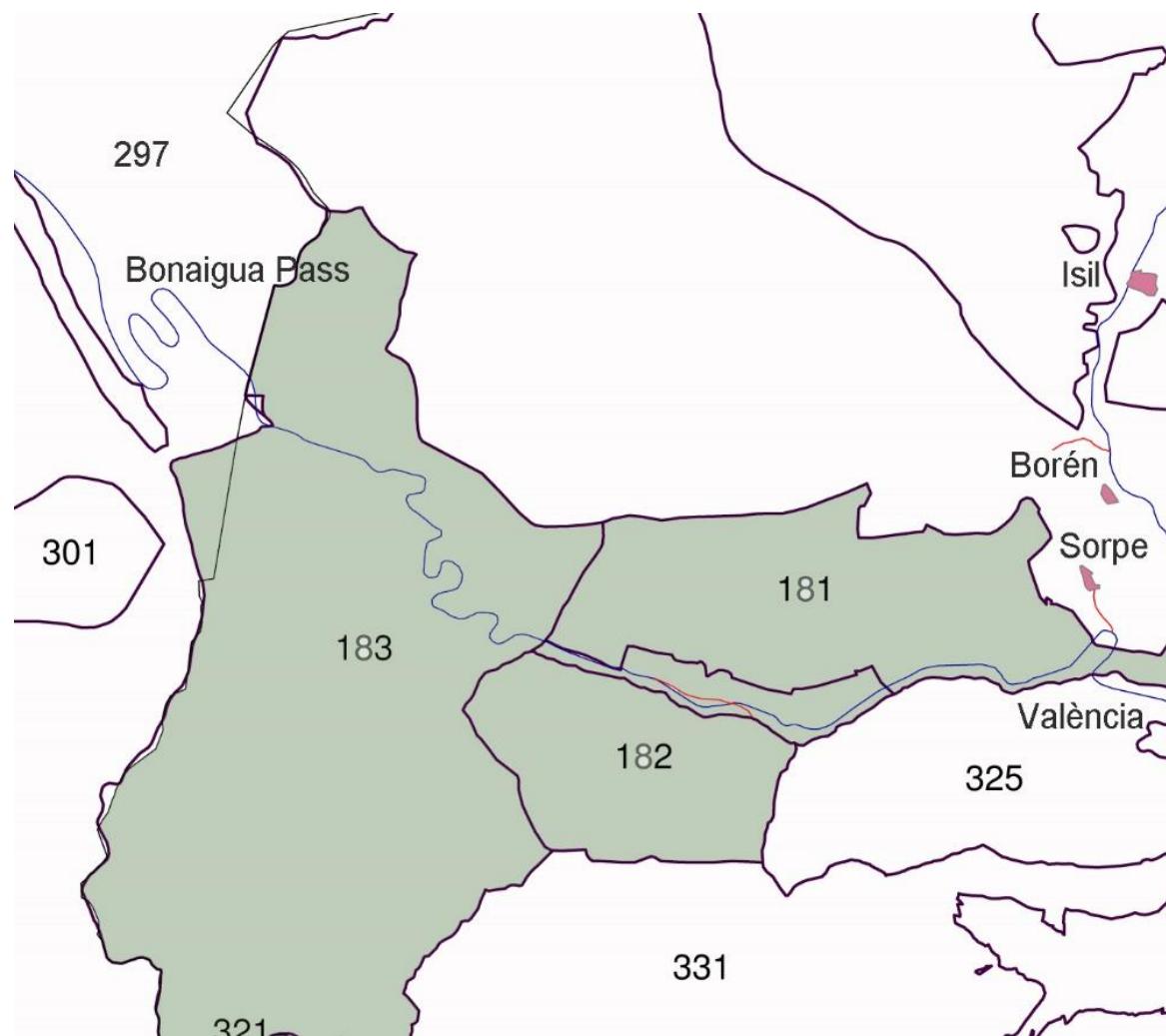
Figure 85. Map of the area disputed by small livestock farmers from Borén and València, on the one hand, and big livestock farmers from Sorpe, on the other, after the Bonaigua-Muntanyó collective flock was set up. Note: the villages of Sorpe, València, Son, and Esterri still dispute the boundary line that separates MUP 181 from MUP 183 today. Source: Author, based on ("Montes d'Utilitat Pública Val d'Aran" 2017).
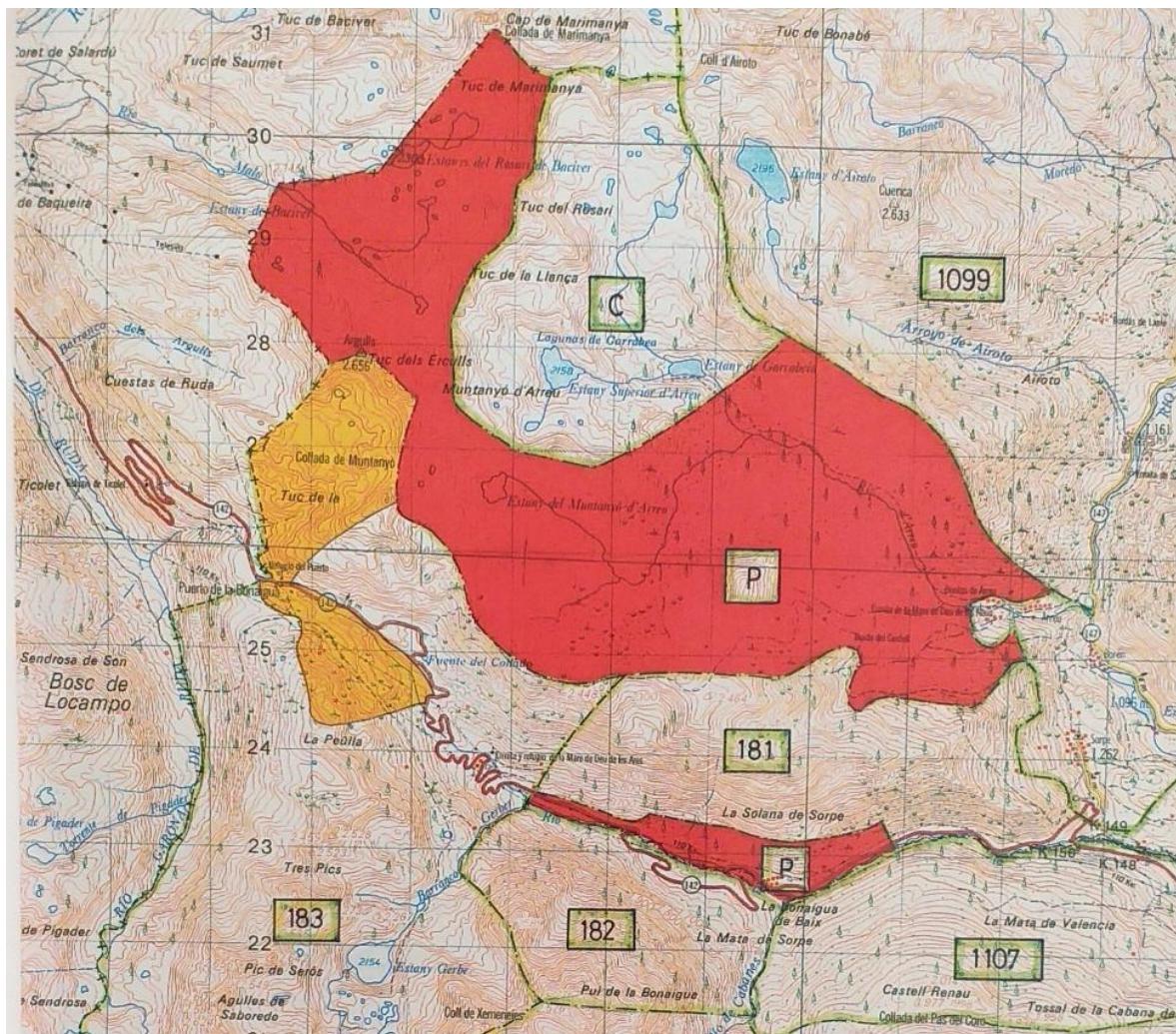
Figure 86. Map of the disputed area drawn up by Baqueira Beret in 1994 following the resort's plans to expand the ski areas toward the municipality of Alt Àneu (EDEM, S.L. 1994). In yellow, the new ski areas; in red, a large plot (2,000 hectares) covering the mountain area above the village of Borén, supposedly acquired by Baqueira Beret.

This area is owned by the following entities:

a) Lands belonging to Sorpe: The Gerdar Forest (MUP 182), in the south, and Solana Boscàs and Pinetar (MUP 181), in the north.

b) Lands formerly belonging to Borén, which now legally belong to and are managed by the municipality of Alt Àneu (large white area above MUP 183 and MUP 181 on the second map).

c) Private lands owned by present or absentee right-holders as well as those acquired by Baqueira Beret in the early 1990s before its spread toward the district of Pallars Sobirà in 1993. Santi, a forest engineer from the Catalan government, told me that Baqueira Beret had tried to disproportionately expand the size of that plot (see the third map above) when it acquired the land from the previous owner (timber enterprise). Baqueira Beret wanted to register 2,000 hectares of land, whereas the previous land deeds referred to this plot of land as a 200 hectares parcel. This information makes me suspect that property rights to the land above the village of Borén up to the administrative boundary with the district of Val d'Aran are more fragmented than the maps show.

d) The Grouping of Four Villages, an entity not inscribed in the Public Property Registry but recognized as valid by all the involved parties (the villages of Sorpe, València, Son, and Esterri), that dates back to between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Bringué 2003, 26).

