XIV European Mountain CONVENTION

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EUROMONTANA

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Mountain grasslands and ecosystem services in the Basque Country. Towards a win-win framework?

Landscape



The context

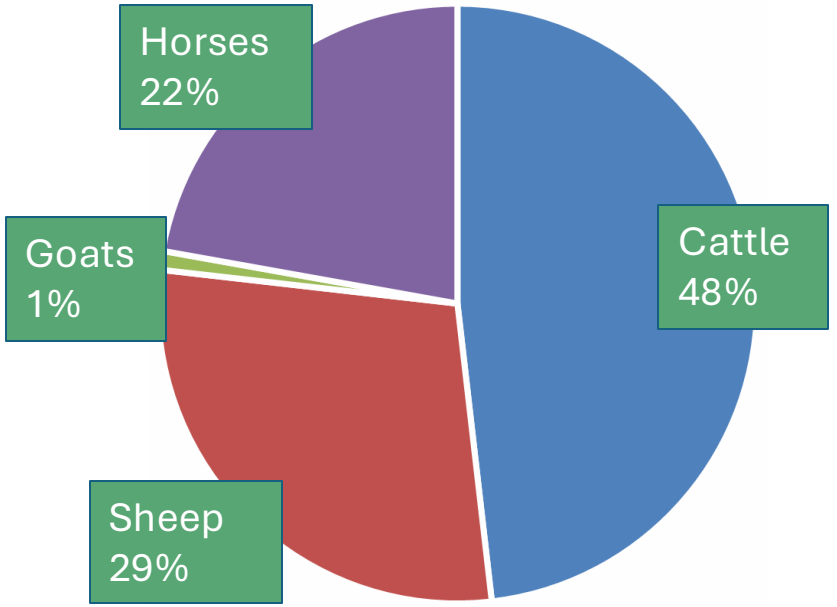
Bioecological

- Atlantic, mid-elevation mountains (800-1.400 m).
- Very high proportion of surface covered by grazed habitats of EU conservation concern within Natura 2000 sites (~50%, 13.000 ha).
  - Dry and wet heathlands (4020, 4030).
  - Raised bogs (7110).
  - Semi-natural grasslands (6230, 6210).
- Habitats for species of EU conservation concern.
- Major contribution to ecological connectivity in SW Europe.



