

EUROMOUNTAINS.NET
**THEME 3: “Defense and Management of the
Fragile Rural Areas, Landscapes, and Natural
Resources in Mountains”**

Study Co-ordination Project



Scottish Study Tour

5th and 6th July 2006

Report prepared by: Russell Smith
Aug 2006



PROJECT PART-FINANCED
BY THE EUROPEAN UNION



Introduction

This report documents the study tour to Skye and Lochalsh in the Highlands of Scotland that took place on the 5th and 6th of July 2006. It describes the site visits that took place, the main points raised by the local presenters, and summarises the themes emerging from the delegates feedback.

1. Euromontana

Geography and fragility of the environment pose challenges to Europe's mountainous areas. Nations and autonomous regions are seeking ways to deal with these and have adapted their development efforts to fit the physical context.

The Euromountains.net project aims to collect and transfer innovative solutions between the partners from France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, UK and Norway.

This study tour is part of Theme 3: "managing the fragile mountain landscape, rural environment and natural resources". Themes 1 and 2 look at improving services and developing resources and products.

Theme 3 required a study tour for partners of suitable areas of the Highlands to illustrate the problems faced by mountainous, fragile areas and to highlight some innovative solutions which might be transferable to the other countries in the project. This report documents the tour. It will be followed by more detailed case studies which describe some solutions developed in Scotland. Case studies from all partners will then be evaluated and discussed at a seminar and be presented in a final report.

2. The Study Tour

The tour was organised by the Highland Council (the local authority for the north of Scotland, including some of the islands off the west coast) on behalf of the Scottish Partners and the Scottish Crofting Foundation (a charitable NGO which represents small farmers in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland).



Delegates assembled in Inverness on the evening 4 July and were transported to Skye and Lochalsh where they were accommodated in Kintail Field Centre (National Trust for Scotland owned property) and Glomach Guest House for the nights of 4 and 5 July.

This area was chosen because it suffers from many disadvantages when it comes to agriculture – mountainous ground, poor soils overall, northerly latitude, distance from markets, climate, lack of services – but has reasonably good

Study Tour Area



communications, making it accessible. Tourism is very important in the area providing alternative income sources for farmers but also leading to conflict between the demands of visitors and of the agricultural community.

On 5 July the delegates visited Drumbuie, Duirinish and Plockton to see the types of agriculture that were practised and to discuss development with the local farmers. Some free time allowed a visit to Eilean Donan Castle. In the evening, there was a talk about a local scheme to support traditional farming practices from the estate manager for the National Trust for Scotland (a conservation body who own the land visited earlier on in the day).

On 6 July, the group visited Sconser on Skye to talk to farmers there about their experiences and to hear from the John Muir Trust (a conservation charity) who own the land. The tour ended after discussion of the themes that had emerged over the visits.

25 delegates attended from Spain, Portugal, Italy, Norway and the UK. A list of delegates is given below.

Ann-Hege Hanstad	County of Sogn og Fjordane (NO)	Kay Bjerke	County of Buskerud (NO)
Asgeir Blixgård	County of Sogn og Fjordane (NO)	Sigvat Morken	County of Buskerud (NO)
Liv Astrid Nordheim Kusslid	County of Sogn og Fjordane (NO)	Sigurd Fjse	County of Buskerud (NO)
Alessandro Gretter	Province of Trento (IT)	Alessandra Mondino	Val d'Aosta (IT)
Dr. Frederico Bigaran	Province of Trento (IT)	Federico Molino	Val d'Aosta (IT)

Alessandro Ciola	Province of Trento (IT)		Nathalie Bétemps	Val d'Aosta (IT)
Edy Piasentiener	Province of Trento (IT)		Lisa Garbellini	IREALP (IT)
Massimo Pirola	Province of Trento (IT)		Margherita Quaglia	Torino (IT)
Fernando José Gomes Rodrigues	ADRAT (PT)		Rui Duarte	Palencia (ES)
Albano Fernandes Alvares	ADRAT (PT)		Fernando Gonzalez Herrero	Palencia (ES)
José Luís Melo Geraldes	ADRAT (PT)		Dave Roberts	The Highland Council (UK)
Becky Shaw	SCF (UK)		Donald Murdie	SCF (UK)
Russell Smith	SCF (UK)			

Some the visits were joined by local experts including Gwyn Jones, Scottish Agricultural College and Councillors John Laing and Isobel Campbell, The Highland Council.

3. Crofting

The sites visited are held under the crofting system. This is a system of land tenure whereby the crofter manages the land but does not own it. They do, however, have an absolute right to occupy the land and to assign the tenancy to someone else. The crofter owns the buildings that sit on the land and would be compensated for any improvements to the land (eg drainage, fencing) when they assign the tenancy. The system developed for historical reasons around the 1890s and has proved a stable system which has maintained population in remote areas and kept the link between the people and the land over several generations. Before that, there was no security of tenure so the tenant had no incentive to improve the land or build a decent house so many families lived in poverty. In many cases, the crofting system is tied in with preserving the culture of the area as well as the landscape.

Crofts are generally small units and do not provide enough income to support a family. Most crofts are, therefore, part time and crofters have an alternative job, often involving tourism. So the croft represents part time income for part time work.

