

**PART I**

**THREE VILLAGES OF PËRMET: BËNJË, KOSINË AND LEUSË**

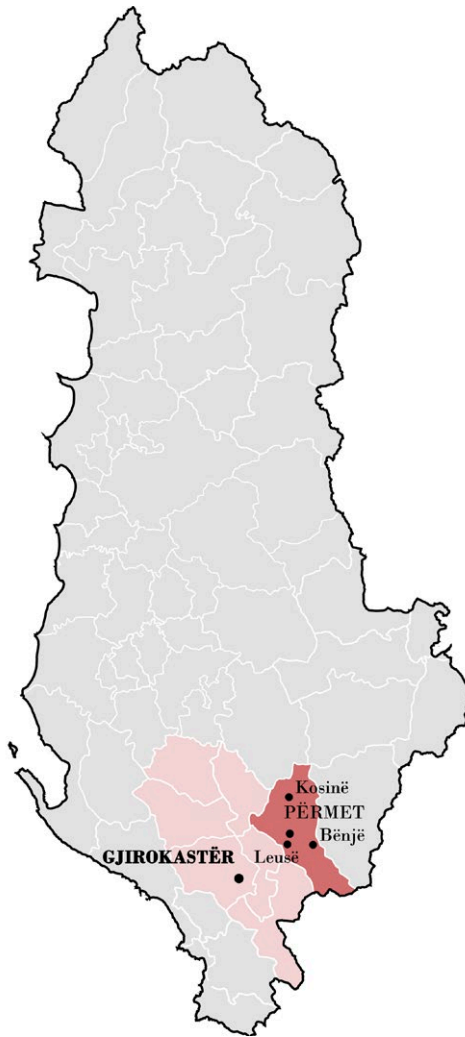


Figure I-0.1 – Përmet on the map of Albania.

## General overview

VILLAGES	ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES	MUNICIPALITY	REGION
Bënjë	Petran	Përmet	Përmet	Gjirokaštër
Kosinë	Piskovë			
Leusë	Petran			

Përmet is a municipality in Gjirokaštër Region, Southern Albania (Fig. I-0.1). Its territory has a historic tradition that is deeply rooted in the distant past, as evidenced by its many architectural assets. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it has caught the attention of foreign travellers who crossed the Balkans on their journey from Western Europe to Turkey.

Edith Durham, the English anthropologist to whose attentive observation Albania is so greatly indebted, when looking at Përmet from one of the hills that surround it, called the small town “one of the most beautiful places in the world” (as cited by Adhami, 2001<sup>a</sup>). The inhabitants themselves are aware of the beauty of their land, as exemplified by the saying: “O Përmet, o xhenet, bukë pak dhe ujë det.” (“Përmet, you are a paradise, there is little bread, but as much water as in the sea.”) (Adhami, 2001<sup>b</sup>). This phrase shows with deep clarity the role of water in the nature of the place, best represented by the Vjosa River and its tributaries, as well as by the many streams that flow down from the mountains<sup>1</sup> (Fig. I-0.2).

<sup>1</sup> The name of Përmet derives, through the dialectal “përm eti”, from “prenetjen” (quench thirst). In fact, from ancient times the streams of Përmet quenched the thirst of wayfarers who used the valley of the Vjosa River as a corridor between Greek and Albanian territory (see Pistrick, 2015).