Pastureland management

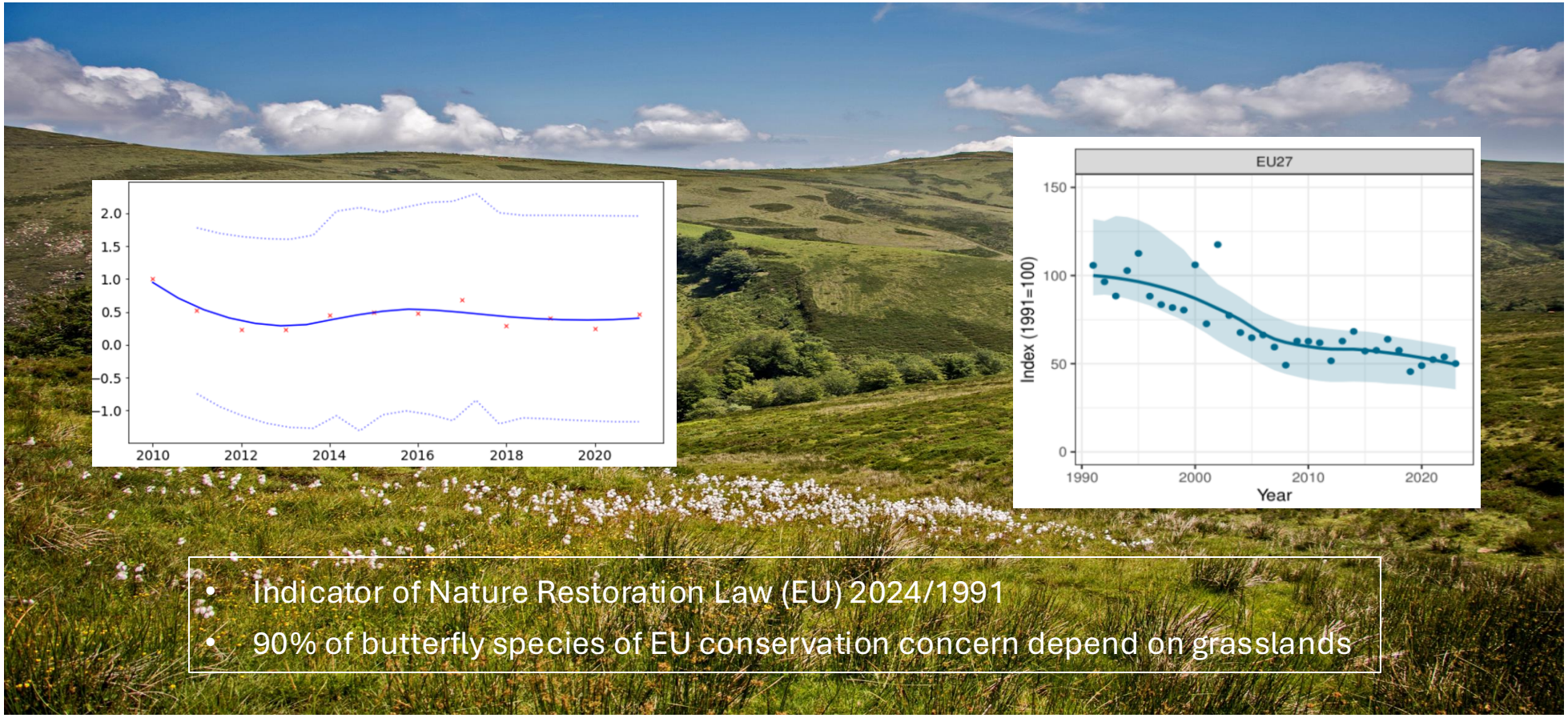
- Use of communal mountain pasturelands, under municipal or local rules.
- Determine livestock numbers, grazing periods and concession of shelters.
- In accordance to regional legislation.
- 700 authorised farms.



The bases for a shared narrative

1. The role of mountain livestock grazing for **grassland conservation** is key.
2. A minor share of production, but with **disproportionate effects** on the territory.
3. Benefits from high-valued landscapes and biodiversity reach over the **whole society**.
4. Messages targetting urban perspectives **reduce the gaps** with pastoral activities.
5. To counteract the impact of low profitability and dependence on CAP subsidies, efforts to **raise the products profile** are needed.
6. The concept of ecosystem services is very well-suited for **communication** across different scales and realms.

Grassland butterfly indicator



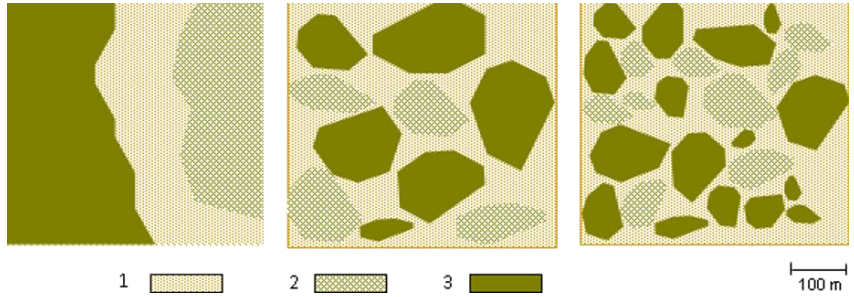
- Indicator of Nature Restoration Law (EU) 2024/1991
- 90% of butterfly species of EU conservation concern depend on grasslands

Fernández-García *et al.* (2022)
Van Swaay *et al.* (2025)