Under the state-driven territorialization endeavour to formalize the legal status of former common lands throughout the nineteenth century,[436] local communities strove to prove their customary rights to these lands. Bringué reported that one of these disputes was heard in court in 1844. In this judicial process "the communities used the Catalan civil law, that is, the continuous possession for thirty years, *usucapió* or immemorial possession." Those judicial sentences "served to consolidate the commonwealths or properties shared between two or more villages, such as … between Sorpe, València [d'Àneu], Son [del Pi] and Esterri [d'Àneu] in the Bonaigua Pass" (2003, 31). The Grouping of Four Villages is, therefore, an old institution that holds use rights to the Bonaigua Pass Mountain, which in turn is split into four indivisible parts among the villages of Sorpe, València, Son, and Esterri. These four parts are now legally represented by the town council of Esterri (25%), the Decentralized Municipal Entity or EMD of Sorpe (25%), and the municipality of Alt Àneu (50%, on behalf of the villages of Son and València, 25% each). There are two points of note here. First, whereas the former municipalities of Son, Sorpe, and València have belonged to the municipality of Alt Àneu since 1970, although Sorpe is the only one that is legally represented by its own municipal entity (EMD), Esterri is an autonomous municipality with its own town council. And second, Borén did not use to have rights to graze on the Bonaigua Pass Mountain (MUP 183).

The conflicts deriving from flock movements under the bear program regrouping policy urges us to scrutinize the persistence of different mobility patterns of livestock in the wake of this new state-driven territoriality. The Bonaigua-Muntanyó collective flock allows for a

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[436] See Chapter 3 for a thorough examination of this process in the municipality of Naut Aran through the lens of de Certeau's framework of strategies and tactics.

thorough exploration of the regrouping policy through the lens of power and property theory since it has reshaped old customary rights and boundaries derived from a former common property regime but under a high-modernist territoriality (Scott 1998). Sheep movements were constrained by old rights and boundaries as well as recent herding practices followed by the local farmers of both small and big livestock. In this context, the commons, understood here as a set of practices carried out in common, are rethought and revisited through de Certeau's tactics and strategies framework (1988) rather than as a static concept that belongs to the past and which must be either restored or replaced. This approach aims to both help understand the emergence of conflicts between farmers of big and small livestock and lay the foundations for the implementation of a new herding model based on the construction of a wildlife/livestock negotiated territoriality.

## Local farmers' parallel biographies and the establishment of the Bonaigua-Muntanyó collective flock

The Bonaigua-Muntanyó collective flock was set up in 2017 after Hug and Ariadna, a young couple who run a farm with fewer than two hundred head of sheep in València, claimed that sixteen of their flock had gone missing during the 2016 summer grazing season.[437] Because the public administration established a minimum threshold of around 1,000 animals to set up a collective flock and due to the scarce number of farms with small livestock in the municipality (two in València, including Hug and Ariadna's, one in Borén, and three between Isil and Alós,

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[437] See Chapter 4 for ethnographic accounts of this situation.

which were already part of the Bonabé-Salau collective flock), the couple grouped their flock with another local sheep farmer in his seventies from the adjacent village of Borén. Two years later, in 2019, Miquel and Iria, another couple from València who run a goat farm and make cheese, joined the collective flock, leaving the historic pasture area of València, the Gerber valley within the Bonaigua Pass Mountain (MUP 183), with no small livestock grazing on it.

Both the men in these families, Hug and Miquel, were born in València in 1984 and 1979, respectively. They not only share a birthplace and generation, however; both men followed a similar path into farming. In their teens they started with a handful of animals—sheep or goats— and in the late 2000s they both decided to set up their own farming enterprise. Their biographies also coincide in that their partners, Ariadna and Iria, were not born in the Catalan High Pyrenees, and they are both fully committed to their respective farm businesses.

Hug's connection with livestock is closely related to his uncle, who used to work as a shepherd in the mid-twentieth century and later had his own flock until 1994. When Hug was only thirteen years old, he and his father decided to acquire three sheep. "It began as a bit of fun and we gradually got more and more involved… and now it's our livelihood,"[438] he described this process to me with amusement. In 2009, he bought more sheep to build up his own flock, and in 2015 he decided to devote himself fully to farming. By 2018, Hug and Ariadna's flock had grown to 240 animals, mostly sheep but also some goats. Although his farm can accommodate up to 400 animals, he considers 250 sheep would be their limit. Between 2010 and 2016, before joining the collective flock in 2017, Hug recalled how he used to graze on the

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[438] "*Vam començar jugant i ens vam anar ficant a l'asunto... i ara és el nostre mitjà de vida*" (Hug, 27/10/2017).

historic common lands of València, in the Gerber valley, from June 18 to October 7. Following the widespread individualized loose management of private flocks and herds across the region, Hug used to visit their flock once a week unless the GPS signal emitted by a collar round the sheep's necks alerted him to any irregular movements. Although he had to hike up and down the Gerber valley—very rough, steep terrain—he described this kind of shepherding management prior to the bear attacks in 2016 as easy and quiet, with a maximum of five sheep requiring specific care treatments throughout the entire summer grazing season. "Had everything gone well, I would have liked to keep going to Gerber [valley]," since he defined this mountain pasture area in very personal terms: "When you go there, it feels like home."[439] Everything did not go well, though: they lost sixteen sheep allegedly due to bear attacks in 2016, although just one of them was certified as such, so he felt forced and resigned to leave *his* mountain, to leave *home.*

Miquel, the goat farmer from València, began taking his flock of about thirty goats to the Gerber valley around 2005, when a dog from the village caused about ten casualties as the flock was grazing on private and public lands near València.[440] By 2008, when he started dating his partner Iria, the flock had grown to more than twenty animals. In 2010, they bought some Spanish ibex goats, and some months later they began to build their own farm. What began as a hobby turned into their professional business and way of life. In 2019, they had 155 goats grazing on the mountains, considered to be the limit their farm could support. Miquel and Iria have

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[439] "*Quan hi vas, tornes a casa*" (Hug, 14/6/2018).
[440] The Catalan's Director of Environment set a comparison between the damage on sheep caused by bears and dogs on a press conference (14/9/2018) to illustrate the extent to which the conflicts surrounding the bear program exceeded the numbers of sheep casualties: "Until August [2018] the bear had killed three sheep in Pallars Sobirà… And the year before, the dogs … had killed 514 sheep in Catalonia."

managed to make their goat farm viable in València, mainly through retail sales of meat and cheese with no distribution costs. They were happy to take their flock up to the Gerber valley, and they did not actually or directly move the flock from *their* mountain because of the bear. The bears had not killed any goats when their flock joined the collective flock in 2019. However, the minimum threshold of 1,000 animals set by the public administration to make any collective flock viable was a more insidious way of forcing them to abandon this location and their shepherding model.

Before the establishment of the collective flock, Oriol, the bear program grounded expert who acts as the liaison between farmers, shepherds, and the public administration, and who is responsible for the logistics of the collective flocks, had already advised both farm units to move their flocks from *their* mountains to other pastures because of the increasing presence of bears in the Gerber valley. Both farmers were reluctant to follow this advice, though, because of their deep place-attachment feelings to this area mentioned above. As with most local sheep farmers in the area, in both cases resistance to moving their flocks coalesced into resignation. Local small livestock farmers were first reluctant to move their flocks from *their* mountains due to the renewed presence of bears, but eventually became resigned to it. Or, as Oriol put it, when he recalled the general feeling among most local farmers about the need to join a new collective flock, they were both resistant and resigned "to abandoning their own heritage for the sake of the bear."[441]

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[441] "*d'abandonar el meu patrimoni per culpa de l'ós*" (Oriol, 15/11/2018).

Beyond the local sheep farmers' feelings of being displaced from *their* mountains, the movement of flocks uncovered conflicts between big and small livestock farmers. These conflicts relate to the coexistence of two different herding models once the regrouping policy had been implemented: an individualized loose management of cows and horses, which graze across high mountain pastures without boundaries; and a public collective management of sheep and goats with spatial and temporal limits. The key point here is that both the big livestock farmers and the bear program proponents representing the public administration use a historical local territoriality to support their argument, namely that a communal collective management of livestock was carried out within old customary boundaries between villages under a farming resource governance. They both claim that the herding model undertaken or organized, respectively, is based on a longstanding territorial ordering of collective pasture use for extensive husbandry. Conceiving territoriality as the unfolding of a herding model based on the combination of livestock management, patterns of mobility, and governance serves to critique both claims. In other words, neither the herding model put in practice by big livestock farmers prior to the regrouping policy nor the model this policy implemented following the establishment of the collective flocks can be considered a *communal territoriality*. Rather, they represent different herding models that also differ from those implemented prior to the dismantling of the village flocks in the 1970s.