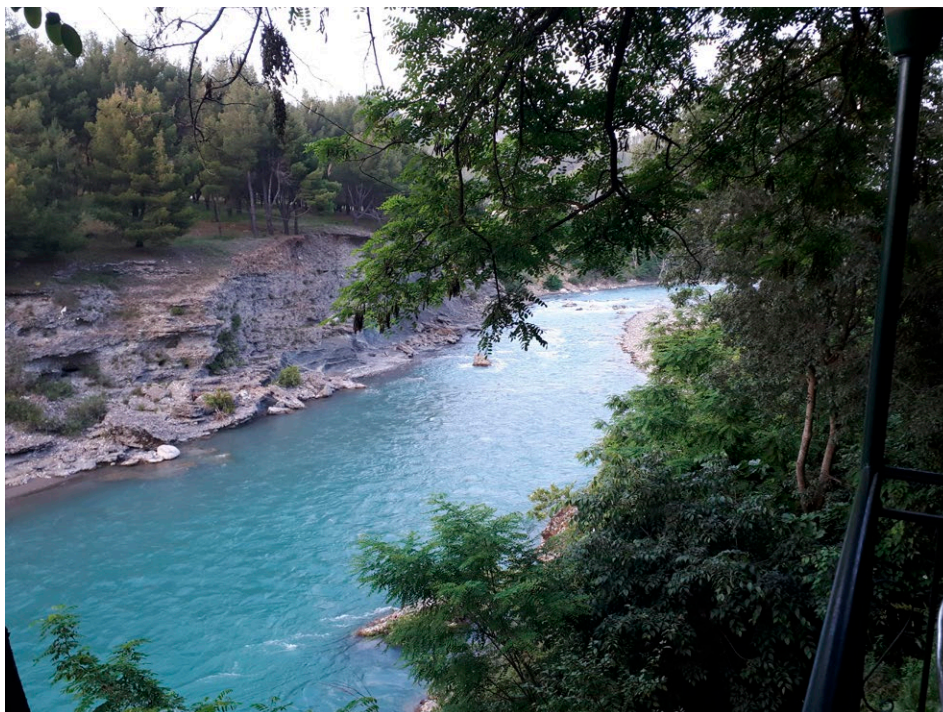


Figure I-0.2  
The Vjosa River  
flowing through the  
centre of Përmet.

At the same time, it refers to the lack of arable land (there is a scarce amount of land for producing “bread”), due to a landscape consisting mostly of hilly and mountainous terrains.

The Vjosa River and its tributaries are a sort of common guiding thread that traverses and ‘supports’ the territory. Like a backbone, they connect a number of cultural assets (natural or architectural) which are significant for the history of the three villages: prehistoric caves, thermal baths, mills, churches, ancient bridges and a canyon, all elements of outstanding monumental value that make the landscape of the area unique.

In addition, the area of Përmet also features several traditional culinary products of very high quality, among which dairy products, *raki* (a distilled spirit comparable to the Italian grappa) obtained from various fruits and berries (grape, apple, plum, juniper, etc.), and *gliko*, a compote made from fruit and vegetables.

The current settlements of the villages of Bënjë, Kosinë and Leusë are the result of developments that took place mostly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. There are, however, traces that are much older.

The area of Bënjë, which lies entirely within the “Bredhi i Hotovës - Dangëlli” National Park, has undergone anthropization processes since prehistoric times. Despite its appearance being permanently altered by the events that took place during World War II, the village, with its fortified stone houses overlooking the valley of the Lengarica River, is undoubtedly one of the most beautiful in the municipality of Përmet. Due to its landscape and architectural value, it was recognised in 2016 as a “historical centre” and as such has come under the protection of the National Institute for the Cultural Heritage<sup>2</sup> (former Institute of the Cultural Monuments) (Fig. I-0.3).

<sup>2</sup> The Institute has recently changed its name, according to the Law 27/2018 “Për trashëgiminë kulturore dhe muzetë” (About cultural heritage and museums).



Figure I-0.3  
A traditional house  
in Bënjë.

The village of Leusë existed before 1812, the year in which the Church of the Dormition of Mary was built. Leusë also suffered great damage during World War II (Saliu, 2011). Today, the image offered to the visitor is that of a compact body of stone extending uninterruptedly from the houses to the narrow streets, the enclosure walls and the courtyards.

There is little information concerning the history of Kosinë. The inhabitants show a strong connection with the Byzantine Church of the Dormition of Mary, but regrettably, it was impossible to go back to the origins of the current settlement, or even to know if there already was a village in the 12<sup>th</sup> century when the church was built. During the past few decades the village has uninterruptedly undergone intense construction activities which have altered its original rural identity, recognisable today only in the few surviving traditional buildings.