Conservation of EU concern species

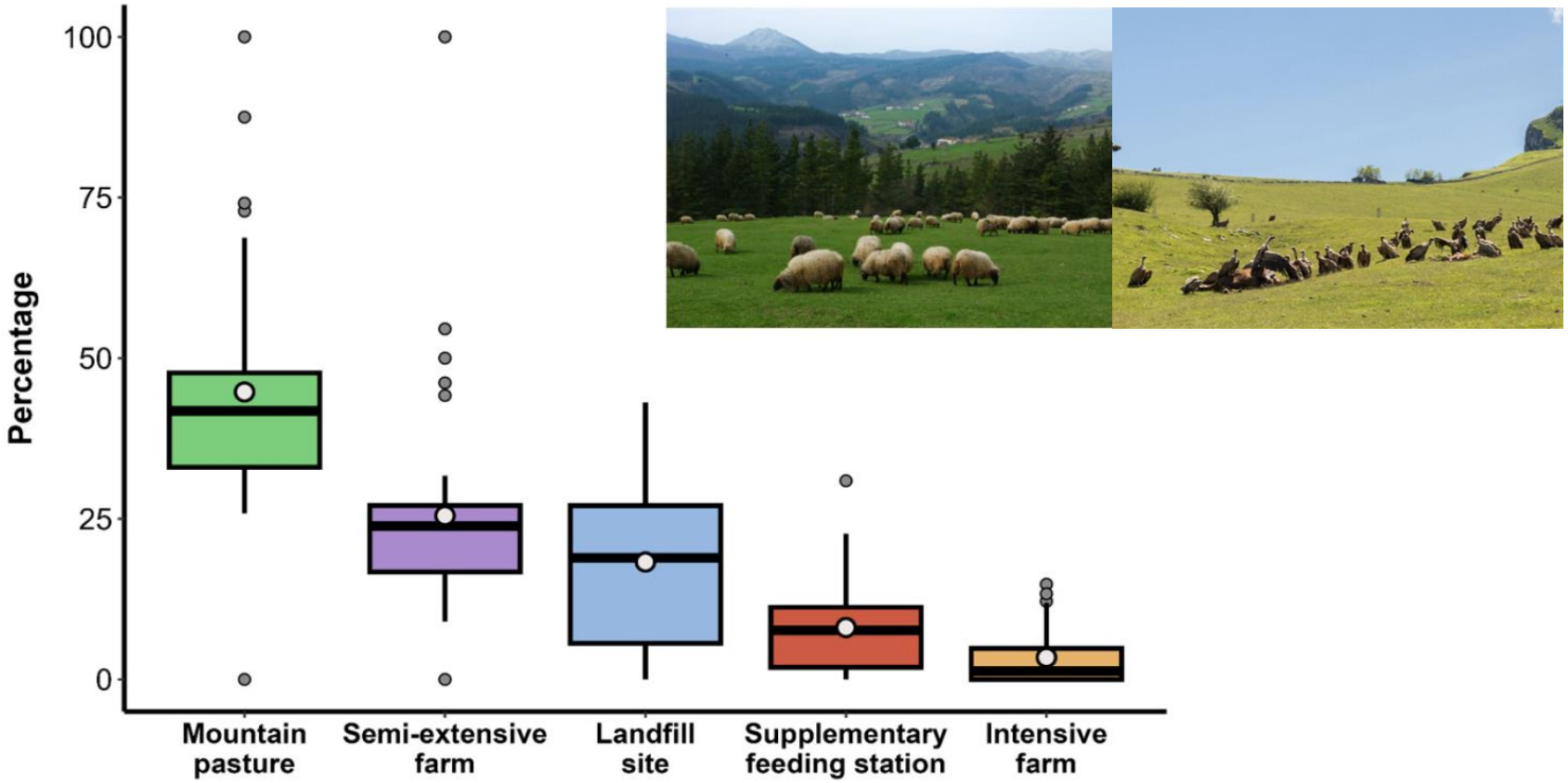






