Potentials and challenges for a cross-border shepherd organisation in the Alps

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Background

„Knowledge transfer on the co-adaptation of humans and wolves in the Alpine region“ by CIPRA International
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Interviews in 1st stage of project showed need among shepherds for intensified exchange

What would be potentials and challenges for a cross-border shepherd organisation in the Alpine region? 
... from the shepherds’ point of view
What we did

Sixteen interviews with Alpine shepherds

Primary focus on shepherds of small livestock

Questions about:
- Perception of shepherds in society
- Representation of shepherds in politics & public sphere
- Conditions of employment
- Membership in existing shepherd organisations
- Need for regional/cross-border shepherd organisation
### Identified potentials

| Public relations                                                                 | Promote shepherding as demanding profession that requires qualification  
|                                                                                  | Educate public about work & challenges of shepherds  
|                                                                                  | Raise awareness on role of pastoralism for nature conservation & regional economic cycles |
| Professional training                                                            | Provide information on existing training opportunities  
|                                                                                  | Help benefit from experiences of other countries |
| Exchange and networking                                                           | Organise conferences, excursions and festivals  
|                                                                                  | Promote exchange of experiences between shepherds |
| Advocacy of shepherds’ interests                                                 | Increase shepherds’ representation in the political sphere  
|                                                                                  | Improve employment and accommodation conditions  
|                                                                                  | Achieve representation of shepherds not permanently living in country where they work |
| Rights and duties                                                                | Serve as contact point for information |
Challenges

"[Depending on who is member] people will think that this structure is not legitimate and they will not want to participate. […] When it’s new and it’s in different countries, we don’t know who we are addressing and that can be a bit worrying."

"[Challenges for existing organisation are] lack of time, resources and organisation"

"The main obstacle [for existing organisation] is that we are volunteers […] you have to earn your living, you have to find the time to invest yourself"

"[Main challenges for cross-border organisation would be] distance, languages and money."

"French shepherds have not grouped themselves by mountains or mountain ranges without reason. Depending on the region, the shepherding techniques, the problems and also the partners with whom an organisation has to cooperate are different. In addition, the pastoralist profession is strongly oriented towards the local level and new initiatives usually emerge from the local context."
Further considerations

- Not forgetting the farmers
- Bridging seasonality and high fluctuation
- Wage gaps between neighbouring countries
- Representativeness of study
Conclusion

In view of similar problems across Alpine region, cross-border organisation working to fulfil identified potentials seems like a resource-efficient and sensible approach.

From interviews, clear need among shepherds for a stronger organisation is apparent.

However, reservations about cross-border shepherd organisation exist → Legitimacy, how to work in grassroots and at the same time transboundary way, how to maintain efforts in the long term, ...

Follow-up project: Determine if and how identified challenges for a cross-border organisation can be addressed.
Thank you for your attention

Questions?