

Alpine Pasture in the Julian Alps (Slovenia): The Krstenica Alp Revisited

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Abstract

This chapter revisits the Krstenica alpine pasture in the Julian Alps, Slovenia, to explore its evolving role through long-term ethnographic observation. The study examines the transformation in alpine pasture management over the past decades, focusing on the changing dynamics between the local agrarian community, livestock owners, shepherds and cheese-makers. Through a blend of historical and contemporary ethnographic data, the research reflects on the latent conflicts and diverse perspectives surrounding the management of the Krstenica alp. The paper notes the tensions between traditional practices and modern agricultural challenges, especially considering urbanization and changing family structures, and in the context of these conflicts, it considers the concept of “uncommon worlds”, drawing on cosmopolitical theories to suggest new approaches for managing shared resources in alpine environments. The study illustrates how alpine pastures, once central to local economies, have become sites of cultural heritage and identity, facing pressures from both conservation efforts and tourism development.

Introduction¹

At the beginning of summer 2021, I returned to the Bohinj region (Slovenia) for a few days to collect documentation for comparative research on the role of alpine pastures in shaping the cultural landscape in Slovenia.² My task was to gather information and conduct semi-structured interviews with owners, managers and users of one of the still-active alpine pastures in the south-eastern part of the Julian Alps. For a while, I hesitated which alp to choose. However, since there are only a few active alps left in the Bohinj region, I decided to gather information on the Krstenica alp. I had spent an entire summer season on this alp more than two decades ago while writing my thesis and I knew there had been changes in its management and staff in recent years. In addition to carrying out semi-structured interviews with the president of the agrarian community and staff, I decided to spend a few more days on the mountain pasture to obtain further information.

When I returned to Bohinj, I first interviewed Anthony,³ the president of the Agrarian Community of Bohinjska Češnjica, Jereka, Podjelje, and Goreljek (AC). During the conversation we sat at a table in his courtyard above the village of Bohinjska Češnjica which afforded a fabulous view of the Lower Bohinj Mountains. Anthony's three children circled us, especially the smallest one. Anthony told me about his work at the municipality and about his livestock: the three dairy cows on the alpine pasture during the summer season and the four calves sold the day before. He also updated me on what had

1 This article is based on two months of participant observation on Krstenica alp during the 1998 grazing season and further sporadic visits and fieldwork in 1999, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2018, and 2019, as well as numerous visits to the other alpine pastures in the Bohinj region and the Julian Alps in general. I also interviewed various stakeholders and actors involved in the management of the respective alpine pasture and of alpine pastures in general at different levels: dairymen, shepherds, livestock owners, chairmen and shareholders of the Agricultural Community Bohinjska Češnjica, Jereka, Podjelje, Koprivnik, governmental agricultural advisors, as well as staff working at the Triglav National Park Public Institution and the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food. I am immensely grateful to everyone for sharing an insight into their worlds. I am also grateful to my colleague Saša Rožkar for numerous joint visits in the Bohinj alps, as well as for reading the first version of this paper. The author acknowledges the financial support of the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency: research core funding *Heritage on the Margins* (No. P5-0408) and project *Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia* (No. J6-4610).

2 The research focused on the differences and commonalities of the current role of mountain pastures in three parts of the Alps in Slovenia (see Urbanc et al., in press).

3 All personal names are anonymized.

happened with the alp's management and staff since my last field visit in 2013. We struggled to make it through my list of questions, as we kept recalling events and stories from the grazing season in 1998 and talked extensively about the current agricultural situation in Bohinj. But as I had a whole week of fieldwork ahead of me, this did not seem to matter, and I settled immediately into the laid-back atmosphere. In the meantime, Frances, Anthony's wife, had served us dinner, which caused me some embarrassment because she and the children did not join us to eat. However, this is how Anthony and Frances choose to live, and they are very kind. Frances organised my transport to the Krstenica alp, and instead of a two-hour walk from the car park, they took me up there in their off-road vehicle, which Anthony drove into the clearing just below the mountain pasture, where we left the car and walked towards the cheese dairy that had been my home for two months two decades ago.

The aim of the paper is to consider the recent transformations in the management of alpine pasture in general and the Krstenica alp in particular through long-term ethnography and the revisiting of the issues thrown up by this. This is revisiting in both meanings of the word: Firstly, to visit the site again and reflect on the possible differences between the initial immersion and participant observation and re-immersion after more than two decades had passed. Second, to go through past field notes and examine the topic anew, trying to look at historical developments from the perspective of recent developments, and to identify any latent and evident conflicts. This is not just from the different perspectives which exist on the alp, but, following Mario Blaser's (2016) observations on conflicts, differences and cosmopolitics, also from "uncommon worlds".