The churches devoted to the Virgin Mary are evidence of the dominant religious culture in the villages. Nearly all the inhabitants of Leusë e Bënjë are Orthodox Christians, while in Kosinë there is an important percentage of Bektashi (members of an Islamic mystic cult)<sup>3</sup>, together with a small number of Muslims.

The main representative of the civil institutions is the *kryeplaku* (literally “the head of the elders”) who is chosen by the inhabitants every 4 years. He incarnates the inheritance of ancient traditions related to the governance of the elders and often has the role of mediator between the public administration and the village community.

<sup>3</sup> The headquarters of the Sufi order of the Bektashi (*Kryegjyshata*) is located in Tirana. The order moved to Albania in 1929 as a result of the Law passed in 1925 by Atatürk’s government forbidding the practice of Bektashi rites in Turkey. The presence of the Bektashi in Albania is known since the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries (Saliu, 2011).

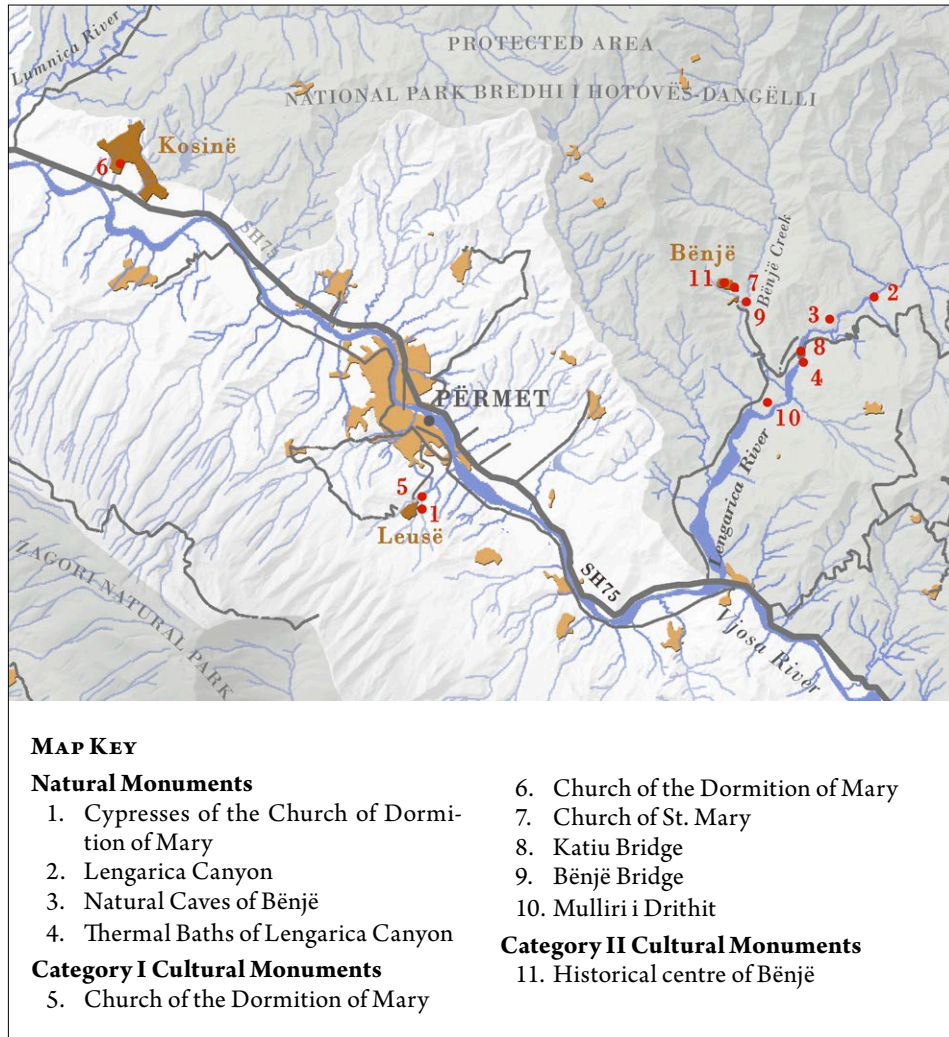


Figure I-0.4  
The Natural  
and Cultural  
Monuments in the  
villages of Bënjë,  
Kosinë and Leusë.  
[Author: Dritan  
Kapo]