Traditionally, crofts have a small area of arable land for the use of that family only (known as inbye land) along with a share of common grazing. The common grazing may extend over 100s of hectares and be shared between many crofters with the amount of stock carried being carefully controlled to prevent overgrazing. The sharing of grazing has led in the past to a culture of communal working, for example in gathering sheep from the hills for shearing.

The crofting system is still in place but is coming under strain from poor financial returns, lack of active crofters for communal work and the demand for crofts for holiday or retirement homes.

4. Support Mechanisms

There are a number of payments to crofters and farmers to support agriculture. The main payments applicable to the study areas are as follows –

- Single Farm Payment – following decoupling, support is paid to farmers and crofters on an historical basis so that the amount of subsidy received does not depend on the amount of stock kept or crops grown. This removes an incentive to maintain stock numbers and could lead to de-stocking in areas where profitability is marginal at best.
- Less Favoured Area Support Scheme – a payment is made to farmers and crofters to compensate for remoteness and disadvantage. However, the designated areas cover much of Scotland and are adjusted for stock levels: this means that areas like those visited receive relatively little as they have low stocking densities since the land is poor and cannot support high levels of cattle and sheep.
- Land Management Contract - this is a new scheme where farmers and crofters are compensated for adopting farming practices which are less efficient but are considered to lead to public good because of their effect on wildlife, animal welfare or landscape etc. For example, support is given for preparing animal health plans, preserving river banks and managing land in ways which help bird populations. This scheme has the options and the payment rates decided at the Scotland level and so may not be appropriate at local levels. (This is discussed in section 8 below.)
- Crofting grants - there are a number of grants which are specific to crofts which assist with infrastructure projects. They are designed to help maintain population in these remote, fragile areas.
- Environmental Schemes – there are a range of support schemes which reward farming practices which support specific wildlife and habitat conservation, for example not grazing land in the spring and summer to encourage breeding corncrakes.

5. Environment and Habitats

The area of the study tour contains a rich diversity of habitats and much of it is designated under various environmental schemes. The Highland Council area as a whole has 20% of its area designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (over half a million hectares), 15% in Special Areas of Conservation, 10% in Special Protection Areas, 6% in Ramsar sites, and 20% in National Scenic Areas. These designations are administered by Scottish Natural Heritage, one of the local partners in the Euromountains.net project.

None of the inbye land at the first 3 sites visited (7 a. b. and c. below) are designated as SSSIs since there is a presumption against designated agricultural land and



any pockets of, for example, species rich grassland are small in extent. However, there is a SSSI elsewhere on the Balmacara Estate and the Woodland Garden is a listed designed landscape. Close by, Kintail, where the delegates were accommodated, is a National Scenic Area and Loch Duich and Loch Alsh is a marine Special Area of Conservation.

On Skye, Sconser Estate (7 d.) contains 2 SSSIs, one is of geological interest and one of peatlands interest. The estate is part of the Cuillins Special Protection Area (which runs to around 30,000 hectares) and the Sligachan Peatlands just to the north and the Kyleakin Hills to the south are Special Areas of Conservation.

These designations on and around the areas visited, arguably, back up the case for supporting the people who are trying to manage the land in such a way that the habitats are maintained AND they can make a living out of agriculture.

a. Site Visits

a. Drumbuie - Balmacara

Drumbuie is situated in Skye and Lochalsh on the west coast of Scotland, north of Kyle of Lochalsh and west of Plockton.

The houses in the township are clustered together between a strip of fertile land next to the sea and rough grazing running from the township into the surrounding hills. The land is communally managed. The fertile (inbye) land is divided up in a system known as runrig. This is an old system which has died out in most places whereby each crofter has a strip of land allocated to them and the position of the strip changes every year so that everybody takes a turn at farming the good land. Crops are mainly oats, hay, potatoes and turnips. Sheep and cattle are kept by a few crofters; others grow potatoes for their own use; and some no longer take part in any agricultural activity.



All crofters, even those with livestock, have other jobs as crofting is not economic by itself. This area is popular with tourists and this sector provides employment and income to supplement agriculture.

Environmental schemes provide another source of income for crofters.

b. Duirinish - Balmacara

Like neighbouring Drumbuie, the houses in Duirinish lie on the lower ground with the fertile inbye land around them. Here the inbye has been shared out so that each croft has its own small fields which they keep fenced. Hill ground is held communally and each croft has a right to graze a certain amount of livestock on it: these limits prevent over grazing. The inbye

fields are fenced to keep livestock off but the village itself is on common ground so that cattle and sheep roam freely between the houses.

Again, there are a small number of active crofters and a larger number of inhabitants who do not take part in agriculture.

Tourism provides alternative income for many.

Like many in crofting areas, our guide in Duirinish could trace her connections with the land through several generations and had instilled the same feeling for her roots in her children.

c. Plockton - Balmacara

This is the close to Duirinish and Drumbuie but is a larger village and much more of a tourist centre. The village is famous for its beauty and contains a harbour, hotels, and shops. This has shifted the balance between agriculture and tourism much further towards tourism and has created conflicts in the past.