An ethnographic revisit occurs, following Burawoy's (2009) definition,

when an ethnographer undertakes participant observation, that is, studying others in their space and time, with a view to comparing his or her site with the same one studied at an earlier point in time, whether by this ethnographer or someone else. (p. 75)

It is compelling to observe the differences in ethnographic immersion. The first time, it took me a couple of weeks to become a visible member of the Krsitenica workforce and not just an observer; now, immersion in the daily chores was quicker. I was pushed (or at least taught) to participate more actively because there were a few accidents – a cow trampled the shepherd's leg, Anthony's son injured his knee, and a cow's torn udder had to be cut off, after which it was driven down into the valley because of the bleeding – that immediately disrupted my plans. This made it impossible to complete in-depth interviews, but on the other hand, it allowed me to share experiences and create a closeness with the others on the alp which provided insights into the current problems and challenges they face.

Alpine Pasture Farming

Pasture farming has a long history in the Alps. It shapes the region in economic, social-cultural and ecological ways (Bätzing, 2021, p. 124) and has produced a landscape consisting of a mixture of collectively and privately owned and managed land. In the Alps, a combination of cultivation and herding emerged known as alpine animal husbandry, the alpine agro-pastoral system or alpine pasture farming (French *économie alpestre*, *économie pastorale*; German *Alpwirtschaft*, *Almwirtschaft*; Italian *alpicoltura*, *economia alpestre*; Slovenian *planinsko gospodarstvo*, *planšarstvo*, *planinsko pašništvo*). This entails the movement of humans and their livestock between permanent winter settlements in the valleys and temporary summer settlements in the higher alpine and subalpine areas. There are two or more spatially segregated spheres of agriculture: arable farming and haymaking in the valleys, and (low or high-altitude) mountain pasturing in the uplands, i.e. on alps, with shelters where needed for animals, people, and the processing of milk. The summer grazing of animals has many advantages, the most evident of which is additional (up to one-third more) animal fodder than would be available in the valley (Kirchengast, 2008). This leaves the scarce land in the lower narrow valleys for the cultivation of crops and haymaking. Together with the harvest from arable farming, the yield from summer grazing enables farmers to produce enough fodder to get through the winter and make the best possible

use of the contrasting levels of altitude and their different growing seasons (Bätzing, 2021; Ledinek Lozej, 2022).

Archaeological excavations have provided evidence of the existence of alpine farming in different parts of the Alps during the Bronze Age (2200–800 BCE). Palynological studies have found even earlier indicators⁴ for high-altitude pastures, but they only show the presence of pasture.⁵ Proof in the form of written sources only exists from the Middle Ages onwards,⁶ but linguistic analyses of place names and terms associated with alpine farming suggest it was taking place before the Middle Ages and perhaps before the time of the Roman Empire (Gilck and Poschlod, 2019; Ledinek Lozej and Roškar, 2018; Ledinek Lozej, 2022). Alpine pastures gained more importance in the 18th century when physiocratic ideas and a focus on market-oriented agriculture beyond subsistence farming led to an intensification of the dairy industry (Tschofen, 2017). In the second half of the 19th century, after the decline of mining, ironworking and the connected woodcutting, charcoal burning, and transportation industries, various governments invested heavily in education in and subsidies for alpine pasture farming.⁷ After an economic peak at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, alpine pasture farming declined throughout the 20th century, and especially from the 1970s onwards. This was largely due to the intensification of agriculture in the lowlands, as well as an increase in urbanisation, and industrialisation, leading to a marginalisation of the inner alpine areas and a transformation in their farming (Krauß and Olwig, 2018; Ledinek Lozej, 2022).⁸ Nevertheless, under the framework of the “new rural paradigm” and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the European Union (EU) which promotes rural development as a multilevel, multi-actor, and multifaceted process (Van der Ploeg et al. 2000, Van der Ploeg

4 From early 4500 BCE.

5 Hence it is not possible to distinguish between nomadism, transhumance and alpine farming.

6 In the Julian Alps the Pečana mountain pasture is mentioned in historical sources from 973 and the Kašina mountain pasture is mentioned in 1338 (Kos, 1975, p. 422).

7 For example, in 1868 the Austrian Imperial-Royal Ministry of Agriculture offered support and awards for improvement of the mountain pasture economy and promotion of dairying (Valenčič, 1990).

8 For example, there were drastic reductions in the number and type of livestock and staff, and in the expansion of land and dependence on subsidies and complementary economic activities (Ledinek Lozej and Roškar, 2018; Krauß and Olwig, 2018).

and Roep, 2003), alpine pasture farming triggered the interest of (regional) governments and experts from the field of agronomy and rural development. Alpine pasture farming was subject to either intensification (in terms of forage or dairy production) or the extensification of agriculture in favour of tourism (catering, accommodation) and occasional educational programmes. However, past (subsistence) practices still survive, and new (transformative) forms of cooperation and solidarity-based agriculture are emerging (Krauß and Olwig, 2018; Ledinek Lozej, 2022).



Figure 1 – The Krstenica alp, 1998.