The rich cultural and natural heritage of the three villages is a resource which is yet untapped, mostly as a result of the mass emigration which occurred after the collapse of the Communist regime (Fig. I-0.4). In the case of Leusë, the number of inhabitants recorded two negative peaks: one in 1994 and the other in 2004. Today (data from 2019) there are approximately 120 residents, mostly elderly people. There are only two children and less than ten people between the ages of twenty and thirty. Emigration trends in Bënjë – where the total number of residents is 80 – are similar to those in Leusë. Kosinë, since it can be easily reached from Përmet and other nearby cities, and thanks to the availability of flat land which favours agricultural production and ensures easy access to cultivated fields, is the only one of the three villages which has recorded any increase in population (it currently has 956 residents) and the only village that has access to certain primary services.

The greatest challenge today lies in halting the trend of emigration and the consequent abandonment of the region. In Përmet, eco-sustainable and experiential tourism can contribute greatly in creating job opportunities and prompting a circular economy based on the enhancement of local resources and productive capacity. The area of

Përmet is clearly privileged: the wealth of the natural, architectural and food heritage is in fact accompanied by specific, valuable social features, such as a great sense of hospitality and the almost total absence of criminality<sup>4</sup>. This fortunate configuration provides a solid basis on which to establish a new strategic vision capable of increasingly involving those assets of the cultural heritage that have not yet been adequately developed, within a new vision of the future that is still to be revealed.

<sup>4</sup> According to the *Report of the Attorney General on the State of Criminality for 2018*, Përmet appears as the Albanian municipality with the least criminal procedures, including a drop of 18.03% from the previous year. In the case of certain types of criminal offences (such as theft, for example), not a single case was registered in Përmet, whereas in others it presents rates that oscillate between 1 and 2% of the national average. See <[http://www.pp.gov.al/web/raporti\\_vjetor\\_2018\\_1571.pdf](http://www.pp.gov.al/web/raporti_vjetor_2018_1571.pdf)> (Last access 10/2020).





## Food heritage

### Typical products and culinary tradition

The food heritage of Përmet is well-known on a national scale for its typical products (spirits, fruit preserves, dairy, meat, honey and bakery products), which result from the favorable climatic conditions and the rich biodiversity of the area (Adhami, 2001<sup>b</sup>).

Përmet boasts a wide variety of wines, liqueurs, syrups, spirits and, in particular, a centuries-old history of artisan production of *raki* (Fig. I-1.1). The excellent quality of Përmet's *raki* is favoured by the autochthonous vine varieties (*rrush pjer-gulle*), but also by the ritual of artisan distillation carried out by the men of the family with the use of special tools (*kazan bakri i kallaisur, kapaku, llulla*, etc.) (Saliu, 2011). The most widely consumed *raki* is undoubtedly the one made with the local grape (*moskat*), yet since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century the production made with cultivated (plum, mulberry) or wild fruit (juniper, blackberry, strawberry tree), as well as with aromatic herbs (oregano), has become widespread. Mulberry *raki* (*raki mani*) is highly appreciated for its health benefits. Because of the scarcity of the mulberry tree (especially black mulberry), which once was extensively cultivated in Përmet (Kola, 2002), there is a diminishing production of this *raki*. The varieties of *raki* produced from the homemade distillation of white oregano (*raki rigoni*)<sup>1</sup> and wild or cultivated fruits are very popular in the area of Përmet, but due to a long and laborious preparation process, they are produced in small amounts and mostly for domestic consumption.