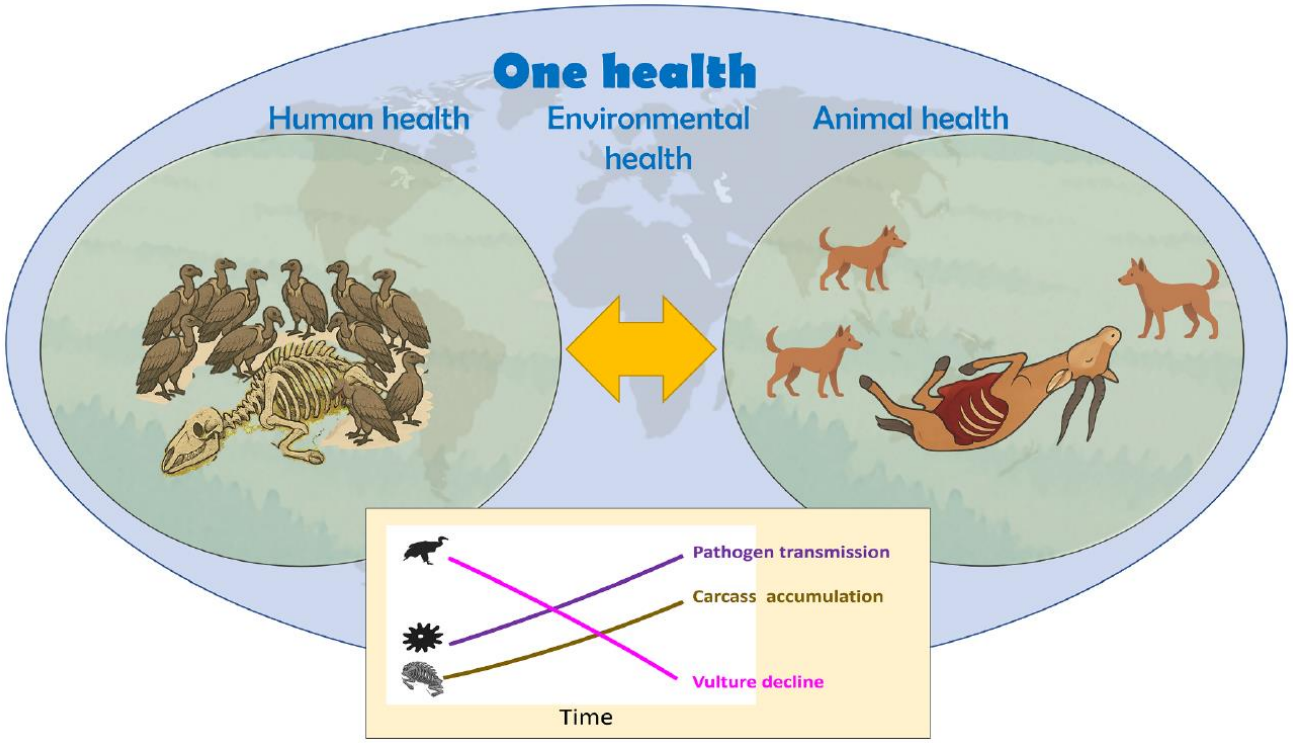
Novoa *et al.* (2012)