Agricultural, Plockton (like the other 2 communities) contains centrally situated houses on common grazing land and fenced-in inbye fields for growing hay, oats, potatoes and turnips. However, many houses have been bought by people coming in to the area who have no connections with agriculture or with its history.

This has had the effect of making houses too expensive for local people on lower incomes to buy and has forced the agricultural community to change their practices. For example, cattle are no longer allowed to roam freely and land has had to be fenced off. Pressures for development have also meant that grazing land has been given up from the commonly held land for a jetty and for affordable, rented housing.

Tourism does, however, provide alternative income to supplement agriculture. The amount of tourism does provide opportunities for local food production and one croft had diversified from livestock into horticulture to supply the local market.

d. Sconser

The Sconser Township is situated on the island of Skye further west from the other townships visited. However, Skye is now joined to the mainland by a toll-free bridge so there is no step change in remoteness and disadvantage from the mainland.

The township is characterised by having no arable ground available (the only good land being occupied by a golf course) but has extensive rough grazing. Again, only a



small number of crofters are actively keeping sheep and Highland cattle on the commonly managed hill land.

Livestock numbers are reducing due to a number of factors including

- the decoupling of subsidies so that they no longer depend on stock numbers
- the poor returns for agricultural produce
- the difficulty in getting labour.

As the number of active crofters reduces, gathering sheep over 8,000 hectares of hills can take up to 8 days. This leads to a downward spiral where it becomes more difficult to attract young people into agriculture and the ones still involved are more likely to give up.

The land is owned by the John Muir Trust who are a conservation body who are keen on restoring the landscape to wilderness and so wish to reduce grazing pressure on the hills both from livestock and deer.

b. Traditional Croft Management Scheme

As stated in section 5, land management contracts were introduced by the Scottish Executive in 2005. These seek to encourage certain practices by meeting some or all of the costs. For example, membership of quality improvement schemes is part funded as this will raise the quality of output, and managing land in certain ways is compensated to encourage bird life.

However, the options available and the rates that are paid are determined on a Scotland-wide basis, designed to encourage main stream commercial farmers to adopt more environmentally friendly practices, and so may not be appropriate for small scale producers in remote mountainous areas. In addition, the national schemes can be highly prescriptive and administratively burdensome. This, therefore, means that the take up is low since the money paid is not adequate recompense for the loss of agricultural efficiency.

The National Trust for Scotland (NTS), which owns Balmacara estate has set up a local scheme which has options and rates of payment which are set at the local level and are realistic for the type of farming practised in Balmacara.

For example, retention of cattle is based on agreements with individual crofters but is of the order of £100 - £350 per crofter. The rates for cropping are –

potatoes	£520 / ha
turnips	£520 / ha
cereals	£420 / ha
grass crop	£200 / ha
hay premium	£100 / ha
species rich premium	£100 / ha

Take up rates for the NTS scheme are much higher than for the national scheme since the money on offer is sufficient to make the traditional, conservation friendly practices worthwhile. In Duirinish, they are changing from the national Rural Stewardship Scheme to the local land management scheme because it allows them to make the most of their land. Through this scheme, the NTS hope to preserve and continue the traditional methods of farming and so maintain the traditional landscape which is prized by wildlife and tourists alike.

The scheme is on a 2 year trial: after that it will be reviewed and possibly extended for another 2 years. Results of the trial will be shared with the Scottish Executive to encourage them to extend the principles of the scheme across Scotland and to fund it centrally. However, deciding different options and payment rates for many different local areas would be a major exercise.

c. Summary of Emerging Themes

Following the tour, delegates were asked to do a brief write up of their impressions of what they had seen and whether any lessons could be transferred to their own areas. These seven reports are attached in the Appendix. The table below summarises some of the main points made -

County of Sogn og Fjordane (NO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Problem with overtaking of a farm from one generation to next doesn't seem that big (yet) in Norway ▪ Decreasing amount of farmers but the resisting farms get bigger ▪ The will from the government to pay for the cultural landscape seems bigger in Norway than Scotland
County of Buskerud (NO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop local products based on local meat ▪ If business development in mountain areas is to succeed there must be fundamental political wish to give it high priority ▪ The future of mountain areas cannot be made by stubborn enthusiasts and romantics
Province of Trento (IT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agricultural system "not-real modern" "not profitable" ▪ Farmer now "manager of the landscape" ▪ Crofting can be interesting case of applied conservation ▪ Promotion of traditional local products has to be pursued
Val d'Aosta (IT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Problem linked to lack of young people ... and consequent ageing of operators ▪ Agriculture has to be seen under the point of view of an integrated policy in relation to tourism ... particularly in the Highlands where the landscape represents one of the most attractive touristic components ... a public contribution is justified
Torino (IT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ attachment of people to the land people strongly feel to belong to a community ▪ we have a high risk of natural disasters so the presence of man on land is needed not only for landscape/cultural reasons but also to prevent disasters ▪ Highland forests often are ecologically unstable ▪ Better advertising of Highlands' agriculture products
Palencia (ES)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Crofting .. keeps the landscape and environment going in a traditional and clean way

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ This system allows .. the tourist industry by attracting those people who live in urban areas to watch the beauty of the mountains
ADRAT (PT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Weak level of revenues ▪ Love of the land, maintenance of tradition, deep sense of property ▪ Environment is considered most important

A number of themes have emerged from the delegates' reports and the site visits and they will be explored further in the case studies and in the seminar later in the project.