The Krstenica Alp in the Julian Alps

The Julian Alps are a range of the Southern Limestone Alps that stretches from northeastern Italy to Slovenia, where they rise to their highest point at Mount Triglav (2,864 m). A wide variety of alpine pastures and management structures emerged in this region, due to differences in environment (morphology, climate) and historical and socio-political circumstances, i.e. the inclusion of the territory in different and changing political, economic, cultural

and linguistic frameworks with dynamic borders and boundaries. Mountain pastures differ in their topographical location and altitude, which determines the type of pasture (high meadows, low- or high-mountain pastures) and livestock grazed on them. They also differ regarding ownership and management, and how they have transformed over in the last few decades. These transformations have helped them to overcome current challenges such as abandonment, overuse, overgrowth, the return of wolves and bears, tourism, and pressures from nature conservation and the rewilding of the area.⁹

The Krstenican alpine pasture (1,672 m) is the second-highest active alp in the whole (present-day Slovenian and Italian) Julian Alps. Despite its location at the heart of the Julian Alps, in the Triglav National Park,¹⁰ it lies off the beaten track. It is owned by the Agrarian Community of Bohinjska Češnjica, Jereka, Podjelje, and Goreljek (AC) and comprises 34 ha of registered pastureland.¹¹ In addition to the dairy plant, which is used by a cheese maker and shepherds, there are also four private stalls and six huts. Two of the stalls are used for livestock, in one of which the owners have recently established a dwelling, while another has been converted into a hut. The owners of these stalls still drive livestock to pasture. Two huts are occasionally used by the owners, their relatives and friends as holiday homes, three are rented on a long-term basis, and one hut is available for short-term tourist rental via a long-term tenant.¹² In the immediate vicinity, there are two other huts, one is used by hunters, and the other belongs to the Triglav National Park and is used by rangers or is occasionally rented out.

Krstenica's pastures have been used by the people of Češnjica since the end of the Middle Ages.¹³ After the emancipation of the serfs in 1848, the peasants of Češnjica redeemed and controlled the rights to the land. Each

9 For a more detailed overview of the past state of alpine pastures in the Julian Alps see Melik (1950), for some recent issues see Ledinek Lozej and Roškar (2018).

10 The only national park in Slovenia, named after the highest point Mount Triglav.

11 Grassland areas have decreased over the last century due to declining importance of agriculture and less livestock: from 403 ha in 1923 to 38 ha between 1963 and 1982 (in the years when the alpine pasture was almost abandoned), to 80 ha in 1995 and 70 ha in 2014 (Jovič, 2016, p. 13).

12 Although this is against the Triglav National Park Act (2010), it is rented out to tourists by a long-term tenant. On the abuses of the TNP Act see Ledinek Lozej (2013).

13 Since the village of Češnjica did not have any high-alpine pasture rights or commons, it was given the right to use the Krstenica mountain pastures by their owner, the Bled dominion (Kos, 1960, pp. 133–134; Ceklin, 1977, pp. 67–74).

shareholder had the right to an area of pasture in relation to the number of cattle they owned, to build a hut, to use the wood, and had the duty of maintaining, for example, the pastures, paths and water sources. On the alp, each shareholder had a herder: This was a member of the (extended) family, or a hired member of staff, who looked after the cattle and processed the milk. In the 1870s, when cooperative dairying by professional cheesemakers was introduced by the agricultural societies and other actors, such as local priests,¹⁴ the herders were supposed to help in the dairy and provide wood as fuel to the cheesemaker according to strict rules of alternation based on the number of cattle. The products were distributed according to the quantity of milk per herd of each shareholder (Novak, 1995; 2024; Ledinek Lozej, 1999; Ledinek Lozej and Roškar, 2018).

After World War I, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes introduced agrarian communities (AC) that replaced the previous local communities. Hence, the shareholders at Krstenica reorganised their pasture management and dairying as part of an AC. In the 1930s, the new dairy¹⁵ and the majority of existing huts were built at their present locations.¹⁶ After World War II, the ACs were abolished, and their lands and other properties were nationalised, transferred to the municipalities, and to the management of state cooperatives, the Peasant Work Cooperatives.¹⁷ In the 1960s, the Peasant Work Cooperative in Srednja Vas, which took over management of the property of the AC Bohinjska Češnjica (including the alpine pastures and dairy plants), started to centralise milk processing at the industrial dairy plant in the valley. This was the beginning of the decline of alpine cheesemaking and the pastures: The Krstenica pasture was abandoned for a few years, and members

14 The same process of the intensification of dairying has been identified for the Swiss Alps from the late 18th century onwards, and in neighbouring Austrian and Italian regions from the second half of the 19th century (Tschofen, 2017). For more information on the introduction of common dairying in the Julian Alps see Valenčič (1990) and Ledinek Lozej (2013).

15 It was designed by the architect Alfonz Pirc, who worked on many similar plants in the Bohinj alps (Ledinek Lozej, 1999).

16 According to archaeological sources, the previous location of the Krstenica mountain pastures was higher, at the location of the present pasture of Jezerca. Later there were two alps operating simultaneously, one at Jezerca and the second at the present location of Krstenica. The latter moved to the lower present location due to the vicinity of the forest (used as fuel), a water source, and construction of a new common dairy plant (Ledinek Lozej, 1999).