<sup>1</sup> See <<https://www.fondazione Slow Food.com/it/arca-del-gusto-slow-food/raki-rigoni/>>.



Figure I-1.1  
The artisan  
preparation of *raki*.  
[Courtesy: CESVI,  
Albania]

Local wines are characterised by a high percentage of alcohol and a continuity of production since ancient times (roots go back to the Bronze Age<sup>2</sup>) with autochthonous grape varieties (*debina e bardhë*, *debina e zezë*, and *pulësi*). Evidence of the continuity in the history of wine production in the valley of the Vjosa is found in sale agreements with the Peloponnese, Istanbul and Ohrid (Saliu, 2011). Of particular enological interest is the wine made with the rose hips of the dog-rose (*trëndafili i egër*), rich in vitamin C, yet produced in very small amounts because “the main ingredient is a wild fruit that is picked but not cultivated, and the process requires a lot of time and care”<sup>3</sup>.

Përmet also produces a wide variety of syrups, which, like spirits, play an important role in hospitality rites. Among these we may mention the following: *liker vere*, a dense and viscous liqueur prepared with red or white wine for domestic use; *lëng mani*, or mulberry juice, commonly used in folk medicine for curing stomatitis and pharyngitis; cornelian cherry sauce (*prevedeja e thanës*) and syrup. In addition, worthy of mention is the rose syrup (*shurup trëndafili*), which is made with rose petals, sugar and lemon. These syrups are usually destined for domestic consumption, and with the exception of the rose syrup, they are becoming increasingly rare.

Few products are as closely linked to the culture of a place as *gliko* is to Përmet. It is a compote of whole fruits, similar to the *slatko* of some Balkan countries, obtained from a variety of fruits and vegetables, all home-produced or cultivated by small local farmers. The particularity of this product lies in its taste and in the preparation process, which involves the use of lime and specialised tools<sup>4</sup>. The most traditional is walnut *gliko* (*gliko arre*) which, in addition to the complete raw nut, uses other ingredients such as lemongrass, geranium flowers, and the peeled kernel of a nut or almond inside of every walnut. *Gliko* made with wild figs, white cherries, aubergines, plums and apri-

<sup>2</sup> See: <<https://www.turismodelgusto.com/tuttodrink/vini-albania>>.

<sup>3</sup> See: <<https://www.fondazione Slow Food.com/it/arca-del-gusto-slow-food/bevanda-fermentata-di-rosa-canina-selvatica-veretrendafil-i-eger/>>.

<sup>4</sup> See <<https://www.fondazione Slow Food.com/it/presidi-slow-food/gliko-di-permet/>>.

cots is also greatly appreciated. According to the local inhabitants<sup>5</sup>, the artisan production of *gliko* is threatened by industrial production – which is marketed with the same name and at lower prices – and is lacking any safeguard protocol or adequate information campaign (Fig. I-1.2).

This critical aspect has been confirmed by the NGO CESVI, which works together with Slow Food association in enhancing the quality of the product and promoting it on the national and international markets.

There is a wide variety of typical dairy products (mostly from sheep and goat's milk) which evoke the ancient tradition of transhumance: cheese such as *feta* (made from cow, sheep and goat's milk), *djath i napës*, which is matured for 40 days, *kaçkavall* (a matured cheese), ricotta, as well as churned butter and white butter made with goat's milk (Fig. I-1.3). Another tradition derived from transhumance is the cheese known as *salcë shakulli*, which is made from goat or sheep yogurt matured in a wineskin (Fig. I-1.4). The peculiarity of the product lies in the process of preparation and maturing of the cheese<sup>6</sup> (Fig. I-1.4). These foods, traditionally prepared by shepherds in the mountain pastures of Përmet (Trebeshinë, Dhëmbel and Nemërçkë), are mostly intended for domestic consumption or else for a niche market managed directly by the shepherds themselves.

Also linked to the tradition of transhumance is the gathering of autochthonous medicinal and aromatic herbs used for soups and the fillings of *byrek* (baked pastry) (Figs. I-1.5 and I-1.6).