- *Duthchas* – the Gaelic term describes the sense of this being one's native land which you have inherited from your ancestors. And with the inherited rights comes the responsibility to pass it on to your own children. Previous generations cleared the stones from the fields and made the land what it is; you have to keep faith with them and care for the land, whatever its shortcomings.

Agriculture, as seen in the site visits, cannot sustain a family by itself. All those we meet had other jobs to supplement the part time farming that is crofting. If the crofters took an economic decision then they would not farm but the link with the land keeps them ploughing and gathering and shearing. People leave the area for work but keep their croft in the family intending to return eventually.

This attitude also mitigates against combining crofts into bigger units, which would be more profitable, since this would break the crofter's link with the land.

- *Political will* – if the public and government want the landscape to be conserved or managed in a certain way and if they want to keep population in rural areas then they must devote the resources to doing this. If the political will does not support rural populations remaining where they are and providing a valued range of services then, by default, depopulation will occur and management without people to undertake the tasks is impossible. Mountainous areas are rarely wildernesses and have been shaped and managed by man for generations, therefore both the political recognition of the situation and the political will to manage mountain areas and support the mountain area populations are vital.

If we want to stop all agricultural activity in our mountain areas so that they return to wilderness (which is the direction that the John Muir Trust would like to go) then this has implications for a wide range of policies and will lead to depopulation, the loss of the cultural heritage and perhaps the loss of some of the aspects that currently make the areas attractive for tourism and people moving into the area. The designation of certain areas as, for example, Sites of Special Scientific Interest imposes restrictions on the way the land is managed and so could have knock on effects on income and the viability of agriculture. Designation is part of the debate about how we want to manage our mountainous areas – as a working environment or as a wilderness playground or as a balance between the two extremes..

- *Fair payment for provision of public goods* – farmers and crofters are being asked to provide land management activity and take less efficient production routes to provide

for public goods from which the wider population benefit. Examples of this are setting aside areas of land for particular habitats or cropping hay in meadows later than is efficient to help breeding birds or preserve wild flower meadows. To ensure that these activities can be carried out, incentive and achievement payments need to be made. These rates need to be set to reflect the local conditions so that the rates make it worthwhile for the farmer or crofter to adopt this system with enthusiasm.

The experiences of the Balmacara Estate and NTS provide an opportunity to look at how local organisations can ‘fill the gap’ between state policy implementation and local needs to ensure both the nature of local management and the finances are more tailored. This type of activity also highlights the potential inadequacy of state rural and agricultural schemes in some mountain areas that do not conform to national agricultural models and where the role of land management is specific to both the environment and the cultural activity that developed there. It is therefore possible that such local schemes may provide potential templates for future variation of state schemes in particular environments.

- *Transferability* – the crofting model has worked well in Scotland for over 100 years but arose because of the special set of circumstances in Scotland in the nineteenth century. It may not be appropriate for other areas. However, certain aspects of communal working might be applicable to other countries or other sectors such as forestry. For example, the idea of shares in common land with a limit on overall numbers of grazing animals.
- *Young people and succession* – if agriculture is to survive then there needs to be a steady inflow of young people. There are dangers of this not happening because of
 - poor economic returns for the work involved
 - inability to get housing because of competition from incomers
 - inability to get land because of blocking by older crofters / farmers.
- *Local food production and marketing* – more production and consumption of local food could help boost incomes from the land. Therefore investigations are needed into the link between producers and consumers at a local level. The advantages these links offer would include
 - reduced transport costs
 - production can be moderated through local demand
 - improved and low cost diet for some of the country’s lowest income families
 - the development of meaningful jobs

This could both develop sustainable farm production and provide the environmental benefits required by residents and governments.

d. Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people who gave up their time to come and talk to us –

- Charlene MacLeod, Roddy MacKerlich, Donald Cameron, Mairi Finlayson - Drumbuie
- Morag MacKenzie - Duirinish
- Catherine Will, Sandra Holmes and Alex Glasgow - Plockton
- Ian Turnbull - National Trust for Scotland
- Angus McHattie
- Hector Nicholson and others - Sconser
- Douglas Halliday - John Muir Trust
- Councillors Isabelle Campbell and John Laing

11. Appendices

The individual reports from the participants have been appended to this report.

Appendix 1	County of Sogn og Fjordane (NO)
Appendix 2	County of Buskerud (NO)
Appendix 3	Province of Trento (IT)
Appendix 4	IREALP (IT)
Appendix 5	Torino (IT)
Appendix 6	Palencia (ES)
Appendix 7	ADRAT (PT)
Appendix 8	Val d'Aosta (IT)