Livestock-scavengers relationship



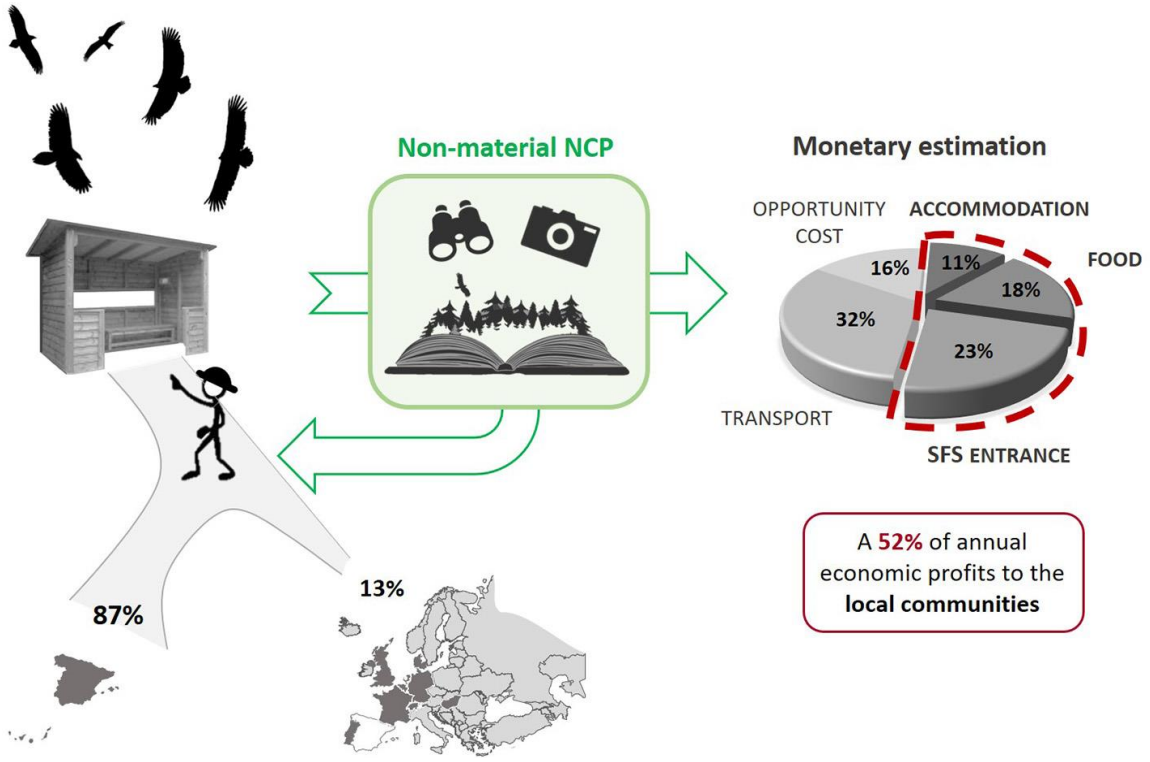
Fernández-García *et al.* (2025)

One health paradigm



Santangeli *et al*. (2025)