A product that should deserve more institutional attention is the truffle. The lack of regulation regarding the picking and selling of truffles is causing the gradual impoverishment of the areas of Southern Albania and the consolidation of an illegal market that primarily involves Greece, Italy and France.

The area of Përmet has always been favourable for cattle breeding, from which a wide variety of goat, sheep and pig meat culinary products is derived. A typical product from the area of Dangëllia and Frashër is *pastërma*, dried and salted meat (veal, pork or lamb), which is used in a variety of recipes in com-



Figure I-1.2  
Traditional fruit *gliko* with cherries and watermelon rind. [Courtesy: CESVI, Albania]



Figure I-1.3  
Feta, *kaçkavall* and ricotta.



Figure I-1.4  
*Salcë shakulli* cheese maturing in the Përmet pastures.

<sup>5</sup> Interviews held on 29.06.2019, 7.07.2019 and 10.07.2019 in Kosinë.

<sup>6</sup> See <<https://www.fondazioneSlowFood.com/it/arca-del-gusto-slow-food/salce-shakulli/>>.

Figure I-1.5  
A traditional  
*byrek* filled with  
spinach and ricotta.  
[Courtesy: CESVI,  
Albania]



Figure I-1.6  
Autochthonous  
medicinal and  
aromatic herbs.  
[Courtesy: CESVI,  
Albania]



Figure I-1.7  
The *kole*.



bination with beans, onions, leek and cabbage.

Also linked to the consumption of meat are two dishes that use the innards of animals: (1) *kole*, the large intestine filled with spiced veal or pork meat<sup>7</sup> (Fig. I-1.7), and (2) *kukurec*, which recalls the *stigghiola* of Palermitan cuisine, used in the past for major family gatherings. Certain stews are made with the innards and other less refined parts of the animals, for example *pace këmbë e plënci*, *kapllama*, *shqeto*, *gjella me drudhe* (with a cockerel broth) and *përsheshi me pulë e me arra*, a well appreciated dish made with chicken and traditional crumbled bread (*kulaç*).

Fish-based cuisine is not that varied depending mostly on the only local variety of fish (*buzëtrashi i Vjosës*), now threatened by the levels of pollution of the Vjosa River (Fig. I-1.8).

The large variety of flour-based traditional dishes date back to the cultivation of cereals promoted by the Tanzimat, the administrative reform undertaken during the 19<sup>th</sup> century for the modernization of the Ottoman Empire (Mile, 1984). This includes several types of bread<sup>8</sup> and a rich variety of savory pies made with wheat (*lakrori me hithra*) or corn (*pistilli* and *palaniku*) stuffed with vegetables, wild herbs or meat, from which derives the traditional new year's eve dish: *mesnik*.

In the area there is also a widespread and well-known tradition of preserves (*zahiret*)<sup>9</sup>, closely linked to the figure of the housewife (*anvisa*). There is little instead in terms of sweet pastries and cakes. The traditional sweets of the area are *reshedi* and *llokume me bajame*.

<sup>7</sup> See <<https://www.fondazione Slow Food.com/it/arca-del-gusto-slow-food/kole/>>.

<sup>8</sup> A traditional bread baked by Christian Orthodox families is known as *bukë vale*.

<sup>9</sup> For example, jams (*reçel ftoi*, *rrushi*, *kumbulle e trëndafili*), pickled vegetables (*turshi patëllxhani*, *arnea me domate*, *arnea me lakër*), dried fruits and vegetables (*fiku i thatë*, *bukëfike*, *domate të thata*), and dried wild fruit (*hoshaf* – wild apples – and *gorica të thata* – almond-leaved pear).

The abundance of sources of nectar in the natural sites has favoured the development of apiculture (wild or practiced with traditional beekeeping techniques) (Fig. I-1.9). The varieties of honey are characterised by high nutritional and curative values and come from the areas of Malëshovë e Frashër, Cerja e Shqërisë and from Mount Nemërçka. The most appreciated honeys are those from strawberry tree (*mjalt mareje*), sage (*mjalti i bedunicës*) and thyme flowers (*trumëza*).