Report from the study tour in the Highlands

Thoughts, observations and comparisons

- In the Highlands there is a big problem with overgrazing from deer and sheep. In Norway we have the opposite problem:
 - we have problem with keeping the traditional cultural landscape open and like it used to be earlier in some special areas
 - we have generally too few grazing animals per ha. This changes the open cultural landscape into bushes and new forest, and this changing seem to be a common problem in Norway.
- In the Highlands there's no support system for having grazing animals in the outlying fields. In Norway this support is important, and in the last years this type of support has increased both nationally and regionally.
- In Norway we have just farmers, not crofters. In generally all the farmers in Norway own their own fields, outlying fields and forests.
- The landscape and the flora in the Highlands are quite similar to the landscape and the flora in the coast area in Sogn og Fjordane in Norway.
- The problem with overtaking of a farm from one generation to next generation doesn't seem that big (yet) in Norway as in the Highlands. But we do have the same trend as in the Highlands: a decreasing amount of farmers, but the resisting farms gets bigger so the production area are still in use.
- The agricultural policy in Norway:
 - the national support system do support the farmers in the mountain areas, and the support system are differenced between the regions in Norway.
 - the will from the government to pay for the cultural landscape seems bigger in Norway than in Scotland.

Transferability

- In Norway a farmer has to have a minimum turnover of ca £ 2600 from his farm to get support from the national support system. If Norway had a similar program as NTS now are trying for crofters in some area in the Highlands, we would have more small farms.

Reviews

- The program of the study tour was very interesting!
- It was very positive to learn about crofting from three different points of view.
- It was very positive to be outside, to see different landscape, to meet and talk with farmers.

At last...

- We do believe in the NTS-project for the crofters, and we hope that it will continue.
- It seems very positive that some areas in the Highlands through the NTS have got a support system that fits the crofting system. We hope it will be a success, and that the SEERAD are taking over in a few years.
- We hope that you will get more political support to do crofting in the Highlands.

Report after study tour to Highlands, Scotland 04.-07.07.2006.
A short summery from Kay, Sigurd and Sigvat (Buskerud/Norway).

It seems that the situation in the Highlands in Scotland is similar to the one in most of the mountaineous and remote areas in Europe:

- Small scale food production looses economically against industrial agriculture
- The economic situation for agriculture in general gets increasingly worse
- Climatically and topographically these areas often struggle with far tougher conditions than other agricultural areas not so far away
- Less and less farms have cattle resulting in re-vegetation of the pasture landscape
- Not many people have farming as their main employment/source of income
- Those who still have cattle are mainly “hobby farmers” having a special interest in the subject
- Still, people are interested in living in the area, most of them are not farming though
- There are jobs in other fields – at least sufficient to avoid acute danger of depopulation
- The interest for bying properties for leisure is high

Crofting is a renting system for land with rights and duties concerning the exploitation of the properties (home field and outlying field). Both farming the land and keeping cattle are subsidised. In some areas environmental restrictions are put on the land use (e.g. concerning when to harvest home fields), but economic compensation is given.

The “crofting” system has no direct relevance for the Norwegian system – most of Norwegian properties being very small and privately owned - but it should be possible to develop some kind of contract of commitment between the authorities and the individual farmers in areas where one wishes to maintain active farming and cattle use.

We have got the impression that cattle use is driven in a rather extensive way. What about organising for higher grass production for winter feeding? We have observed only one machine for baling hay (*made up this word I'm afraid!!*). It seems to us that little has been done to develop local products based on local meat. We should think that there is a potential for local food products destined for the tourists who visit the area. Even if meat is not as easily stored as whisky, we think there should be some possibilities for product development, cfr Hallingskarvet Lam (local products from Buskerud/Hallingdal)

Learning about the crofting system was interesting, but we feel that too much focus was put on that theme and that the discussions became a bit too detailed, especially when we cannot see the relevance of crofting for us in Norway.

If business development in mountain areas is to succeed there must be a fundamental political wish to give it high priority through economical measures which ensure a sustainable use of the resources (meaning both cattle farming and the taking care of the landscape). The future of mountain regions cannot be made by stubborn enthusiasts and “romantics”. Basing the

economy in these areas solely on consumption of local resources as e.g. through constructing cabins in Norwegian mountain regions, does not give the answer either.

When it comes to the technical arrangement of the study tour, it deserves top marks. It is always impressive to meet colleagues with a genuine interest for their work. Accommodation and cooking based on self service is ok and brings about more social contact than other alternatives.

**INTERREG IIIC “Euromountains.net” Project
REPORT ON STUDY TOUR IN SCOTLAND
5th – 7th July 2006**

▪ **Observations (comparisons, differences or even anomalies that occur to you)**

The agricultural system presented has to be labelled, definitely, as a “not-real modern” one. According to other farming approaches throughout Europe it has to be seen as “not profitable” and referred as “hobby” activity (and some of the crofter used this expression!). That could be an interesting starting point, either on reflecting on positive or negative characteristic of crofting. Despite the lack of a strict economic value, crofting plays an important role in cultural/social side not merely for a role in landscape conservation .

▪ **Ideas on transferability of methods/techniques both to and from the Highland Crofting model**

The system of crofting could be seen as inadequate to the actual agrarian system. The modernisation and diversification occurred in the traditional system may led to different approaches to agriculture. Despite in some regions of Europe this sector still deserve an important role in other areas, that can be considered “marginal”, a new role has to be found. Mainly the farmer now have to be considered as a “manager of the landscape” and his presence in the farmland is fundamental not only for the production, namely a personnel one, but conserving the traditional features of an agricultural area. By this point of view, crofting can be an interesting case of applied-conservation not only in private lands but, mainly, in common land and area of particular interest (say Natural Parks, etc...). Grant some support for people that voluntarily keep land in traditional way it's very interesting, in particular in order to applied elsewhere in other “fragile” part of Europe. For example in the Alpine communities (and in particular in the land managed commonly) it can be applied for some “less-profitable” activities as forestry and wood transformation.