The following ethnographic snippets from 2018 and 2019 serve to illustrate the extent to which the collision between state-driven and local territorialities ties into the troubled coexistence of three herding models regarding livestock mobility patterns. Inspired by Hug's graphic descriptions, these models could be classified as follows: herding within customary boundaries; herding with no boundaries; and herding with new boundaries.

| Herding models over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Alt Àneu | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Period** | 1900-1970 | 1970-2010 | 2010-to date |
| **Format** | Communal | Private | Public |
| **Management** | Collective | Individual | Collective |
| **Mobility** | Customary boundaries | No boundaries | New boundaries |
| **Governance** | Farming | Farming | Environmentality |
| **Territoriality** | Local | Local | State |

Figure 87. Herding models over the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in Alt Àneu. Differences of livestock mobility patterns between these three periods are highlighted in yellow.

**When a state-driven territoriality collides with previous local herding models: local tactics on (un)bounded pastures**

*Borén lands: trouble in the Far West (2018)*
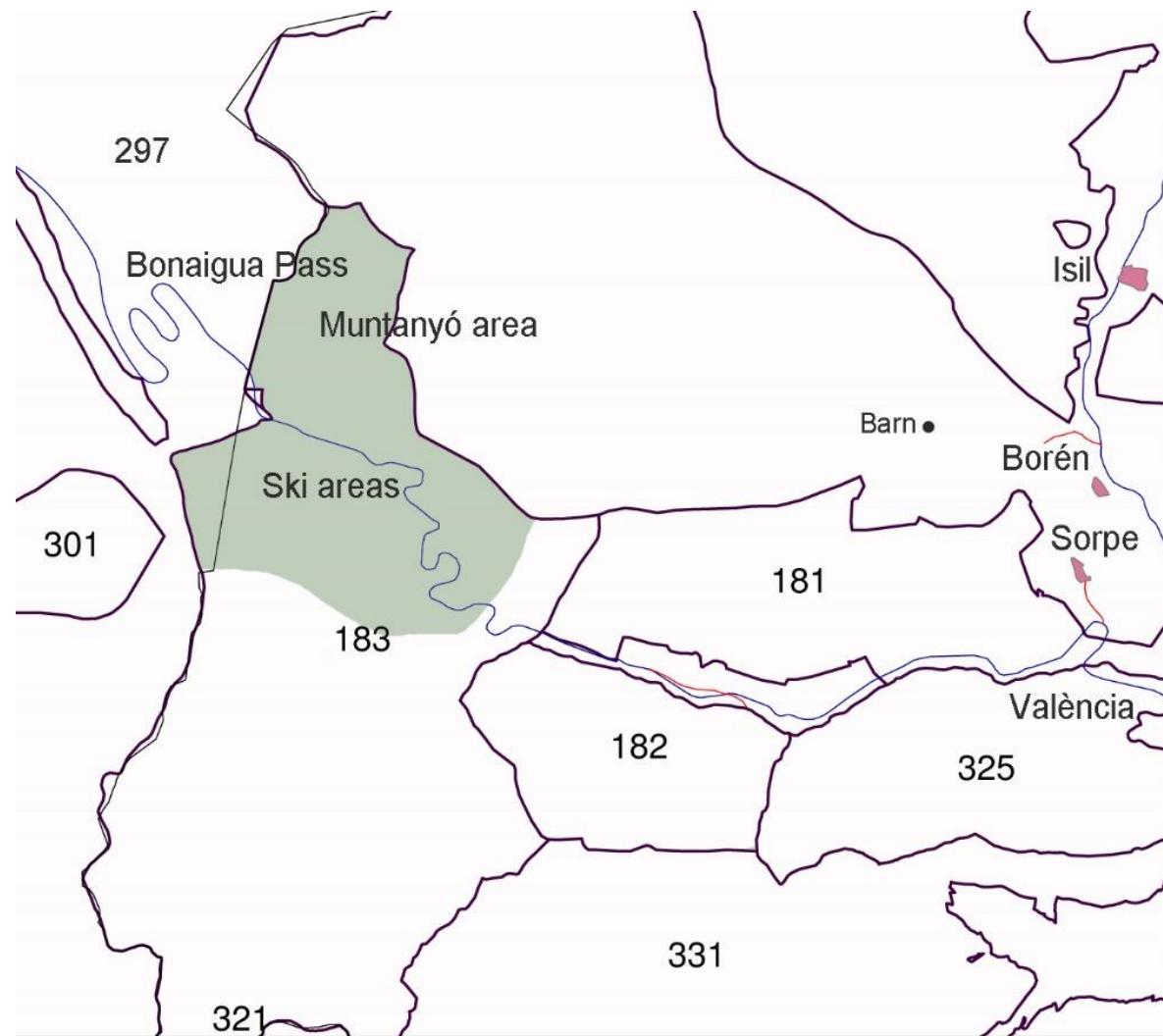


Figure 88. Map of Baqueira Beret ski areas in the municipality of Alt Àneu, partly overlapping with the Muntanyó area where the Bonaigua-Muntanyó collective flock was established in 2017. Source: Author, based on ("Montes d'Utilitat Pública Val d'Aran" 2017).

The Muntanyó area, which borders on Val d'Aran and the Baqueira Beret ski areas, is where I first met both Hug, the sheep farmer from València, and Robert, the Bonaigua-Muntanyó collective flock shepherd. It was on one of those unexpectedly cold, snowy weeks in mid-September, in 2017. That was the first year of the collective flock and two local sheep farmers, one from Borén and the other from València, grouped their respective flocks and took them up to that spot in July. Muntanyó lies at over 2,000 metres above sea level and a very basic prefabricated shelter had been flown in by helicopter as a provisional shepherd's hut. Three years later, I asked Hug about the land tenure regimes surrounding the shelter where the shepherd and the collective flock have stayed overnight during the summer grazing season since 2017. He summarized the complex bundle of rights to this land held by different villages in clear layperson's terms: "There's a bit of trouble in that area."[442] The following ethnographic vignette describes this trouble as I went walkabout with Hug and Robert across the fields near Borén in June 2018.

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As arranged by phone the week before, I meet Hug and Ariadna, the couple from València, and Robert, the shepherd, at the turn onto the Sorpe-Borén road on June 14. It is 2 pm. After greeting them, for about a kilometre I slowly follow behind the flock in my car until we reach a water tank.

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[442] "*En aquella zona hi ha una mica de jaleo*" (Hug, 28/1/2020).

I park the car and offer to carry some stuff in my backpack over to the barn where the shepherd will stay for a couple of weeks. This spot is unfamiliar to me since the flock did not stay in that intermediate area the year before. I'm finally given half a dozen eggs to carry. While Robert takes the flock up the first steep stretch of the trail, and Ariadna returns to their apartment in València, I start walking with Hug. The flock are now out of sight. It is spring, but it seems as if time has stood still. The last occasion I spoke with Robert was just here, walking down along the same trail, in mid-October at the start of the fall nine months ago. Today, a fierce sun warms our bodies. Neither the heat nor the climb stop us from chatting, though. Hug and I have not seen each other for many months, since the end of January, so we are eager to talk as we face the first stretch. I feel exhausted by the steep climb and the conversation, and am out of breath. Hug resolves to stop talking, joking: "Now, I'll be the anthropologist," meaning that he will limit his activity to just observing.

No words for a while.

We finally reach a flatter stretch and I break the silence. I ask him about the land tenure of the fields we will walk through today and the owners of the land where the flock will stay overnight for the next couple of weeks until the sheep go up to the Muntanyó area. In 2018, Hug came to an agreement with the owner of a disused barn situated at the top of several small privately-owned parcels of land.

Beside the barn, they plan to set up the electrified enclosure where the flock will spend over the nights after grazing the upper reaches of the mountain during the day. Hug tells me that the fields and pastures we will cross today are a mixture of private lands, which he says were leased by or ceded to the only sheep farmer from the village of Borén, and the lands formerly

owned by the village that are currently managed by the municipality of Alt Àneu. He describes a non-conflictive scenario of land agreements, though there is one niggling detail. Today, the sheep farmer from Borén is not coming with us. Just as last year and as will happen the following year, for personal and logistical reasons he decided to take his flock to the high mountain pastures some weeks later, in July. Thus, today the collective flock is not so much collective, since it turns out that just one private flock, owned by Hug and Ariadna from the village of València, will move in to graze on private lands historically owned by the residents of the village of Borén.

After walking for an hour or so, we reach the barn. A padlock secures the door. Hug takes a key out of his pocket and we go inside. The space evokes a feeling of desolation in me. A dirt floor, a loft with wooden beams, sundry abandoned household appliances, a table, some chairs, and the white plastic bags the helicopter had brought with the shepherd's supplies. We sit on two round upright logs and chat for a while.

Unexpectedly, a backlit silhouette appears in the entrance.