17 For more information on the impacts of land expropriation and the abolishing of the ACs on alpine pasture farming after World War II see Petek and Urbanc (2007).

of the former AC feared that the state-run Peasant Work Cooperative would sell the alpine dairy, as had been the case for some other alps in the Bohinj region.¹⁸ Thanks to the efforts of some individual breeders and herders, who persisted in grazing the alp during the most challenging times of the 1970s and 1980s, alpine pasture farming recovered. Because of this, grazing and dairying have been preserved on the Krstenica pasture, and it has remained an active alp until the present day.¹⁹ However, at present only five of the more than 150 shareholders²⁰ are using the alp for grazing, and none of these depend on the alpine pasture economically. The economic importance of the alp, Netting's (1981) "balancing on an alp", has been replaced by its symbolic importance and an unarticulated potentiality: for eventual tourism development,²¹ landscape conservation, biodiversity and ecosystem services, and, for example, "nature conservation" (Bätzing, 2021). It also has potential for the preservation of "local traditions", for heritage-making and identity-building, for use by both local and non-local actors.

18 For example, on the Jezero alp the dairy was transformed into a mountain lodge for mountaineers.

19 For more details about the Krstenica alpine pasture see Ledinek Lozej (1999; 2002), Ledinek Lozej and Rožkar (2018), and Urbanc et al. (in press).

20 The number of shareholders has increased because following the Denationalization Act (1991) and the Act on the Reestablishment of Agrarian Communities and Restitution of Their Property and Rights (1994) that re-established the ACs, the inheritance of each owner was processed according to customary inheritance law and was not tied to the house or farm. That led to a fragmentation of rights and an increased number of shareholders.

21 That means additional income from tourists and hikers which the AC and managers of the alp have only partially exploited, e.g. selling dairy produce and drinks to hikers. For example, they do not rent out the huts for short stays to tourists as this is not allowed following the Triglav National Park Act (2010), nevertheless one of the long-term tenants managed to overcome the issue and advertised his hut officially on his website (cf. footnote n. 2). Also, the Triglav National Park Public Institution rents out a hut in the immediate vicinity.



Figure 2 – The Krstenica alp, 2021.

Forty Summers on the Krstenica Alp

Cecily was born in 1935 and spent forty summers on the Krstenica alp between 1975 and 2015, taking care of and milking the cattle of her relatives, neighbours, and other breeders. In 1998, when I spent the summer on the alp, there were 28 dairy cows and 18 heifers from eleven owners.²² They drove the animals up to the alp – depending on the weather – around the feast of Saints Peter and Paul (29 June) and stayed until the Sunday after the feast of the Nativity of Mary (8 September). However, before and after this time on the high mountain alp, Cecily worked on the lower alpine pasture of Zajamniki, but there she took care only of cattle of her brother and nephews.²³

22 The number of cattle has declined since the 1940s and 1950s when there were more than 100 dairy cows. Oxen, heifers, and calves grazed other mountain pastures.

23 While the Krstenica alp was – before nationalisation and after de-nationalisation – in the ownership of the members of the AC, the lower mountain pastures comprised meadows in private property and commonly owned pastures.

As I flip through the 1998 fieldwork diary, a scene unfolds before my eyes. When I first dialled the phone number of Cecily's family in Češnjica, her sister told me that I could not talk to her now because she was in Germany, and she did not know when Cecily would return. She gave me the phone number of her apartment in Ljubljana, which I should try in about a month's time. A milkmaid who was in Germany for the winter and with an apartment in Ljubljana, this was far from what I expected.

A good month later I called Cecily, asking her whether I could come to Krstenica for the summer season. Her answer was clear: "Yes, sure. You can come... I will first go to Zajamniki [the lower alp] for two weeks and only at the end of the month to Krstenica... But do not come at the weekend because I have enough people." I arrived on the Krstenica alp a few days after the cattle drive, accompanied by a friend who helped me carry one of the two backpacks loaded with all the (un)necessary field equipment I thought I needed for the next two months. When I came to a flat, grassy slope below the dairy and saw the first huts, I was excited because of the beautiful scenery and at the same time afraid that I would not be able to cope with this situation and last two months here. "I could just stay for a fortnight at first," I reassured myself. But these gloomy thoughts were dispelled by the clarity of the blazing afternoon sun and the soft, fresh breeze from the mountains of Triglav and Tosc. I was immediately captivated by the view of the mountain range. When we reached the dairy, I hesitantly knocked on the door, entered, and greeted those inside somewhat shyly. "I told you not to come over the weekend!" came the reply. And immediately after, a more conciliatory question, "Would you like some tea?"