▪ **Technical discussions based on the visits to Crofting Townships (mini compare/contrast)**

The integrated system between crofting and the communities where this activity is carried out is a point of sure interest. The linkage between traditional crafts, rural hospitality, tourism and other activities (has to be reminded that most of the people involved still have another main occupation) is very important and, surely, fundamental for enhance the income in the villages that have few resources on which rely on. The multi-functional approach, studied and foreseen as one of the solution against the problem of marginal mountain areas, is here on practice and it's a good example that, as said above, can be demonstrated in other places.

▪ **Reviews and critiques of various elements of the study tour**

Solutions applied by the hosting organizations was of good level. By the organisational point of view the idea of “communal” approach to eating/lodging it can be referred as more useful in order to work in a less “stressed” way. Personally I have nothing negative to say about all the organisation despite the timetable seemed to be quite “strict”.

▪ **Conclusions and suggestions for ways to progress**

As enlightened in the Theme II, promotion of traditional local products has to be pursued. In fact this products have to be “consumed”, preferably, where they have been produced (Highland meat). Application of innovative (but simple) solutions can be helpful from this point of view (say, as suggested from Prof. Piasenter, the use of “mobile slaughter” for lamb). As said during the final discussion, I think (and suggest) that we have to enforce an idea of a “certified process of landscape conservation”. Despite the huge role that agriculture still play in many regions (as well mountain ones), the necessity to preserve traditional landscape (with its heritage of culture

and environment) is gaining importance in the last years. This is evident by the role played from NGOs like National Trust or Scottish Heritage (only to refer to ones seen in Highlands). Raising the attention of citizens, public and private bodies to this can be useful as well in order to address some financial resource to support these activities in the mountain and fragile areas.

Alessandro GRETTER (with contribution of Federico BIGARAN and Eddy PIASENTER)
Autonomous Province of Trento – Centre of Alpine Ecology

DIARY/SHORT REPORT

Highlands is a very particular territory and presents a lot of specificities, either in relation to the territory itself or to the management of the rural activities. Nevertheless, some problems and above all some processes in progress in this territory are similar to the situation existing on the Lombardy mountain territory. For this reason, it is interesting to know which are the management tools used in Scotland and to appreciate their function and efficacy in order to evaluate comparison elements and, if possible, their transferability.

During the study trip we visited several villages in which the territorial management is linked to the croft model; it is possible to notice a lot of management differences bound to the different elements, for example: in some villages - as Plockton - there is a larger tourist activity and consequently the crofters' needs have to adapt also to the necessities linked to the tourist operators.

In Sconser, a no profit organisation for the environment protection (Jhon Muir Turst) is owner of the territory; in some villages the territorial management refers to local models, whereas in other cases the management refers to actions at national level.

Croft's institution, beyond these differences, represents a peculiarity which is part of the social and cultural tradition of these areas and, for this reason, it is not possible to think transferring the croft's model in other territory, but it can be interesting to consider some remarks for the comparison.

For example also in the Alps there is the problem linked to the lack of young people that want to apply for the agricultural traditional activities and the consequent ageing of the operators.

The plots of ground, which have often small dimension as the crofts are, belong to old people who even when are not able to farm their territories anymore, are reluctant to remove them.

Maybe it would be useful to analyse a model similar to the croft in order to allow young people farming grounds, for which they are not owners, by paying a cheap rent and, above all, by having the warranty that, this right will last in the future. The owner, by perceiving this cheap rent would have an higher benefit respect the choice to leave the uncultivated ground.

The agriculture sector has to be seen under the point of view of an integrated policy in relation, for example, to the tourism. If it is true that these situations can create some differences (as for example in Plockton where it was decided not to allow the free pastures cattle) it is remarkable that tourism can reach benefits from the agricultural activity. As a matter of fact, this activity allows the territorial maintenance and defence by considering also the consequences towards landscape. This aspect is particularly important in the Highlands, where the landscape represents, of course, one of the most attractive touristic component; for this reason, a public contribution is justified towards people who will be able to keep alive the traditional activities.

In order to be sustainable, the agricultural activity needs - on one side - a public contributions and on the other one - it contributes to the added value generated by the tourism on the territory.

At least it is very interesting the pilot project which was presented; it deals with a survey on the crofters' actual perceptions. What came out by the questionnaires results is that, among crofters there is a high level bound to the choice motivation in applying to the agricultural activity, that, however, crashes with the lack of resources as money and time availability. In order to avoid the lack of motivation in the long time, it will be useful to study a suitable management for the public incentives and above all for the young people. For this purpose, it is important to consider the above mentioned pilot project.