It is a hefty young man, leaning with his two hands and chin on a hazel shepherd's crook. A quick exchange of cordial greetings tells me right away that they know each other very well, after which the young man's mood and tone change. What seemed like a casual, friendly encounter turns into something else that I am still unable to work out. Referring to a previous meeting, he is accusing Hug of grazing his flock on pastures where he is allegedly not allowed to. The quarrel becomes more intense; Hug and I are still sitting on our upright logs, and the young man stares at him across the barn from the doorway. Hug's face is impassive. I am immobile, even paralyzed by the increasing tension palpable in the atmosphere. The place does

not ease my feeling; the opposite in fact. A desolate barn up there, so close but so far from the nearest village and the main road. A disordered space. An angry young man vehemently claiming his rights. His hefty body supported on that thin stick. Some of the things Hug said minutes earlier resonate clearly in my head. "People here," he has just told me, "get furious even before they say hello" and most of the time "they'd rather die than feel they'd lost." The combination of those words, which now seem to be a premonition of something neither Hug nor I expected, and the scene before me is just explosive. My impression is compounded by Hug's next words to the young man: "Let them come and tell me whatever they want to say… I have no problem," he says out loud confidently and even a bit arrogantly, goading the young man to bring anyone who may have an issue with him grazing his flock in that area. The light, the sounds… it seems straight out of a Western. But what if he draws a rifle or a handgun to settle his argument?!

This scene conjures a violent atmosphere that unfolds in two directions. On the one hand, the contents and forms of what and how the young man speaks; on the other, the disturbance associated with being in a place and having to listen to a conversation to which I have not been invited. Moreover, the content of the conversation calls into question the supposed normative harmony about the rights and duties to the plots of land we just crossed today with the flock. I feel uncomfortable being present in a conversation that seems to contradict the impression I had from Hug's words, both today and in previous meetings. The deeds of these private fields and collective grazing lands do not seem to be so clear, and the question of who currently owns the land is part of the "trouble" as Hug himself will tell me a couple of years later. In 2020, the mayor of Alt Àneu planned to sort out this trouble through a project to regulate the former common lands in Borén to clarify their ownership.

After the discussion is over, the man has gone, and Robert shows up with the flock, Hug tells me that some of the land we crossed to get to the barn where we are now has been bought by a family from Sorpe, a village adjacent to Borén, where the young man is from. They acquired this land not for hay or to graze their herd of about 80 cows, but so they could complain about other people using them. According to Hug, this family's aim is to boycott the collective flock so they can have access to the meadows on the former commons of Borén and then gain access to the Muntanyó pasture areas: "What they would like," he tells me, "is for there to be no animals here so they can say they have the right to put their cows here."

Just before we leave and head down the road to the car, Hug sums up the scene and conflict by telling me that people no longer know the territory and speak without knowing where they are talking about, or the rights associated to these lands.

The declining number of farms and the ensuing loss of knowledge about land divisions since the 1960s have blurred the old boundaries and customary rights. Hug had already graphically described this model as "herding without boundaries." Contrary to what it might seem, this description strays from the conception of the herding model prior to the regrouping policy as devoid of conflicts: "Ever since this 'more or less' [referring to the lack of rigidity and strictness of boundaries and rights after the village flocks were dismantled] started," he said, "it's always 'more than less'."

After making a few calls, first to the owner of the barn and some of the plots surrounding it, then to the mayor of Alt Àneu and Oriol, the grounded expert responsible for organizing the collective flock, Hug decides to set up the night camp with the electrified enclosure as planned.

It is time to get back to my car. As I walk alone in the dim light of the evening, the upset over the land rights fills me a feeling of disturbance that will last for some days.

### The Bonaigua Pass Mountain pasture areas at stake (2019)

Just as in 2018, the following year the sheep farmer from Borén decided to join the collective flock some weeks after the animals were expected to go up to the mountain pasture areas at the end of June. By that time, the grass on the Muntanyó area, where the shepherd's prefabricated shelter was already in place, was getting scarce. Given that the villagers from Borén do not hold historic rights to use the Bonaigua Pass Mountain pasture areas, which belong to the "Grouping of the four villages" (Sorpe, València, Son, and Esterri), Miquel and Iria, who joined the collective flock that year for the first time, and Hug and Ariadna, as neighbours from València with use rights to this *public mountain* (MUP 183), decided to take advantage of the absence of the Borén flock and move their two flocks together up to this shared pasture area in late June, at the beginning of the mountain grazing season. Despite the enactment of a municipal ordinance issued in 2018 to enable any movement of livestock within the boundaries of Alt Àneu caused by the presence of bears, the València farmers' decision was intended to avoid conflicts with some big livestock farmers from Sorpe, as had occurred the year before. The family of the young man who unexpectedly appeared in the barn door in June 2018 also questioned the right of a farmer from Borén to graze on the Bonaigua Pass Mountain pasture areas in 2019. More specifically, Hug pointed out that both farm units from València planned to place the electrified enclosure around an old hut where the València village flock used to stay overnight in the 1960s when it was tended by his uncle.

In the mid-twentieth century, although the Bonaigua Pass Mountain pasture areas were exploited by livestock from the four villages, Sorpe, València, Son, and Esterri, each village flock was assigned a specific parcel to graze on. The decision taken by today's farmers from València was thus meant not only to avoid conflicts with some big livestock farmers from Sorpe, but also to reinforce the historical, and even kin-related territorial attachments to that specific corner of the collective pasture areas of the Bonaigua Pass Mountain. In doing so, they were emulating a pattern of grazing mobility followed until the early 1970s, the time when the village flocks were still present.



Figure 89. The inscription chiseled on the stone sign proves that the current hut dates back to 1953 (25/6/2019).

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As vividly illustrated in the ethnographic vignette from 2018 as well as by the València farmers'
movements in 2019, the Bonaigua-Muntanyó collective flock shows how a state-led high-
modernist territoriality, engendered by the renewed presence of bears and the ensuing
regrouping policy, overlaps with different local forms of territoriality based on the combination
of a historical communal collective model and a recently individualized loose herding model.
Local tactics and state strategies play out on this overlap. The movements of flocks prompt us
to reflect on the articulation between historical, though blurred, customary boundaries, the
individualized and loose management of big livestock, and farmers' particular interests in private
fields and collective pastures. Conflicts between local farmers emerge from this complex
interplay and the loss of knowledge about boundaries and associated rights, but they are covered
up by the description of what at first glance seems to be a problem-free landscape.

In line with what Hug told me when were taking the flock up to the disused barn near
the village of Borén, Bea, a big livestock farmer from Sorpe, who did not oppose the movements
of the collective flock across the Muntanyó or the Bonaigua Pass Mountain pasture areas, also
portrayed a non-conflictive scenario when she spoke about the use of the high mountain
pastures, their old boundaries, and the rights of local farmers from different villages:

- *Me*: But, strictly speaking, if different common lands [belonging to different villages] are
marked off …, horses or cows from València could not graze on Sorpe common lands…

-   *Bea*: Well, there is no problem with that because they [cows and horses] usually stay on a *mountain* [the Bonaigua Pass] that belongs to the four villages [Sorpe, València, Son, and Esterri]… It's true that there are horses [not from Sorpe] that go toward Podo Lake [Solana Boscàs Mountain, MUP 181], which belongs *more* to Sorpe, but it doesn't matter… Although in those cases there are some grudges [among local farmers] … But, taking the overall livestock that graze on the [Bonaigua] Pass [Mountain] there is no problem because it belongs to the four villages… The limits were always very well set out, but … when there's money, the commons… when there's money there are problems… While it's about grass, there is no problem."[443]

The drastic decline of farms and farming activities since the 1960s, and the subsequent abundance of pastures for the few remaining farmers is an overstated narrative voiced by those very farmers to paint a picture of a quiet landscape, grazed by livestock on collective pasture areas, a bucolic vision apparently only disturbed by the relaxing sound of the bells round the animals' necks, in which territorial issues lay hidden underneath.[444] In this context, occasional disputes among local farmers are usually mentioned in passing remarks that tend to linger on the sidelines of farmers' discourses with acceptance and resignation. "There are some [conflicts among local farmers], but not here because I'm almost alone," said, for example, Cèdric, one of

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[443] *- Però, estrictament, si el comú, si els diferents comunals estan delimitats... Per dir algo així, els cavalls o les vaques de... València, si el comunal està delimitat no podrien pasturar pels de Sorpe...*
*- Bueno, amb això no hi ha problema, perquè casi sempre estan al Port... la part que é dels quatre [pobles]... Bueno, si que hi ha eqües que se'n van cap a Estany Podo que é allò é més de Sorpe, bueno és igual… Que aleshores allà sí que hi ha una mica més de piques, però bueno... Pel volum general que està aquí al Port, com que é dels quatre pobles no hi ha problema… Els límits, tota la vida havien estat molt marcats. Però … quan hi ha calers hi ha problemas … Mentre són herbes no hi havie cap problema"* (Bea, 16/3/2018).
[444] The contrast between an apparently quiet landscape imbued with the sounds of nature and a conflictive territory, in which different interests in the exploitation of natural resources are at stake, is a common pattern in high mountain areas where current population numbers are scant, insignificant, or completely absent (Pons Raga 2015).

the three sheep farmers from the Bonabé valley. In this case, there is only one other horse farmer with whom he gets on well. Interestingly, this smooth relationship results in a crucial informal agreement that evokes the aforementioned "herding without boundaries" model: "He grazes [his herd] everywhere, and so do I."[445]