This first contact became a blueprint for our relationship, straightforward and full of care, that was formed through everyday experiences: getting up at half-past five, milking the cows, which I began to recognise by their different teats, weighing and curdling the milk, churning the cream, driving the cattle to pasture, cleaning the stalls and searching for lost cows and calves, getting Cecily used to the voice recorder and camera, having fun with the youngsters who helped Cecily, or admiring a slightly different scene in the sky above Mount Ogradi every evening, from the fiery glowing sunset to the flashes of lightning accompanied by hollow thunder. And, of course, there was the writing of diaries and notes in the evenings in the hut owned by Cecily's fam-

ily, where she had put me up so I could have some quiet time for my work. This lasted until I put my recording equipment and camera away in a corner for a while because I was needed for other tasks, or so I thought.



Figure 3 – Removing the curd from the cauldron, 1998.

Cecily learned herding as a child, when she spent all her vacations helping her older sister on the Krstenica alp in the 1940s.²⁴ After her older sister's marriage, Cecily took up the work on the alp as she was "the one who patched the holes in the house" in the family of eleven siblings.²⁵ But when the Peasant Cooperative was formed to take care of the management of alpine dairying by centralising production in the valley, the Krstenica mountain pastures were abandoned for a couple of years in the late 1960s.²⁶ Hence, Cecily spent the entire summer season on the easily accessible lower alpine pasture of Zajamniki, which suited her, because, besides tending the cattle, she also took

24 Her family built the hut and started to spend the summer on the Krstenica alp in 1946.

25 Even though she had a job as a nurse in Ljubljana.

26 Cecily said that in some places the cheese dairy had been empty since 1965 or 1969.

care of her young nephews and elderly brother-in-law. However, because of crowds of visitors and vacationers on the Zajamniki pasture, as well as a fear of losing the dairy on the Krstenica alp (there had been several examples in the neighbouring mountains where the Peasant Cooperatives had sold or transformed a former dairy into a mountain lodge), at the beginning of the 1970s Cecily returned to the Krstenica alp during the summer. At first, she tended only the cattle of family members and close relatives, but she gradually extended the circle of breeders interested in bringing cattle to the alp, expanding this to almost all the former members of the AC, and occasionally beyond. Their interest was grounded being able to reclaim the former or traditional rights to mountain pasture.²⁷ Thanks to the efforts of Cecily, cattle herders from Češnjica and Jereka managed to reorganise themselves into an unofficial form of an alpine-pasture cooperative. This was based on Cecily's willingness to spend the entire summer on the mountain pasture, tending and milking the animals and turning the milk into cheese, ricotta, and butter. She grazed the cattle of extended family and relatives for free; the other owners paid a certain amount per animal.²⁸ Livestock owners, family members included, were required to deliver a weekly food supply to Cecily and to contribute to additional costs (oil for the generator, salt for the animals) and other tasks (such as preparing firewood or helping with the housework). At the end of the season, the cattle owners received dairy products depending on the amount of milk which had come from their herd, or, if they preferred, the equivalent in money.

Cecily had no children of her own, but she worked as a babysitter in Ljubljana and took care of her nephews and great-nephews during the summer, first on the lower mountain pasture of Zajamniki and then also on the high alp of Krstenica. Taking care of the children meant that they worked together with her, so she also taught them how to milk and handle livestock, as well as to process the milk. They slowly proved to be excellent helpers in milking, driving cattle, mixing curds and making butter. Cecily was also helped by

27 When Krstenica was abandoned they either kept their animals on lower mountain pastures during the summer or at home.

28 In 1998, the amount was 5,000 SIT (around 20 euros) per dairy cow and less than half for heifers and calves for the whole season. In 2015, the amount was 50 euros per dairy cow and 25 euros per heifer or calf. During the last three grazing seasons (2013–2015), she also received a payment from the AC, which she shared with those who helped her on the alp.

cattle owners, who sent their children to the mountain pasture for a couple of days, as well as young people from all over the Bohinj Valley who occasionally turned up; sometimes there were fifteen of them from the ages of two to twenty-two. The older ones took care of the younger ones and trained them in the various skills and tasks that were needed on the alp. As they grew up, the younger ones took over. Over the years, some of them were able to work independently, first in the daily cattle drive, then in the milking, and finally in processing of the milk. Cecily explained that she found it easier to work with children than adults because she knew the former would obey if necessary: “The kids have their responsibilities, they help when they need to, and then they have free time. And they get along well.” Whereas at the end of the 20th century several alps had become places of the elderly or unemployed marginalised individuals, the Krstenica alp was full of young people.²⁹ This created bonds among the children, as well as between them and the alpine pasture, its life, work and traditions (Ledinek Lozej and Roškar, 2018).

Decades of work with young people have paid off. Cecily trained four generations to work on the alp. When she retired in 2016, her nineteen-year-old great niece took her place. Vania, a secondary school graduate, took over the management of the alp with the help of her younger brother Jeremy. The decision that Vania should work during the summer on the Krstenica alp was made by Vania and her parents, because “she had time, she had graduated and was free until October”. Media, from the national television to the local newspapers, seized on the fact that young people had taken over management of the alp.³⁰ However, Vania’s and her brother’s work in the alp was presented as an autonomous and romanticised decision, without insights into the complex relationships, tensions and changes in the alp, village and AC, that had taken place since the 1990s.