Euromountains Theme 3
Study tour in Scotland July, 5-6, 2006
Province of Turin - Corintea

Short report of the tour

➤ **Thoughts on what you saw**

I had never seen Highland areas before the study tour so maybe I'm not a good judge; anyway my impression is that from an agricultural and pastoral point of view Highland areas are managed in a right way:

- you can feel the presence of man;
- fields, meadows and pastures are managed;
- there are not big abandoned areas.

So, the impression is that, even with difficulties, Crofting is an effective model.

➤ **Observations (comparisons, differences or even anomalies that occur to you)**

I think the strength of the Crofting model is the attachment of people for their land. Crofters are crofters not only for economic reasons, in fact, I could see that sometimes is a "hobby", but mostly because they love their land and they don't want it to be deserted. People strongly feel to belong to a community.

Main differences between Highlands and Province of Turin / Regione Piemonte:

- Ownership. Here we don't have very big areas owned by a very small number of people, on the contrary lots of people own a small estate each.
- Geomorphology. Mountain areas in Piemonte have steep slopes, so that rural areas (especially pastures and forests) are often difficult to reach especially by roads.
- Higher risk of natural disasters. We have a higher risk of natural disasters such as floods and landslides. So the presence of man on land to carry out maintenance works is needed not only for landscape/cultural reasons but also to prevent disasters.

Main analogies between Highlands and Province of Turin / Regione Piemonte:

- Agriculture and grazing in mountain areas are uneconomic.

➤ **Ideas on transferability of methods/techniques both to and from the Highland Crofting model**

Highland Crofting model is difficult (impossibile) to transfer here because of the different type of ownership.

What should be transferred – but I don't know how, a further analysis is needed – is the attachment of people to their land. We also have it here, but I think it is usually smaller.

➤ **Reviews and critiques of various elements of the study tour**

We didn't have information about forestry and maintenance works.

About forestry.

1. Do crofters manage forests? If not, who does?
2. We saw, while moving, that Highlands forests often are ecologically unstable. Most forests are plantations of the same age and of the same species and they have never been spaced out. So trees are now very thin and weak, and breakings are frequent. Such a problem is probably increasing in the future. What do you think to do to improve forests' circumstances?

About maintenance works and prevention of natural disasters.

Do crofters have tasks in prevention of natural disasters? For example, in managing river beds and river banks or in managing agri-forestry roads.

- **Technical discussions based on the visits to Crofting Townships (mini compare/contrast)**

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- **Conclusions and suggestions for ways to progress**

It would be needed a better advertising of Highlands' agriculture and breeding products so that people would be more disposed to pay local products more than foreign ones.



Proyecto Euromountains.net

Study Tour Report

In our Study Tour we could observe cases of *crofts* that work thanks to a kind of philosophical and traditional spirit from *crofters* and also to the economical complementary activities that those develop in industry, in other sectors or in the same croft witch building is used as tourist houses in a rural way in one zone of beautiful landscape.

One of the most interesting aspect, and at the same time strange for us, is the land ownership on witch crofts are based. The most part of them are based in semi-public land and are controlled by a commission of the National Trust for Scotland (something like our Real State Patrimony) - Drumbuie, Durinish and Plokton. But there are also some crofts based in old private properties related to some old families and clans, with very recognised position in the Scotland (Highland) society with almost medieval traditions (John Muir Trust, de Sconser), and we also visited crofts witch land was purchased by a community and now are for all of the habitants of the municipality (Sconser).

To see the possibilities of this model of land management (crofting) in other areas we would have to know deeply the system of graze ownership and his exploitation's in those mountain areas, and in a special way for us, in "Palencia's Mountain".

Could we apply this system in our mountain area? Our opinion is that, from what we saw in this study trip, the main improvement that we would get from this crafting system in our area would be a way to keep the landscape and an environmental system going on in a traditional and clean way in our mountain area.

This system demands a good care of crofts and it's graze, as at the same time insures the maintenance of a specific livestock and the grazing of common areas, and all this facts allows the continuity of the landscape and, in a last but not less important point, insures the tourist industry by attracting those persons who live in urban areas to watch the beauties of those mountains.

Ending we must say that this was a very interesting visit and we had the occasion to observe a different way of land management and a very traditional way of landscape maintenance.

The study visit foreseen in the project Euromountains.net in Scotland had as basic theme the study about the way how is made the land management in Highlands, in which respect to the collective estate.

As first approach we may refer that the visited zone presents great environmental quality, which is provoked, mostly, by the way as local population treat the environment where they are inserted. In fact, all the people contacted refer they want leave to the future generations an environment, at least, alike to they received.

We may refer that crofting is a very old system in the region, allowing the extensive work of the land and setting up links among the intervenient, which presents some links with an almost feudal system.

After the introduction, that took place in the Kintail Field Centre, about the management land system in Highlands, where the crofting was explained and where was referred the functions of some involved institutions, the group addressed to Drumbuie to make a first contact with local producers and where it was possible to verify the great environmental quality of the zone.

However, it didn't seem that the environmental quality which we could found grants the attainment of an adequate revenue level to all they work the land. Indeed, our host referred that all the crofters had to work in other activities and not only to the work in the land, being, himself, railway chauffer. This happens because the maximum restrictions imposed to the productions and to the occupation of the fields.