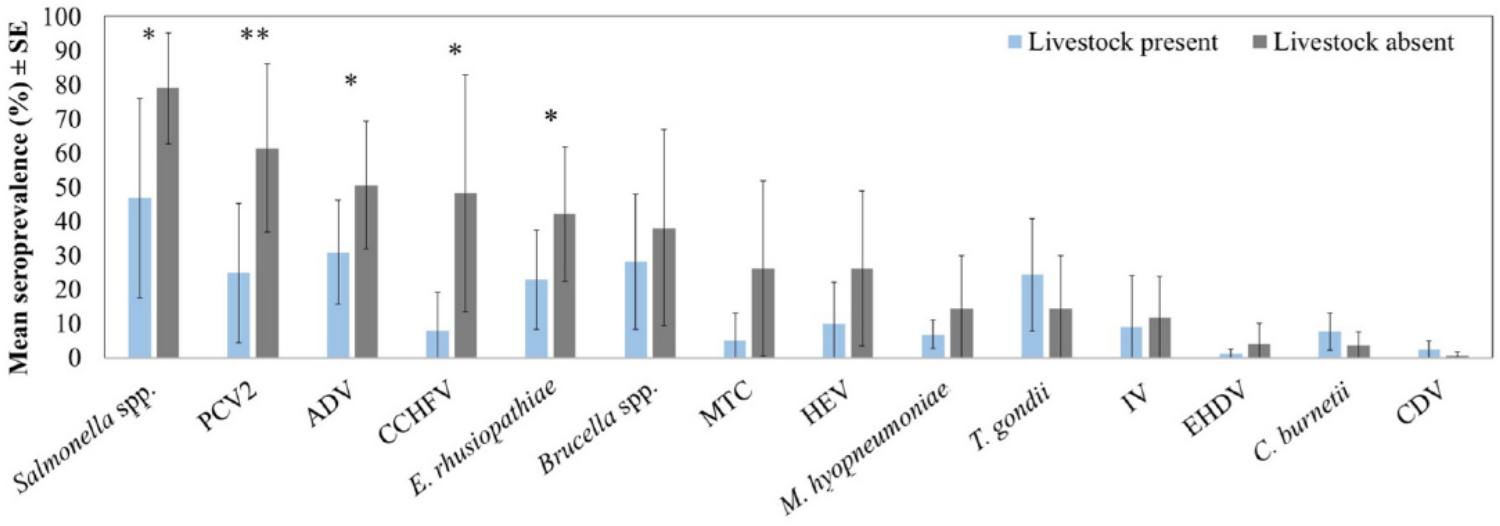
Nature tourism

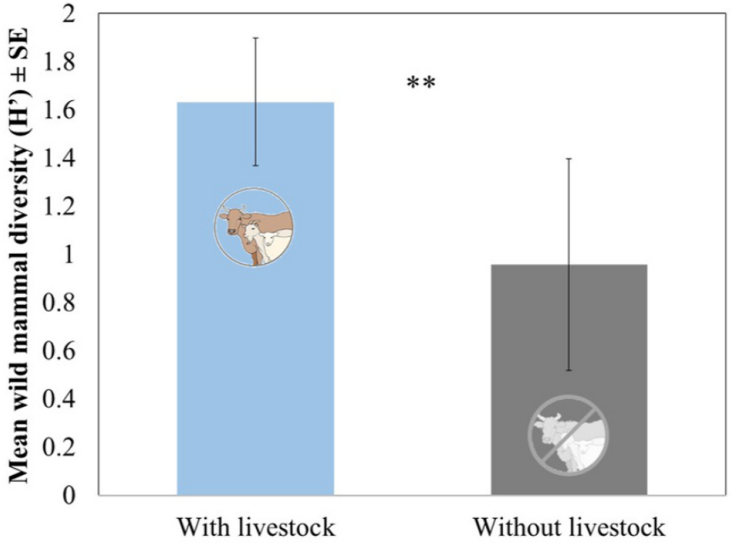


- 4,3 million €/year in the Pyrenees
- 1-1,5 million €/year in the Pyrénées Atlantiques

Salles & Dutilly (2019)
García-Jiménez *et al.* (2021)