29 Children played an important role in alpine pastoralism in the Julian Alps and in other Alpine regions until the 1960s, and in some places into the 1970s. In the region of Bohinj some children became independent shepherds as early as the age of twelve or fourteen (Novak, 1989; 2024).

30 See, for example the reports on national television (Braniselj, 2016), national radio (Jocič, 2016), and newspapers (Mlakar, 2018; Medvešek, 2018) and regional newspapers (Sodja, 2016). There was also an international report by Alps–Danube–Adria TV (Bevčič, 2018).

The Agricultural Community Takes Command

The restitution of property and rights to the members of the AC, which took place in 1994, did not initially have a significant impact on the management model introduced by Cecily. However, after denationalisation in 1991, several breeders who were still driving cattle to Krstenica (and other alps) formed an organisation which demonstrated their ambition to manage the alp. Until then, most of the investment and improvements had been carried out by Cecily, her family, and eventually by other users of the alpine pastures (e.g. long-term tenants).³¹ Since 1994, the reconstituted AC³² has begun to participate more intensively in the work on the alp, for example in the renovation of the wooden roof of the dairy and the installation of a solar power plant. Its members started to take over the decision-making process, based on the fact that this was collective property, and they were carrying out projects of common benefit to all. The AC's ambitions increased especially after Slovenia's accession to the EU in 2004 and the introduction of the European Union's CAP subsidies for the preservation of alpine pastures and the alpine landscape. This led to tensions, intensified by the personal agendas of the individuals involved.³³

When I visited Cecily in 2016 on the lower alp of Zajamniki, for the first time in forty years she was not spending the summer in Krstenica. She told me that she was pleased with the takeover by Vania and said it was about time. In Zajamniki she only took care of her family's cattle, and there was not much milk from the three cows. I was a little surprised that she was no longer processing the milk in the shared dairy, but in her own hut. How was it possible – I wondered – that someone who had taken care of the village's cattle for four decades now had no access to the alp's shared infrastructure? It seemed

31 For example, solving the problem of water supply solution with running spring water, improvements in the dairy, installation of a generator for electricity, maintaining the road.

32 The Češnjica, Jereka, Podjelje and Koprivnik AC was formed under the 1991 Act on Denationalisation and the 1994 Act on the Reestablishment of Agrarian Communities and Restitution of their Property and Rights. However, they have not succeeded in reorganising themselves under the 2015 Law on Agrarian Communities, which gives ACs more autonomy. The reason is that they do not know at least half of the shareholders because the inheritance issues between the shareholders have not been resolved, therefore, they cannot convene a general meeting at which a decision on registration under the new law could be made.

33 For more information on the different agendas of those involved see Ledinek Lozej (2002; 2013) and Urbanc et al. (in press).

to me that Cecily somehow had, intentionally or unintentionally, been cut off from Krstenica, even though she could, and would probably still want to, have a supervisory role there. Cecily reassured me that she was in constant contact with her great-niece Vania and talked to her on the phone almost daily. She had taught her how to heat and cool the brine for cheese, when to change it, how to churn butter, and above all, how to keep the dairy and cheesemaking equipment clean and tidy and be careful about hygiene. Cecily was also aware that it was thanks to her that Vania had taken over work on the alp confidently and independently. Despite the unpleasantness around the use of the shared dairy, Cecily is actually doing well in Zajamniki; she is enjoying a well-deserved rest and taking care of only a few heads of cattle.

Vania and Jeremy managed the Krstenica alp for three grazing seasons between 2016 and 2018, organising a team of workers that consisted of friends and relatives, with their parents supplying them with food and drinks to be sold to tourists. The dynamic in the alp changed as they have a different style of management; a lot of people who had been there previously missed working on the alp. Why Vania and Jeremy stopped working at Krstenica after 2018 is not entirely clear, but Vania told me that it was too tiring and exhausting to do all the work alone: "It's too much to be tied up for two months... And at the end, the payment was not what they had agreed." But there were probably other reasons, from the fact that a two-month stay on the alp without social contact with friends was too exhausting, for personal and family reasons, and disagreements with the AC about the distribution of the additional income related to the sale of drinks to visitors. Since 2019, the AC has hired a professional cheesemaker and an additional shepherd to manage the alp, and Vania has been employed as a cheesemaker in the dairy in the valley. During the summer, she occasionally helps in the alpine dairy on the Zajavniki alp, which belongs to the neighbouring AC of Gorjuše-Nomenj. In the summer of 2021, she visited Cecily several times in Zajamniki, and she also went to Krstenica, where the cattle of her family were spending the summer, to look for a cow that the shepherds had told her had kicked. She admitted that she misses Krstenica. It is hard to imagine the feeling of coming to the pasture where you grew up, helped and worked independently, and then see that someone else is in charge.