However, Hug pointed out sharply that no boundaries does not mean no problems. The staggering decline of the farming sector plus the appearance of maps and GPS technology triggered the progressive invisibilization of original landmarks while a "dirtier" landscape spread. "Mountains [and marks] have not moved, but the land got dirty," according to Hug, and "the people no longer know the territory … and the rights associated with it."[446] "Dirtiness" refers here to the spread of vegetation, the advancing forest, and a rewilding process writ large, which made original landmarks, such as rocks, trails, streams, rivers, peaks, trees, and so on, more difficult to recognize quickly from the ground. Hug pondered on the traditional ways in which historical boundaries would have been set, differentiating them with what Stilgoe called the "secularization of landscape boundaries" (in Lowenthal 2015, 407 f. n. 129) This secularization process refers to the shift from using natural features to demarcate properties to tracing these boundaries through records (printing, aerial photography, and mathematical cartography), obviating the need either to recall or to retain physical markers. The process of secularizing the landscape boundaries allows us to map "all the world's features with special precision" at the expense of emptying them of any "historical or memorial context" (Lowenthal 2015, 407). Hug's words exemplified this shift, from relying on natural landmarks to the use of maps:

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[445] "*Ell passa per tot arreu i jo també*" (Cèdric, 7/11/2018).
[446] "*Les muntanyes no s'han mogut, però el terreny s'ha embrutat*" (Hug, 28/1/2020); "*la gent ja no es coneix el territori i parla sense conèixer ni d'on parla ni dels drets que hi ha associats a aquests territoris*" (Hug, 14/6/2018).

People didn't use to have GPS, yardsticks, nothing like that. So they were very much guided by what they could see … If people … could look over the place on the ground … not with a map … If you go to the mountain and say, where is the limit? Waters here, waters there. You know, mountain boundaries … People didn't come and say, 'you see that stone hidden over there …'. Nothing like that! They did it so that … there would be no confusion. So they would know exactly when they went up, to fix the boundaries, from here to there, period.[447]

The abandoned pastures together with the spread of the forest mean that the current boundary marks are blurred and obscured. This vanishing process would have been exacerbated by several factors, but the secondary role—to say the least—of farming in most local households was a crucial element. A dirty, wild landscape, two adjectives that together conjure up a sense of abandonment and a loss of value,[448] paved the way for the movement of boundaries for everyone's sake. Limits and rights become messy when they appear as inexistent, while landscape transformations, such as the advance of the forest, may exacerbate this messiness since boundaries are then out of people's sight and mind. In a way, if the bear was considered socially extinct,[449] then so were old boundaries and rights. The "mental extinction of bears," to use

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[447] "*La gent d'abans no tenia ni GPS, ni teniven metros ni teniven res d'això. I llavors es guiaven molt per la vista… Si la gent … pugessin a mirar sobre el lloc del terreny. No amb un mapa… Si tu vas a la muntanya i dius, el límit on és? Aigües cap aquí, aigües cap allà. Saps, limitacions de muntanyes … La gent no arribava i deia, 'veus aquella pedreta que hi ha allí amagada …'. No no, allò ho feven perquè no hi hagués problemes, perquè no hi hagués confusió. Perquè sapiguessin exactament quan pujaven per fer un fitatge, d'aquí a allà, i s'ha acabat*"] (Hug, 5/11/2018).
[448] See Chapter 5.
[449] See Chapter 4.

Oriol's expression, and the blurriness of boundaries are two of the main factors that led to herding with no boundaries.

As Hug graphically put it, herding with no boundaries means that today, "Boundary stones get moved about more than a wine pitcher [*porró*] on the table." Consequently, "Everybody looks out for themselves" and grazing on the high mountain pastures "is free-for-all." [450] The first comparison is especially illustrative, since a "porró" is a typical recipient, normally made of glass, with one opening at the top where a beverage, usually alcoholic, is poured in, and a narrow spout where it comes out in a stream when the pitcher is tilted, pouring straight into the mouth without touching the drinker's lips.[451] After drinking, the *porró* is passed on to the next person so it almost never stays in the same place on the table.

The *quiet, free* landscape Cèdric mentioned earlier, a non-conflictive scenario in which everyone could graze freely anywhere they wanted to contrasts starkly with Hug's portrayal of a situation in which everyone tries to take more than their share at the expense of others. Individual interests and personal discrepancies come to the fore when shared boundaries get blurred.

The implementation of the sheep regrouping policy without prior acknowledgement of the old, vanishing boundaries has rekindled buried conflicts between big and small livestock farmers. Contrasting the loose management of cows and horses with the transformation of small livestock shepherding practices under the bear program, Hug lamented: "Those of us with a

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[450] "*les fites es mouen més que un porró a taula*" (Hug, 27/10/2017); "*tothom s'ho fa venir bé per tirar cap a casa seva*" (Hug, 31/1/2018).

[451] See note 80 in Chapter 1.

shepherd have to follow everything to the letter, [but] the people whose animals [cows and horses] go wherever they want, what about them?!"[452]

In this transformation, the conflicts emerging over the sheep regrouping policy seem to be, to use Bea's expression, *only about grass*, or more specifically about the social spatialization and the spatial socialization of collective pastures based on the dissonance between current and previous boundaries and rights.[453] This scenario leads me to conceptualize those grazing lands as *(un)bounded pastures*, since they appear to have no boundaries, but in the conflicts triggered by the movement of the collective flocks, these blurred boundaries resurfaced as visible and tangible.

## The missed opportunity: toward a negotiated territoriality

On August 29, 2019, I met Hug at the Bonaigua Pass. The date was set to bring down the pregnant ewes to the farm. Like the year before, a researcher working on socioecological transformations in the Pyrenees was also present. There were other farmers and relatives, and conversations were flowing back and forth, but I stuck by the researcher and Hug. Since some pastures in the Bonabé valley and all the Gerber valley stopped being grazed when the Bonabé-Salau and Muntanyó-Bonaigua collective flocks were introduced, she brought up the question of the potential ecological downsides of the regrouping policy. As I was listening to this

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[452] "*Nosaltres que tenim pastor hem de seguir tot a raja tabla, i la gent que les seves bèsties van on volen, què passa?!* (Hug, 25/6/2019).
[453] A peripatetic ethnography, as it was devised by Wendy Darby (2000, 4), precisely "examines how social relations are spatialized and how spatial relations are socialized" (see Introduction).

discussion, I recalled the opinion that Oriol, the grounded expert responsible for organizing the collective flocks, had shared with me on this topic. He basically contended that while grouping flocks from adjacent villages has indeed meant some pasture areas were grazed bare, the number of sheep and goats involved was so small that the ecological implications would be almost negligible. In fact, the staggering decline of flocks grazing on these mountain pasture areas was mostly caused by the collapse of transhumance at the beginning of the twenty-first century, prior to the regrouping policy. [454] I brought Oriol's argument into the conversation. Hug agreed, but he also wanted to make a point: regarding the role livestock play in producing a certain ecologically diverse landscape, he was at pains to stress that as well as the number of animals, but the pattern of mobility of both small and big livestock across the high mountain pasture areas is also a factor.

This comment was especially relevant to me, since he shifted the conversation from landscape to territorial issues, thus offering a territorial view of the landscape. By recalling how the last large transhumant flocks to graze on the Naut Aran and Alt Àneu high mountain pasture areas would move long distances across different corners of the mountains during the summer grazing season following a strict calendar, Hug highlighted the clear difference between the shepherding model with new boundaries followed by the collective flocks today and the herding model with no boundaries followed by big livestock since the mid-twentieth century. In effect, the regrouping policy and the ensuing hiring of shepherds brought about a change in the mobility of sheep and goat flocks, but hardly affected the individualized loose management of herds of

[454] See Chapter 4.

cows and horses.[455] Given this situation, I interjected with the argument that the bear program may be conceived as a *missed opportunity* since it did not consider the landscape transformations, including the blurred boundaries and the differences between the herding models of big and small livestock farmers, before the sheep regrouping policy was implemented. In other words, the bear program did not develop a territorial view of the landscape before implementing those measures.

The regrouping policy thus illustrates a wildlife-driven territorialization endorsed by the interplay of different environmentalities imposed on the local farmers that aims to design and implement a new herding model. The renewed presence of bears has thus challenged the way flocks and herds were previously managed, the boundary system on which that management was based, and the farming resource governance. Bears have given way to a crucial shift in the shepherding model from a loose to a shepherd-driven management backed by the presence of protection dogs and electrified night camps coupled with a new environmental governance of natural resources. Lacking a territorial dimension of the landscapes, which includes a careful study of the genealogy of historical changes in the herding models of both small and big livestock in these pasture areas, I deem this shift as a missed opportunity with regard to not only *what*, but foremost *how* it has been implemented so far.

The bear program could have served to steer the interplay between livestock and wildlife toward a negotiated territoriality involving not only sheep and goat farmers, but also cow and

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[455] Some cattle and horse herders were hired through the PirosLIFE project (2015-2019), but their role did not revolve around moving the herds across pasture areas, but rather checking where the cows and horses were as well as their state before their farmers come to visit them in the high mountain pastures once a week. In the Bonabé valley, for instance, the cattle herder is responsible for *tending* 800 hundred transhumant cows (official data from the Isil and Alós EMD).

horse farmers in reshaping livestock patterns of mobility across bounded pastures by considering old boundaries and rights beforehand. This approach would not necessarily imply enforcing those boundaries and rights, but they would be taken into account.