Ecosystem resilience

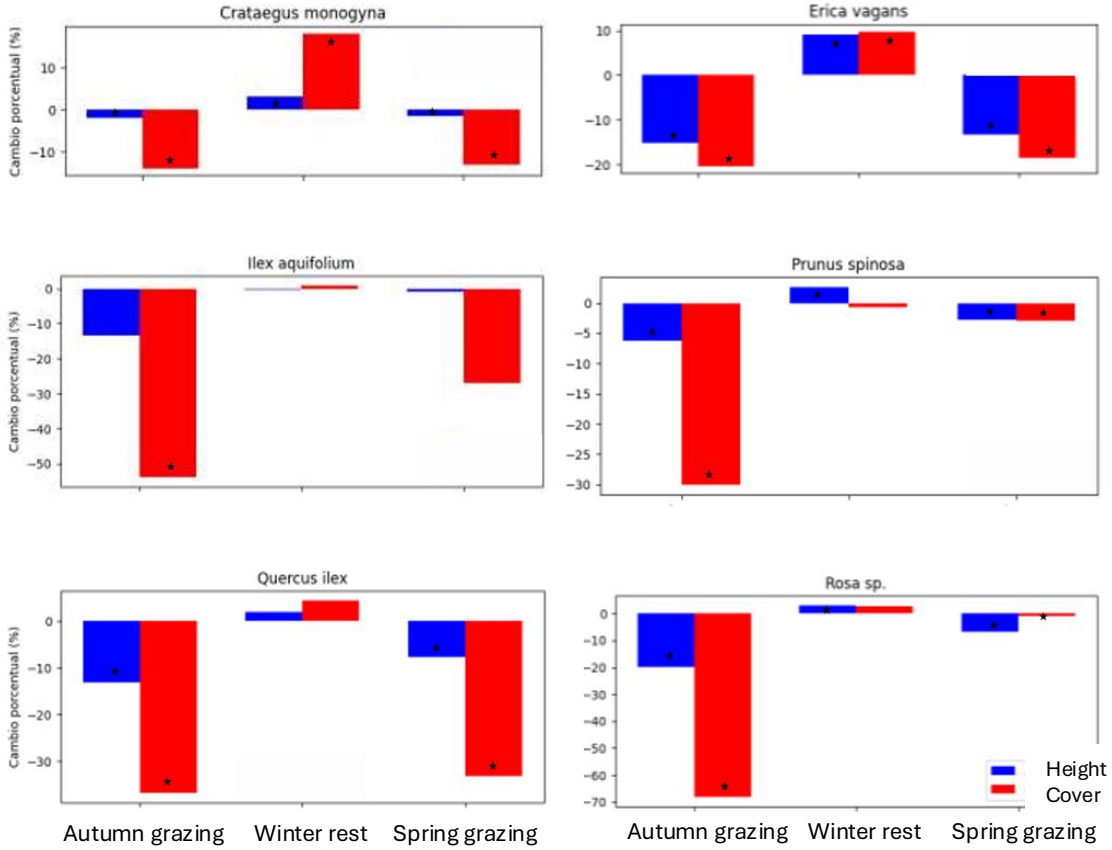




Tech-aid to maintain grasslands

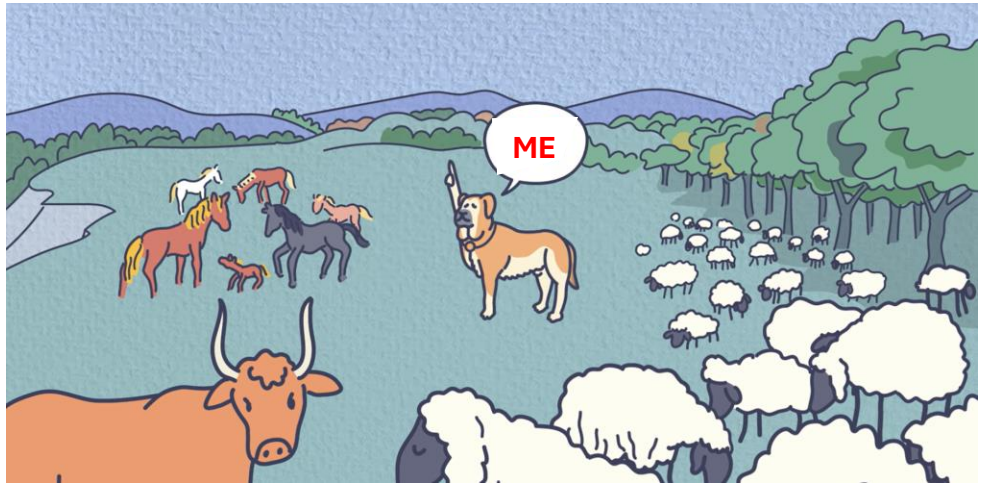






Bartolomé *et al.* (2025)

Adapting to risks related to wolf presence



- Compensating and training farmers to proper use of guarding dogs.
- Hiring personnel to guard and guide herds.
- Rehabilitating of mountain shelters for staying farmers.
- Campaining recreational mountain users.

Promoting traditional breeds



- Genetically improved breeds aimed at production…
- …but optimal pastoral use of mountains require rustic traits, not always correlated to productive traits.

Supporting the mountain products





- Cheese produced up in the mountain pastureland, with milk from *latxa* sheep.
- Favours extensive, guided grazing systems.
- High food quality product.

Garmendia *et al.* (2022)

The good practices tale

Working the educational dimension



Engaging in land stewardship



- Goilarre colaborative program, since 2020.
- Brings together interests and promotes exchange among provincial authorities, landowners (municipalities) and farmers.
- Decision-making and shared financial contribution from stakeholders (85 €/ha authorities, 45 €/ha municipalities).

Roadmap for further developments

- Not just training, but **closer support**.
- Promote shorter market chains and **product differentiation**.
- Extend **awareness among consumers**, including facilitating direct contact with producers.
- **Mutual understanding** and dialogue for coexistence between livestock and “new” recreational activities.



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DE VOTRE ATTENTION !

THANK YOU

FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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