When I arrived at the Krstenica dairy with Anthony and his children in early July 2021, Michael and Sean, hired to do the herding and milking, were waiting for us at the big kitchen table. The table is new but somehow empty compared to the table in the 1990s when children crowded the space. The general atmosphere is different, uncomfortable, and full of more masculine banter than in the 1990s.

Michael had already spent the previous summer season as a shepherd in Krstenica, where he had helped the cheesemaker. Since the cheesemaker had had some health problems, and because numerous disagreements between the cheesemakers and shepherds, Michael had taken over the cheesemaking at the end of the season. He was paid for this supplementary work by AC and in 2021 the AC hired him again to take over the dairy. To help out, Michael invited his colleagues, Sean and Mark, to work as shepherds. They all come from another Slovenian region, Carinthia, and are considered outsiders by local breeders.

The shepherds have their own agendas, ranging from economic interests to gaining experience and credentials in cheesemaking. They also want to make life and work on the alp as smooth as possible: they asked for a portable shower; they have their own preferences for the food and drink that is delivered to them by the owners of the cattle; they do not want, or do not know, how to milk cows that are kicking because of injuries; and, they do not know how to repair things. Some members of the AC considered them to be unaccustomed to working and living on a mountain pasture and not proactive enough in solving problems. Above all, they feel that they are more interested in communicating with visitors than in taking care of the cattle, cleaning the stalls and making cheese. Thus, the agendas of the shepherds collide with the unarticulated interests of the AC. At the end of the season, it seemed to me that everyone – employers and employees – was dissatisfied. I was also told the AC did not want to deal with hired staff anymore because they are, as they put it, “different from the locals”. For the AC, this difference is, “that there is no connection”. The complaints of breeders appeared to lie in the perception that they did not care enough for the animals and were too attentive to visitors.



Figure 4 – Removing the curd from the cauldron, 2021.

Members of the AC complain that the former rules that governed alpine life are no longer followed nowadays. But I had heard the same complaints before, during the period when Cecily took over the alp. The only difference is that Cecily managed to cushion and soften conflicts and to establish a new way of operating with years of dedicated work. Vania and Jeremy were somehow still too young to make autonomous decisions, still followed the visions of their parents, and remained on the alp for only three years, which from a long-term perspective is too short a period of time in which to establish their authority. For Michael it was an extremely challenging environment in which to introduce a different form of management that would, as he explained, include renovation and a turn towards providing hospitality. The previous cheesemaker had built his position of authority on his skills, but, lacking this, Michael's desire for innovation on the alp and autonomy was doomed to failure. However, even though the representatives of the AC did not want to hire non-local staff anymore, they still employed Mark as the cheesemaker and herder-in-chief and his team of co-workers for the summer season of 2022. It is evident that members of the AC no longer depend on the pasture economically, hence their role is based solely on ownership and hobbled by

the decreasing importance of agricultural production, the unsettled ownership of shares among the members and resulting limitations as a legal entity, and the lack of both former and new ways of acting.

Conclusion

At the end of the 1990s, an agricultural advisor had seen the future of Krstenica as very bright and promising. This looked like it might come true when Vania and Jeremy took over in 2016, especially given the media exposure.³⁴ A few years later, when alpine pastures and dairying are now labelled as intangible cultural heritage³⁵ and local food chains are seen as increasingly important,³⁶ Krstenica is facing challenges and tensions. These problems are articulated differently by different actors, but can be categorised as follows:

1. Tensions between the particular interests of different actors. Whereas in the past tensions were mainly external (e.g. conflicts between different villages over pastures, and between the interests of the TNP, tourism and the agriculturalists), today these are more internal, between the AC (the owners of the land), the breeders (the owners of the livestock), and the labour force (the personnel on the alp). In recent years, this was most evident through a general dissatisfaction of the AC with hired labour because they are “different from the locals”. Nevertheless, the roles and interests of the owners and personnel may overlap, coexist, collide, or even change over time, forming different alliances due to purely personal circumstances peculiar to all small communities.
2. These tensions are primarily the result of general social change associated with urbanisation and changes in family structure. In the past, and as was the case for Cecily, the extended family provided labour (Cole and Wolf, 1974; Netting, 1981; Viazzo, 1989). Herding was done by older members of the family, unmarried uncles or aunts, or girls before marriage (Novak, 1985, 1995).

34 See footnote n. 30.

35 Mountain pasturing and dairying was inscribed in the national Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage on 7 April 2020 (Jerin and Ledinek Lozej, 2020).