# Conclusions — The production of green over the persistence of the commons

Departing from the production of green and the persistence of the commons, I have examined the landscape transformations that have taken place in two municipalities in the Catalan High Pyrenees in the wake of the creation of the Baqueira Beret ski resort and the implementation of the brown bear reintroduction program. Until now, I have handled the ski resort and the bear program separately, but in these concluding remarks I offer a transversal reading, bringing together the themes that have crosscut my analysis of the complex articulation of Baqueira Beret and the bear program with extensive husbandry.

My ethnographic approach to historicity has revealed the continuities and discontinuities between the landscapes before and after the implementation of the *snow reserve* in Naut Aran and the *natural reserve* in Alt Àneu. Tracing out those changes through the local farmers' voices, memories, and knowledge has allowed me to engage critically with the notions of replacement and restoration, advocated by the ski resort and the bear program, respectively. Looking at these transformations from an ethnographic and historical standpoint allows us to understand the production of both reserves in terms of a twofold paradox: the double urbanization and naturalization of the landscape midwifed the transition from a farming to a leisure-based society in the High Pyrenees. The urbanization and naturalization of the landscape are entwined processes that account for the elements that comprise both reserves under different regimes of governance. In other words, these processes undergird and inform the key research questions motivating this dissertation:

- How are both reserves produced, understood as the landscape transformations derived from the (in)compatible interactions of Baqueira Beret and the bear reintroduction program with extensive husbandry?

- Who is responsible for or who governs such production and the ensuing landscape transformations?

- What are the power relations, moral values, and territorial rights underpinning these interactions and the resulting landscapes?

These questions underlie the tropes of improvement revolving around the production of green landscapes under the moral ecology of Baqueira Beret and the bear program, but they also emerge out of the conflicts and negotiations surrounding the persistence of previous local territorialities that still hinge upon the notion of the commons. In a way, environmentality, understood as "the creation of environmental subjects—people who care about the environment," has been embraced by Baqueira Beret and the bear program alike (Fletcher 2010: 176), but it has also been reduced to the production of green landscapes. Such new caring has not been able, though, to get rid of the previous local territorialities. As a result, the complex articulation of an alpine ski resort and a wildlife conservation program with extensive husbandry, frequently defined as either compatible or incompatible, presses us to take (in)compatibility as the analytical lenses through which to examine the production of green over the persistence of the communal or pre-modern territorialities. The dialectical essence of this vantage point draws attention to the power relations between Baqueira Beret and the bear program, on one hand, and extensive husbandry, on the other.

# The ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape: the production of reserves in space and through time via a double urbanization/naturalization process

My crucial epistemological premise has been to view the landscape as a palimpsest composed of layers that sediment in space and time. "Landscape is time materializing," as Barbara Bender put it (2002, 103), and this materialization always occurs in space. Thus, in landscape, time and space become inextricably entwined. Besides, a multilayered landscape is not simply *there* but is constantly produced as part of historical conjunctures in which inseparable, and sometimes incompatible, worlds interact (Tsing 2005; Li 2014; Franquesa 2018; Tilley and Cameron-Daum 2017, 293). I have taken the creation of Baqueira Beret in 1964 and the implementation of the bear reintroduction program in 1996 as the departure points to delineate a vanishing farming landscape, characterized by the longstanding presence of livestock, within the current prevailing skiing and ecotourism landscapes in Naut Aran and Alt Àneu. This ethnographic quest looks both backward and forward. Looking backward, it reveals how the production of both reserves is brought about in space and time. Looking forward, it offers a glimpse of the differentiated imagined futures that hinge upon two notions that paradoxically connect us to the past: replacement and restoration. Baqueira Beret and the bear program look forward, to the future, while framing the past as a bounded time to get rid of or to return to. In doing so, I have argued that replacement and restoration, embraced by Baqueira Beret and the bear program, respectively, become the ways in which alpine skiing and wildlife conservation construct, dialectically with extensive husbandry, the links between the past, the present, and the future. As a result, I have shown how the production of these landscape transformations takes time as an

essential element for its realization. In other words, Baqueira Beret and the bear program have not only produced the landscape transformations over the last decades or *in time*, but they have also used time as a key category to produce them. Thus, I contend that they have produced the landscape transformations *through time* (see Ringel 2016a). By this I mean that the landscape transformations have not only built historically but also using time as a key variable for its production. Under the differentiated notions of replacement and restoration that connect the past to the present and future, both the ski resort and the bear program embrace tropes of improvement to legitimate landscape transformations. However, improvement as a discourse tends to jeopardize a laminated view of the landscape. In a laminated view, previous layers are not understood in terms of erasure and replacement or recovery and restoration but rather as part of current and future landscapes. Throughout these chapters, I have aimed to reveal this laminated or, using Olwig's terminology, binocular vision of the landscape, through which "[t]he touched, smelled and heard proximate material worlds is … woven into the walker's sensory field" (2008, 84). Through this laminated binocular vision, multiple temporalities and territorialities are simultaneously present thereby disrupting a linear discourse of improvement and development.

The local farmers' voices—whether through semi-structured interviews in their apartments or going walkabout across fields, pastures, and streets—have shed light on this binocular vision. Huts may have been displaced from their original site in the mountains and barns may have changed their function in the villages, shifting from storing livestock and hay to accommodating tourists in hotels or restaurants. Fields may have given way either to urban complexes, as part of the primitive accumulation of private lands by the ski resort, or to deciduous forests full of hazelnut trees, as part of an ecological succession that tells us about the

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drastic decline of the farming sector that ran in parallel with and was accelerated by the rise of leisure activities in the mountainous rural milieux. However, the remaining presence of farmers in Naut Aran—sometimes just amounting to one or two per village—and, more importantly, their memories and knowledge highlight that neither barns and fields, nor the local knowledge that springs from them have been fully replaced or erased by the presence of Baqueira Beret. Likewise, shepherds and livestock guardian dogs (LGDs) have physically reappeared in the Pyrenees after the release of bears, thanks to funding from a wildlife conservation program. However, current shepherding practices do not resemble to those undertaken a few decades ago, when the presence of the village flocks epitomized the persistence of a communal local territoriality. Shepherds began to be hired by the public administration to reshape or even reform how local farmers have grazed their animals on the high mountain pastures since the last quarter of the twentieth century. The staggering differences between previous and current shepherding practices urge us to stay away from seeing neither the return of bears, shepherds, and LGDs, nor the changes they have entailed for the local farmers in terms of restoration.

I have framed the creation and flourishing of Baqueira Beret as a hegemonic process, characterized not only by the extreme economic dependence experienced by Naut Aran's villagers, but also by the sacredness endowed on the ski resort by most of the local population, who think that the ski resort *cannot* be criticized. Likewise, I have defined the bear program as an anti-politics machine. This anti-politics machine reduces to mere technicalities the conflicts surrounding the implementation of the bear program and claims that the program simply restores longstanding and recently abandoned shepherding practices, adapting them to the historical presence of bears in the Pyrenees. Despite these hegemonic and anti-politics processes, the ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape has revealed that neither replacement

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nor restoration are the proper terms to identify the processes occurring in both municipalities. Instead, I have proposed change and transformation as the terms through which the production of a *snow* and a *natural reserve* must be read. More specifically, Baqueira Beret and the bear program constitute two touchstones of an alpine development model based on an amenity-based consumption economy that have entailed simultaneously the urbanization and the naturalization of a previous farming landscape. The apparent contradictions between the urban and the natural are dismantled when we look at them not as opposites, but rather as complementary processes championed by both, to some extent and with key nuances, Baqueira Beret and the bear program.

Urbanization and naturalization have gone hand in hand in the landscape transformations fostered by an alpine ski resort and a wildlife reintroduction program in the High Pyrenees. At first glance, a ski resort is coupled with the urbanization of a high mountainous milieu while a wildlife program ties into its naturalization. Since ski resorts require real-estate operations to become viable and profitable, housing plans become an essential part of the blueprint of any ski resort. Baqueira Beret is not an exception. First, urbanization at the foot of the Vaquèira mountain and subsequently in Naut Aran's villages took place soon after the creation of the ski resort through a classic process of primitive accumulation through which small or medium-sized plots of land owned by a handful of landowners were acquired at very low rates in the name of progress and development. Likewise, the bear reintroduction program aimed at making the Pyrenees a wilder, greener landscape based on the restoration of natural and cultural (in this order) heritage values around the renewed presence of an umbrella species and large carnivore such as the brown bear. Naturalization thus aligns with this rewilding project, given that one of its main goals was to restore a *wilder heritagized natural* landscape (Baird 2017).