Afterwards, the group addressed to the village of Durinish where contacted with a crofter woman, which croft is in his family since some generations. Besides she have to dedicate to other activity, the Bed and Breakfast (B&B), the other members of the family have other occupations, because the agricultural activity don't allows, by itself, the achieving of the desired and indispensable revenues to get an adequate life level. They was referred some difficulties to get bank credits, because the land isn't ownership of the family, and it's not accepted as guarantee by the banks, in spite of the improvements that was made. The conflicts with the neighbours were also referred, because the excrements leaved by the sheep in the grazing and crossing grounds, near the houses.

After the lunch which took place in the beautiful fishing village of Plockton, near the sea, it were made new contacts with crofters of this zone and where they were referred some conflicts appeared with the recent increasing of tourism, because the grazing zones near the sea. Here, it was well marked the idea that many crofters maintain this activity because they have the possibility to exploit the B&B in the houses they built and to obtain new revenues.

After one visit to the beautiful castle of Eilean Donan, the group addressed to the Kintail Centre, where the manager of Balmacara Estate made one explanation relative to the land management and to the crofting in that zone.

The second day began with the trip to the Isle of Skye where the group contacted with the management of crofting in Sconser, where the majority of the crofters has cattle production, either bovine, either ovine and where it were related the activities to conclude the purchasing of one of the properties where the crofting is used. In this meeting were, also, present crofters of this zone that talked about their activity and about the land management, existing here a local committee that makes the management of the estate.

As it happened in the preceding day, it was clear the weak level of the revenues obtained in the agricultural activity, here predominantly linked to the cattle production. We could see, also, the great quality of the environment, and it was clear that all the inhabitants of the village have other activities, beyond the agriculture.

All the participants of the study visit participate, after, in a brief meeting where each one give own opinion about crofting, system, unknown for the majority with very good results to the defence of very good environmental conditions existing here.

As final comment, we want to make the following remarks:

1 – Indeed, crofting system, allowing, only, the extensive exploitation of the land, guarantees the environmental sustainability of this mountain zone, with the weaknesses that are inherent to these zones.

2 – However, we want to enhance the short income obtained, as it was referred by the generality of the people contacted by us, forcing them to the exercise of other activities.

3 – One of the crofters than we have contacted tell us that was the great love he feels to that land which stimulate him to pursue in that activity, as well as the maintenance of the tradition and the respect to the heritage of this zone, which belongs to his cultural identity.

4 - However, it seems to us that the possibility to build an house and it will be received by inheritance by the sons or this house could be rented through the B&B are, by itself, advantages that must be considered, mainly when don't exist nothing that oblige the people to be an active crofter.

4 – In Portugal, there are collective lands, owned by the local communities, and managed by the Parishes or by Commissions elected by the members of that community which may have some similitude with crofting. However, these lands are to be used by the members of the community and the benefits of the exploitation revert on behalf of the community.

5 – In a general way, the Portuguese farmer has a deep sense of property, wanting to work his lands and, from there, to extract the revenues he needs lo live. Even, in rented lands, the farmer works the land and he makes the improvements having the aim to acquire it, such it is possible.

6 – The possibility to contact a different way of land management that was, until now, almost unknown for us has contributed decisively for our personal enrichment, but the possibilities of its workability in Portugal don't have great viability.

7 – The great valuation of the environmental quality and the interest of the communities in its preservation it was a great lesson, because the environment is considered most important than the renting of the agricultural activity.

During the 4th-6th July crofts visits we didn't really felt the differences between crofts sustained by national scheme and crofts sustained by local scheme, anyway we can underline some interesting differences between Aosta Valley and Scotland land management:

- in Scotland, even with public contribution, agriculture is no so rentable especially cropping and cattle but farmers follow with agriculture in order to guarantee territory management. In Aosta Valley agriculture is rentable in term of production because local, national and international demand is high; the problem is the cost that a farm has to sustain for innovation in order to facilitate the hard work. For that reason in Aosta Valley most of the contributions sustain investments: mechanisation, land reorganisation...the aim is to create easier conditions of work in order to reduce the mountain abandonment and so indirectly conserve the territory. Some agri-environmental contributions exist too in order to sustain the important aspect of land and environment management that is strictly related with agriculture.
- In Scotland there are some big owners of land and farmers rent pieces of land, in Aosta Valley normally farmers are owners of the majority of the land they work and then they rent some more pieces of land to integrate their proprieties. In Aosta Valley many persons have some small proprieties, even people working in other sectors; these persons received land from fathers so, even if it's no rentable, they follow agriculture (just for a family consume level, no market) in a form of respect for father's work. The problem will probably be with next generation because their fathers are not farmers but just hobbyists so young people can't really feel the hard work of farmers and they haven't developed the right conscience and sensibility.
- In Scotland just less developed activities (cattle and cropping) are financed, in Aosta Valley all activities are financed in the same way; the main activity is bovine-farming so the results is that most of the funds are assigned to this sector but it's not a philosophy or a choice, it's just the response to the demand.

On the other side lots of situation are very similar, in particular we can observe that most of the agriculture activities are disappearing in Scotland such as in Aosta Valley. Public contribution and people passion are the only reason because of the agriculture still exists because in mountain areas agriculture is a quite hard job with normal revenue because of morphology and weather conditions.