36 This was especially so in 2021 when Slovenia was the European Region of Gastronomy.

3. The past is often idealised and seen as a golden age, and changes are usually hard to accept. While the hired herders want to impose new rules on the alp, the cattle owners complain, for example, that the herders do not get up early enough, that the work is not done on time, that the cows are not rotated daily, in short, that there are no rules. Michael complained that the owners of the cattle were always referring to how Cecily did things and how things were organised then. But I can clearly remember that in the 1990s, they also complained about Cecily's new form of management with the use of children, her dairying, and the production of smaller wheels of cheese.
4. The rules that regulated several aspects of alpine life before nationalisation in 1947 are no longer followed, and new ones have not yet been introduced. The AC, which is not a legal entity, has neither the legitimacy nor the potency to mediate in imagining and shaping Krstenica's future (despite the efforts of its president and some members). According to several interviewees, the key reason for the weakness of the AC is that shareholders are no longer dependent economically on the alpine pasture and agriculture in general. In this context, it is significant that in the search for a competent and willing cheesemaker, some suggested organizing the work on the alp so that each owner of dairy cattle would take over the management for part of the summer.³⁷ In this way, the work would be divided, and at least one family member would learn the skills necessary for looking after the animals and land (together with cheesemaking) and could eventually transfer these to their children. However, this proposal was turned down by the cattle owners.

A solution to the differences in the agendas of the actors on the Krstenica alp – the AC, the hired shepherds and cheesemakers, and the livestock owners³⁸ – might be found in cosmopolitics and the work of Mario Blaser (2016) and his ethnographic material on a conflict around caribou in Labrador, Canada. The

³⁷ Such an organisation exists for some alpine pastures in the southern part of the Julian Alps near Tolmin and Kobarid (see Ledinek Lozej and Roškar, 2018).

³⁸ Other actors and stakeholders involved at various levels of government include the TNP, Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation, Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, Slovenian Forest Service, Tourism Bohinj, and different ministries, especially the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, and also – following Latour's (2005) actor-network theory – non-human entities that form the Krstenica assembly.

concept of cosmopolitics, as developed by Isabelle Stengers (2005) and Bruno Latour (2004), keeps open who and what might compose a common world.

In this way, cosmopolitics offers a way to avoid the pitfalls of reasonable politics, a politics that, defining in advance that the differences at stake in a disagreement are between perspectives on a single reality. Figuring the common world as its possible result, rather than as a starting point, cosmopolitics disrupts the quick recourse to ruling our concerns on the basis of their ostensible lack of reality. (Blaser, 2016, p. 566)

Given Blaser's description of how the conflicts (class conflict over the control of a resource, cultural conflict involving the competing knowledges) and differences "might constitute the political in a given situation" (Blaser, 2016, p. 551), we can question, whether there is a conflict of perspectives on the Krstenica alp among the actors or whether the alp is actually an "uncommon world" (Blaser, 2016, p. 562). It might be better to see it as a pluriverse and a shared setting, not among but between the AC, hired cheesemakers and shepherds, cattle owners, long-term tenants, the Triglav National Park, its rangers, hikers, hunters, and cows and other creatures. In this sense, the differences between cattle owners and hired shepherds are not concerned with the local versus non-local, but different worlds. In this regards, Mario Blaser (2016) treats certain conflicts as ontological rather than epistemological frictions,³⁹ and instead of reasonable politics and its exclusionary operations (for example, excluding someone for "being different") proposes adopting the idea of cosmopolitics. This would be a cosmopolitics that articulates common goals for those who want to live with the land and animals on the Krstenica alp. Using an examination of its historical development and ethnographic observations of recent developments, this could lead to a just calibration of investment in work, money, time, care⁴⁰ and revenues from milk and meat production, subsidies, and additional income from tourism, and ecosystem services.

In 2021 the Krstenica alp's future was not as promising as it had been in

39 He also points out, that the specification of ontological differences is fundamentally an a posteriori proposition (Blaser, 2016)

40 For example, each breeder decides whether they still want to drive dairy cows to the alp, which requires daily oversight, prefer to send only non-dairy cattle which demand only occasional supervision.

the 1990s, and it formed a contrast with the neighbouring Laz alp. When I was there for the first time in the 1990s, two elderly female herders were taking care of a small number of animals, one of them making cheese from goat's milk. The atmosphere was not as lively as in Krstenica, populated as it was by young people from the whole Bohinj valley. Since 1990s many changes have taken place in Laz: The dairy on the property of the AC Studor-Stara Fužina was rented by a farmer and skilled cheesemaker from Studor, who combined farming, cheesemaking and tourism in the valley with summer grazing on the mountain pasture, and also involved other family members.⁴¹ In 2021 he and one of the elderly herders passed away, but the pasture was taken over by his daughter Lucy, who is in her thirties and who decided to be a farmer instead of working in the local tourism organisation. She has engaged young people from the whole Bohinj valley as helpers in the daily drives to and from the pastures, milking and dairying. The atmosphere reminded me of that in Krstenica in the 1990s.

These developments and changes are only possible because of new beginnings. Beginning, as explained by Michael Lambeck in his insightful article on sacrifice and the problem of beginning, is an activity that implies return and repetition, involves the designation of a consequent intention, and is the first step in the intentional production of meaning (Lambeck, 2007, p. 22). I dedicate this article to Cecily and Lucy, and all those shepherds and cheesemakers from Bohinj (and elsewhere) who were and are courageous enough to embark on new beginnings, new meanings and alternative futures.

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41 For more, see the ethnographic film *V Lazu* (Peče, 2018).

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