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In this dissertation, I have shown that urbanization and naturalization cannot be reduced to this binary scheme. In fact, both Baqueira Beret and the bear program, through different means and to different ends, claim to foster the naturalization of the landscape while they also promote its urbanization. On the one hand, Baqueira Beret naturalizes the landscape through *greeneering* or the engineering production of green on the ski runs. As a result, the mountains on which the ski facilities are located appear greener and hence *more natural*, as though they had never been never touched. *Greeneering* encompasses practical and aesthetic dimensions. The practical dimension relates to improving skiing conditions in the winter, while the aesthetic dimension ties into a peculiar way of caring for the environment that is narrowed down to the production of green landscapes. Thus, improving the landscape equates to producing black-boxed—using Stoddart's expression—green landscapes that conceals the traces of their engineering. At the same time, the bear reintroduction program urbanizes the mountainous rural settings by representing the loci of power in which urban-centered desires, epitomized by the renewed presence of an allegedly large carnivore such as the brown bear, are satisfied. Interestingly, this urbanization revolves around the notion of wildness, "understood as a spectrum, with fully human-dominated landscapes on the one end and (almost) fully nature-dominated landscapes on the other" (Büscher and Fletcher 2020, 67). For the bear program, recovering the presence of an umbrella species such as the brown bear that not only indexes but also, despite its ambiguous ecological role, enhances the quality of the environment, is deemed as a proof of landscape improvement. In opposition to this viewpoint, the local farmers deem the bears as "the urban squatters of the rural world" (Hug, 5/11/2018).

In both cases, Baqueira Beret and the bear program aim at producing a particular technonature (Escobar 1999; White and Wilbert 2009) or different *technonatural wildness*, in which

the prefix "techno" preceding the noun "nature" accounts for the extent to which nature and wildness are increasingly mediated through a variety of technological devices, resulting in constant reinvention. Thus, the technonature produced by both Baqueira Beret and the bear program is traversed by a shared feature. This technonature evokes artificiality and virtuality, but it does so through a paramount contradiction: it produces wildness. Stretching Arturo Escobar's reflections on the regime of technonature and following the move in conservation from protection to design (Beltran and Vaccaro 2019), we can see that the landscapes produced by both Baqueira Beret and the bear program become a matter of design (Escobar 1999, 11). Through the paradigm of conservation as design centred on the idiom of green, the ski resort has naturalized the slopes to conceal the urbanization of the landscape while the bear program has urbanized the landscape, or it has fostered an urban-centred representation of the mountainous rural landscapes, through its naturalization. Interestingly, taking Lefèbvre's triadic approach to space and applying it to the characterization of a rural space developed by Keith Halfacree (2006), the bear program has accentuated the opposition between the different representations and experiences of the everyday lives of the rural, or what could be called the exacerbation of the rurality-urbanity opposition, whereas Baqueira Beret has lessened the separation between the rural and the urban as geographic localities by subsuming the rurality-urbanity opposition to the margins.

Urbanization and naturalization are nonetheless covered by the tropes of improvement that bolster both projects. Baqueira Beret and the bear program claim to improve the landscape, "to leave it better," under a moral ecology in which the production of green is tantamount to the production of good. Interestingly, local farmers are also subjected to or even encompassed by the hegemonic idiom of the moral ecology of green coupled with the notion of improvement.

We can see evidence of the influence that EU directives—more specifically the Common Agrarian Policy (CAP), which stipulates a "green direct payment"—have on local farmers' acceptance of and even pride in being rewarded as the "gardeners of the Pyrenees." The "green direct payment" or "greening" supports, according to the EU-CAP, "farmers who adopt or maintain farming practices that contribute to EU environmental and climate goals."[456] The financial compensation for greening activities aligns with how some local farmers feel about their role in the mountains, considering the stagnation of meat prices. "It's good that the work you do is recognized," Hug once told me.[457] He felt rewarded by receiving public funds for "recovering plots of land" or "cleaning scrublands." His words clearly illustrated the extent to which local farmers have also embraced the couplet greening-improvement:

> You feel rewarded when you recover a farm or clear away some bushes. When I go around the edge [of the village] and I take my axe, and I go with the sheep, and clear a piece of a barren field, and you see that they [the sheep] are walking around and eating, and you see that in two months, three months or a year, it has changed, you say, 'Damn, it looks fucking nice now!?' This used to be a plot of land full of bushes and now it's turned into a beautiful fucking meadow. In a way, you are firewalling. And this is already a concern of the Administration, that there are many fires and they do not want to screw up [the landscape] with tracks or firewalls… Well, we, if they let us recover [the

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[456]        https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/income-support/greening_en.
[457] "*És bo que es reconegui la feina que fa un*" (Hug, 30/6/2018).

land] or let us do this stuff, and also they pay you a little to be gardeners or firefighters, it's even better. It's an added incentive to do the work.[458]

# Improving or greening the landscape? Moral ecologies and multivocalities

In this research, I have focused on the production of green landscapes by Baqueira Beret and the bear program, showing how it is construed as improvement. In this section I concentrate on these two sets of actors. However, narratives of improvement were also present in extensive husbandry, and I will address them here briefly before delving into the discourses on greening and improvement undertaken by the ski resort and the wildlife program. The local farmers have embraced a moral ecology of green to legitimate their task of keeping up the meadows near the villages and the pastures in the high mountains. Thus, farmers also construe greening as way to improve the landscapes. However, greening and improving the landscapes do not stand alone in this case but in relation to the tasks of stewardship of and caring for their lands.

The Baqueira Beret employees responsible for carrying out mountain interventions on the ski runs during the summer, as well as the experts, scientists, and politicians in charge of the

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[458] "*Et sents recompensat quan tu recuperes finques, o estàs llimpiant una sèrie de matollars. jo quan vaig pel terme i m'emporto la destral, i vaig amb les ovelles, i llimpio un tros de fincota erma, i veus que elles hi van passant i van menjant, i veus que en dos mesos, tres mesos o un any, òstia, allò ha canviat, diu, 'òstia, què ben parit no ara!?'. Això era un puesto ple de gabarneres i ara s'ha fotut un prat de puta mare. És que, de manera inconscient, estàs fent tallafocs. I ja és aquesta preocupació a l'Administració, que hi ha molts incendis i no volen fotre pistes o tallafocs... Pues naltres si mos deixen recuperar o mos deixen fer aquestes històries, o a més a més, te paguen un tant per fer de jardiners o per fer de bombers és encara millor. És un incentiu més que tens tu a fer la feina*" (Hug, 5/11/2018).

bear reintroduction program talk about their actions in terms of landscape improvement. In both cases, and despite the staggering differences in scale and purpose, improvement aligns with the moral ecology of green, which entails a peculiar landscape change that consists of a present-future transformation charged with a moral assessment that equates the good to the green. Considering this equivalence, a preliminary inquiry must be made. What is improvement, exactly, for Baqueira Beret and the bear program? For the ski resort, improvement translates into replacing the rough and rocky slopes for a superficial layer of green that resembles a golf course; for the wildlife program, improvement means restoring a previous landscape through the renewed presence of a large carnivore and the implementation of age-old shepherding practices abandoned a few decades ago.

The production of green lies at the core of both projects and serves to validate them. As such, the idiom of green becomes a dominant *naturalizing* and *naturalized* mechanism that manages to make the landscapes *more natural* and to present this transformation as *taken-for-granted*. To green the landscapes means to make them more natural and, *consequently*, to make them better. However, greening encompasses tasks and purposes as different as, on the one hand, sowing seeds and removing rocks to open a ski run, and, on the other hand, releasing wild bears and planting thousands of apple trees and raspberry trees to recover and consolidate the brown bear population in the Pyrenees. When understood as improvement, greening needs no additional explanation, because its opposite would be to worsen the landscape. Cracking into this Manicheism scheme, a crucial point must be addressed: who decides what fits in the category of improving the landscape, or whose views on the landscape prevail in such moral assessments? This question aims at shifting from the contents to the genealogy and governance of the production of green by Baqueira Beret and the bear program.

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The production of engineered green landscapes by Baqueira Beret has accomplished a double function: making the slopes skiable and making the slopes look natural. *Producing-as-if-not producing* would summarize the leitmotiv surrounding the landscape transformations that result in the production of a technonatural green wildness. Likewise, the renewed presence of bears should be deemed as a landscape design that is presented in terms of restoration and improvement. *Producing-as-if-restoring* and *producing-as-if-improving* are the two interlinked tropes upheld by the bear program and underpinned by the hegemonic idioms of heritage and the moral ecology of wildlife conservation. These tropes are supported by the production of another sort of technonatural green wildness.

The moral ecology of Baqueira Beret and the bear program (although in substantially different ways) revolves around the production of green, attached to certain beliefs, values, and interests that, albeit dominant, are not necessarily hegemonic. The landscape produced by the ski resort and the wildlife program is not assessed univocally. Rather, this ethnography has revealed an asynchronous and simultaneous multivocality that emerged from the production of those green landscapes. Green landscapes have not always been considered in terms of improvement nor are they always considered in such terms today. On the one hand, the moral ecology of Baqueira Beret has changed over time, as the interventions on the ski runs have not followed a linear but rather a shifting pattern. On the other hand, the renewed presence of bears and the landscape produced around them—whether actively via the implementation of new shepherding practices with the presence of shepherds, LGDs, and night enclosures in the high mountain pastures as well as via the planting of fruit trees, or passively through the natural growth of hazelnut trees—are not always viewed in terms of value and improvement. To the contrary, waste and rubble are sometimes used to define the bears and the ecological succession

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they index. In sum, the moral ecology of Baqueira Beret has evolved over time in line with the emergence of a new environmentality leading to an asynchronous multivocality, a multivocality about the landscape transformations undertaken by the ski resort on the slopes over time, while the moral ecology of the bear program is confronted by other simultaneous moral ecologies derived from different place-embedded biographies.

