

SUMMER SCHOOL IN PEYRESQ, FRANCE

4th of September, 2019

In late August I arrived in the little town of Peyresq, France, nestled between the large boulders of a mountain top (Figure 1.). I was here to attend a ten-day Summer School on Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity, arranged by Alter-NET. Participants from 15 different countries came together to listen to lectures from experienced scientists and train in future scenarios development.

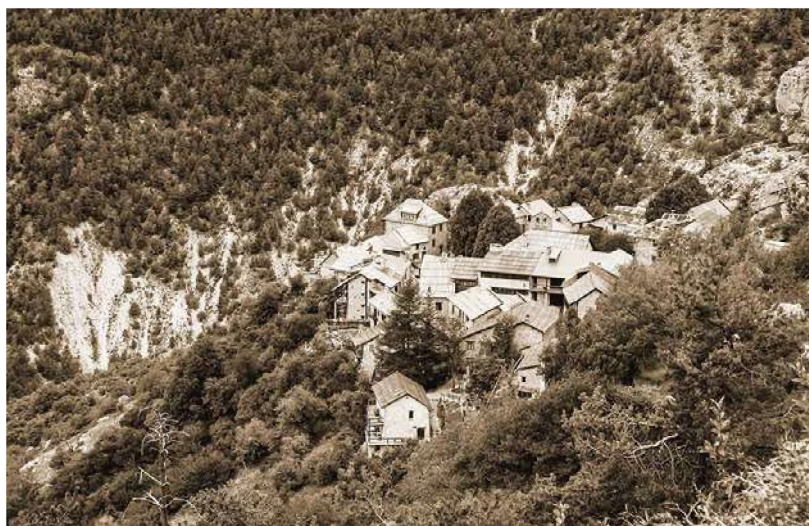


Figure 1. View of Peyresq Town (Photo: Martin Sharman)

1. ábra Peyresq város látképe (fotó: Martin Sharman)

After the first introductory days of lectures, we set off on a 12 km hike of the nearby mountain where we were hoping to run into a local shepherd. On our way up, a local guide told old stories of the shepherds and their culture, of daredevils paragliding off the mountain top, and the marine fossils still observed in the stone along the pathway. It took a while to find the shepherd, but we followed the sound of ringing bells and barking dogs and finally came upon her and the 1500 strong herd of sheep she was managing. Her talk was cut short by the threatening rumbling of thunder, and she rushed away to get the sheep out of the rain (Figure 2.).

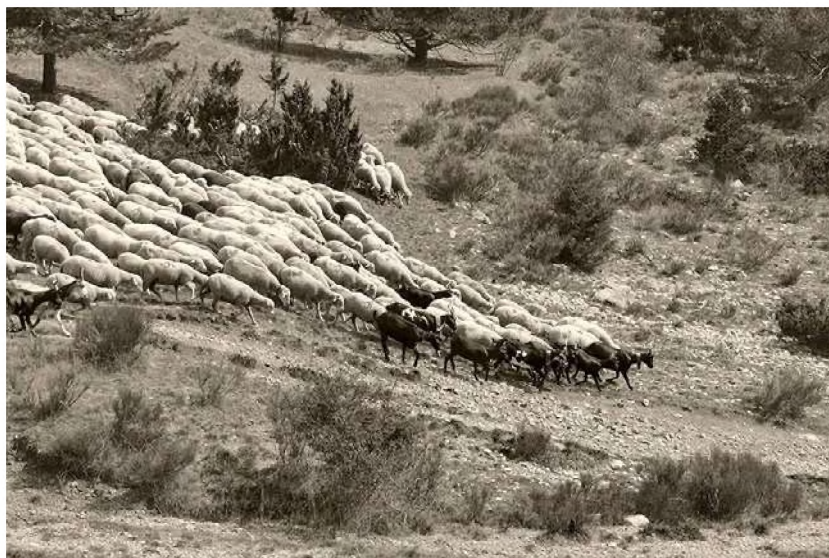


Figure 2. Sheep and goat herd around the Peyresq Mountains (Photo: Martin Sharman)

2. ábra Birka- és kecskenyáj a Peyresq-hegységben (fotó: Martin Sharman)

In the week, I connected with the participants from various international research institutes personally. The lectures varied by topic; trade-offs and synergies, ecosystem services and policy, agricultural futures, scenario planning, IPBES, participatory research, nitrogen management, and more.

We had a full day trip to the Mercantour National Park, which hosts Allos Lake (Figure 3.), the largest natural lake in Europe. After a quick walk we were welcomed by the beautiful blue sight of the lake, perfectly reflecting the mountain backdrop. A paleo-ecologist spoke with us about the Palaeolithic events and glaciers that led to the unique surroundings of the park. A park ranger answered questions about the organisational set-up of the national park, and current pressures being managed. And we finished our visit with a healthy lunch of French cheese and baguette.



Figure 3. The author (Lyndre) at Allos Lake, Mercantour National Park, France
3. ábra A szerző (Lyndre) az Allos-tónál, Mercantour Nemzeti Park, Franciaország

Time was given to peruse the local goods store to choose between Lavender honey, dried walnut sausages, hand-made jewellery, and local French beer. In the evenings, after a delicious meal prepared by the best chefs in town, a local bar would open for the Summer School attendees to discuss and debate the days, topics and interests.

The ten intensive days of interaction and learning left many of the participants tired but very happy. Acquaintances had turned into friends and we were soon discussing a reunion event next year. The Summer School was an insightful experience of the European environmental research sector and presents a learning network where young researchers can collaborate and work together in the future.

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