

## *Abandoned taskscapes: shifting labor and tenure relations in southern Europe's uplands*

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The social structure, economy and ecology of Europe's highlands, once dominated by traditional extensive livestock keeping and transhumance, is rapidly changing. As the material, cultural and political influence of rural practices and lifestyles is declining, many upland landscapes have undergone a process of ecological transformation. Rural abandonment has been identified as an important factor in forest regeneration and in the recovery of many wildlife populations across Europe, but few studies have looked at how it has impacted rural identities and the multi-species relations unravelling in these new landscapes. Especially as local communities are transitioning from traditional resource uses to an economy based on services and tourism, people's relationships to their landscape and the wildlife that inhabits it are also changing. This research will explore local perceptions of landscape, social and ecological change, and will consider the strategies employed by communities to adapt and respond to rural abandonment. Drawing on political ecology, multi-species and gender studies perspectives, it seeks to understand the shifting land tenure and labor arrangements that are taking place, as communities and their more-than-human counterparts engage in a changing landscape.

Like many other European uplands, the municipalities of Somiedo and Cangas in northern Spain are inhabited by an aging and dwindling population. Livestock grazing and shrub burning have provided a mosaic landscape that gives refuge to a variety of wildlife, but structural changes in agrarian systems coupled with conservation and environmental regulations are threatening the viability of traditional practices. Burdened by declining agricultural subsidies, stalling sale prices, and increasing bureaucratic requirements, some livestock owners are no longer able or willing to pursue their activities. Those who resist these changes have changed their herding practices and shifted to livestock that requires less care and is less vulnerable to depredations by the burgeoning populations of large carnivores. Others have gone into the service sector, and many more have migrated to near and far urban centers. Women are often the first to go, and with them also goes the reproductive future, resilience and wellbeing of the local community.

This research will employ ethnographic methods to document local perceptions of land abandonment and the strategies adopted to respond to it, taking as a starting point the narratives, practices and livelihoods through which people make sense of and shape their surroundings. Ingold's notion 'taskscape', understood as the enduring record of activities carried out in an environment, helps shed light on the ways in which environment, local activities and identities are mutually constituted. It draws attention to the labor carried out by people and their more-than-human companions, both domestic and wild, as they go about their everyday life and place-making activities. By looking at the labor of animals, on one side, and of women on the other, this research will explore the changing material and political contours of Europe's abandoned upland landscapes. From the cows whose grazing habits carve out a

space for themselves and for humans, to livestock guarding dogs protecting herds from carnivore predations, through to the growing populations of vultures scavenging among decomposing carcasses, this research will reflect on the role that animals play in carrying out the labor that humans no longer can or care to do. Ideas of labor and care will furthermore be explored by looking at the tasks and roles taken on in the community by the women who have chosen to stay. In a context where men have traditionally dominated the realm of recognized labor and politics, this research will consider emerging gender and multispecies entanglements, and the role they play in holding together the social and ecological fabric of rural landscapes. Finally, the research will explore shifting land tenure relations as people in Cangas and Somiedo are reclaiming ownership of neglected and contested communal lands. In a context where wildlife is taking over once productive landscapes, where villages are emptying out, and where notions of landscape ownership and care are changing, this research will explore emerging socio-ecological arrangements and how they are affecting local gender and multispecies relations.