Where moral ecologies meet, replacement and restoration crumble, while change and transformation take a kaleidoscopic aspect that presses us to see improvement with estrangement (Li 2007, 3). From this vantage point, the politics and morals of improvement take a historical and contested form in which power relations and the rights to control and use the natural resources are at stake.

Inspired by a long conversation I had with Santi, a forestry engineer from the Catalan government, I have taken the couplet greening-improvement not only to scrutinize the moral ecology of both Baqueira Beret and the bear program as a shared feature that must be approached ethnographically considering its asynchronous and simultaneous multivocality, but also to address the question of who decides what should and should not be valued as an improvement of the landscape. In other words, coupling greening with improvement presses us to examine the production of green through the lenses of governance. As Santi stated, "The one who must decide what it means to improve [the landscape] is the owner [of the mountains or Uplands of Public Utility, MUPs]." But he added nuance to this response, referring to the complex bundle of rights to collective natural resources: "At the end of the day, the one who decides is the one who rules it. And the one who rules is [or should be] the public

representative… The problem is that public representatives should have more power over the territory than private entities [referring to Baqueira Beret]."[459]

The official viewpoint from a public officer as Santi mirrors the binary clash between public and private interests. In this dissertation I have expanded this dual approach by highlighting the overlapping of modern territorialities, ruled by the state and the market, and pre-modern territorialities, prior to the ski resort and the bear program that revolved around the notion of the commons and extensive husbandry. Although modern territorialities prevail today, they have not completely obliterated the previous ones. In effect, the private and the public or the market and the state—represented by an alpine ski resort and a wildlife conservation program—must cope with the historic rights endowed on the local institutions and communities as part of such pre-modern territorialities. Among these local communities, I have drawn special attention to the few local farmers who remain in Naut Aran and Alt Àneu as representatives of a production-based use of the collective mountain pastures that contrasts with the predominant amenity-based capitalism, which swings seasonally between skiing and ecotourism. The binary clash between the private and the public, expressed by Santi, has thus taken a triadic shape, including the municipal entities and the farmers as part of the local communities. I have analyzed improvement through the lenses of (in)compatibility. Synergies and clashes of Baqueira Beret and the bear program with the local institutions and farmers have served to scrutinize dialectically the power relations underpinning the landscape improvements through the production of green. (In)compatibility has also allowed me to examine how the production of

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[459] "El que ha de decidir què és millorar és el titular." "Al final qui decideix és qui domina allò. I el qui domina és el representant públic… el problema és que els representants públics tinguin més poder sobre el territori que no les entitats privades" (Santi, 25/7/2019).

green, as the shared feature of this modern territoriality, is confronted by the persistence of the commons, as the quintessential institutional element of those pre-modern territorialities.

## (In)compatibility as a dialectical approach to analyzing the production of green over the remnants of the commons

Local institutions and farmers have adapted to, and even benefited from the creation of an alpine ski resort and the implementation of a wildlife conservation program. Compatibility aligns with adaptation and benefit, whereas incompatibility hints the opposite. However, in the examination of the complex interactions of Baqueira Beret and the bear program with extensive husbandry, I have chosen to approach (in)compatibility as an epistemological means rather than a teleological end. In other words, I have been interested in compatibility and incompatibility as processes instead of a goal to be achieved. This approach ties into Marxian dialectics, since it attempts to move from oppositions to contradictions, "tracing out the inner connections between the different elements in a mode of production, as against the haphazard, and extrinsic 'mere juxtaposition'" (Hall 2003, 120). From this vantage point, extensive husbandry is not a world from the past that lies in opposition or juxtaposition to the modern, or using Vaccaro's terminology (2010) hypermodern worlds fully or partially built around Baqueira Beret and the bear program. Extensive husbandry is rather part of the current alpine development model running alongside the contradictory connections that can be traced via the lenses of (in)compatibility. As such, Baqueira Beret, the bear program, and extensive husbandry constitute an "inclusive totality" or a "complexly structured whole" (Hall 2003, 128; 136), while the

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(in)compatible interactions that can be observed between them allowed me to develop a "concrete analysis of concrete relations" within a specific historical conjuncture.

Certain differences between Baqueira Beret and the bear program must be underscored. Local farmers tend to frame the interactions between the alpine ski resort and extensive husbandry in terms of compatibility, whereas they frame interactions with the bear program in terms of incompatibility. The seasonality of skiing and that of the bears plays a crucial role here. Despite some disturbances, livestock continue grazing on the high mountain pastures upon which the ski facilities lie. In fact, grazing on these ski runs may be even beneficial for the animals, since the ski resort sows seeds and removes rocks from the high mountain pastures every year. The tracks opened by Baqueira Beret to access the ski runs are also useful for the local farmers, allowing them to reach remote areas by car. More importantly, most of the local farmers from Naut Aran work or have worked as ski instructors, providing them with income that they invest in their farming businesses. In contrast, after their hibernation cycle, the bears wander around the forests and fields near the villages in spring and fall or the high mountain pastures in the summer, following the livestock. The loose herding model, without boundaries, shepherds, or LGDs, dominant in these territories since the last quarter of the twentieth century, clashes strikingly with the increasing presence of bears in the High Pyrenees since the late 2000s. Moreover, in Naut Aran and Alt Àneu bears are not a tourist asset yet, nor do they require a consistent amount of labour from the local population beyond the handful of *grounded experts* and the half dozen shepherds hired by the public administration, plus the couple of people who run the museum "The House of the Bear" in Isil and temporary workers to plant fruit trees.

Beyond these differences and although compatibility or incompatibility may shift to improvement in both cases, my interests have revolved around two other axes: a) the links between the production of green and the persistence of previous layers in the landscape, particularly the remaining presence of farming activities and the notion of the commons and b) the underpinnings of both compatibility and incompatibility, or what lies beneath them.

Firstly, approaching property as a bundle of rights has allowed me to move from a moral to a territorial view of the landscape, drawing attention to the layers of rights as part of the palimpsest of the landscape. Use rights must be differentiated from the right to choose or authoritative rights. De Certeau's terminology on the difference between strategy and tactic has provided a generative framework for this analysis (1988). Local institutions and farmers have had to adapt to the pace imposed by the land demands of an alpine ski resort and the EU directives on environmental conservation and biodiversity. However, the negotiations around the expansion of the Baqueira Beret ski areas differ from the ones around the implementation of the bear program. Whereas local institutions and farmers in Naut Aran have deployed tactics that allow them to control the exploitation of the natural resources around Baqueira Beret, the local farmers have perceived the implementation of the bear program as an overt (release of bears) or insidious (new shepherding practices) imposition, fitting in a high-modernist territoriality (Scott 1998) and different environmentalities (Fletcher 2010). In the production of green landscapes, Baqueira Beret and the bear program, has had to deal, though, with the persistence of previous local territorialities, in which the commons are still prevalent, whether in the form of the remnants of a land tenure regime or the reinvigoration of communal collective activities. The cannon between Baqueira Beret and Naut Aran is a paradigmatic example of the persistence of the commons in current times. The income received by each village from the

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exploitation of the collective pastures by the ski resort is determined according to historic communal rights, which date to the seventeenth century. Likewise, the regrouping policy attempted to mirror prior shepherding practices in which the sheep from all households of one village were grouped together in a larger collective "village flock." However, conflicts emerged between large and small livestock farmers as well as around the institutional scaffolding surrounding the new collective flocks, organized and funded by the bear program. These conflicts show that the new shepherding model and the new territoriality it entailed did not consider sufficiently either the communal or the more recently individualized management of the flocks and herds, and the multiple local territorialities that unfolded in parallel with these different types of shepherding and herding.

Secondly, approaching the compatibility or incompatibility between, on the one hand, Baqueira Beret and the bear program, and, on the other, the local farmers, as a teleological end prevents us from understanding what these processes entail and what lie beneath them. Framed as a goal, (in)compatibility erases power from the equation, whether as a hopeful or dead end. As such, it hinders the possibility of addressing the moral ecologies and territorialities through the power relations between different stakeholders underpinning the collective representations, and the control and use of natural resources.

When we delaminate the layers of green and the layers of rights surrounding the notion of the commons, we begin to see a path toward a moral ecology of skiing, wildlife, and extensive husbandry that allows us to engage critically with the notions of improvement and incompatibility through the ethnographic approach to the historicity of landscape. This method allows us to see the moral and territorial views of the landscape as two intertwined parts of a

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totality underpinned by the politics and power that spring from both views. Moral ecology and property as a bundle of rights thus become two analytics that must be considered together rather than separately in the analysis of the landscape transformations fostered by alpine skiing and wildlife programs in the rural milieux of southern Europe.

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# Appendix: List of figures