#### Critical issues and future prospects

The typical products described above are connected to forms of cultivation and artisan production which have been passed on from generation to generation and to environmental conditions that determine unique features. It is a culinary and cultural heritage of undoubted interest that, however, must overcome some challenges (whether general or particular) in order to fully express its potential and to generate socio-economic value for local communities.



Figure I-1.8  
A local variety of fish (*buzëtrashi i Vjosës*).



Figure I-1.9  
A variety of honey produced with traditional beekeeping techniques.  
[Courtesy: CESVI, Albania]

The first of these challenges regards official recognition of the typical products. This, in addition to performing a function that is essential in terms of control and certification, generally contributes in conferring to the products symbolic elements of uniqueness and qualitative identity (see Ciappei, 2006). Although in Albania there is a law (L. 9863/2008) that introduced measures for the recognition of typical products, the scant production levels are an obstacle to the attribution of specificity certifications. To this is added the problem of marketing and the strict hygienic rules adopted by the European Union that slow down the growth of local producers and the sale of their products in the international market.

Another issue concerns the lack of specific studies and research which document the local culinary tradition and would also serve as a repertoire of foods and recipes to be passed on to future generations<sup>10</sup>. This aspect is especially relevant in rural areas in Albania that risk losing precious elements of a culinary tradition that is transmitted exclusively in verbal form, because of the intense emigration of the younger population.

Fortunately, in Përmet it is not necessary to start from scratch. During the past few years, thanks to the efforts of the Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development, of the Italian NGO CESVI and of Slow Food Association, the food heritage has become an important driver of local development. In this regard, the Pro-Përmet Consortium<sup>11</sup> and the Incubator for local typical products (*raki*, dried fruit, etc.) which is located in a former storehouse are noteworthy experiences. The food heritage, in this case, has prompted trickle-down positive effects that include the development of a local production system that enhances food authenticity and the hiring of approximately 100 employees, 60% of whom are women.

This result clearly demonstrates the role that the food heritage can play in the sustainable development of a place, both in economic and socio-cultural terms. This process may also positively influence forms of territorial marketing linked to experiential culinary tourism, a kind of tourism that privileges visitors who appreciate local knowledge, traditions and culture through the diversity of food products. In this perspective, the food heritage is seen as an element of a dynamic system that involves local contexts and activities, productive landscapes, habits and customs of the community, as well as specific knowledge connected to the process of transformation and processing of typical products. This system can be structured in three main categories: the first concerns the strengthening of the product's reputation, the second regards the territorial quality understood as the connection between product, tradition and land, and the third is linked to the knowledge, safeguarding and creative interpretation of traditional knowledge.

<sup>10</sup> An initiative was undertaken in this regard by the Slow Food association which, as a result of on-site research, included in its catalogue of typical foods (Ark of Taste) some typical Albanian delicacies which are at risk of being lost.

<sup>11</sup> The Pro-Përmet Consortium is a non-profit association actively involved in the economic development of the territory of the valley of the Vjosa. See: <<http://www.visitpermet.org/permet/index.php/it/pro-permet>>.

## Intervention strategies

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### S1 Education and Training Strategies

*A.1 Promoting educational projects aimed at the transmission of the food heritage knowledge to local cooks and the reinterpretation of culinary traditions in a contemporary key*

These initiatives can be developed through workshops or brief training courses involving the participation of the village elders, farmers and shepherds, in other words of those individuals who are depositaries of knowledge pertaining to ancient food production and processing practices.

The participation of Albanian chefs with professional experience abroad could be very useful. Their contribution could help the participants to reinterpret the culinary tradition in a contemporary key, thus determining a new paradigm that combines tradition and innovation.

*A.2 Generating awareness among students concerning the local culinary tradition*

The Action aims at promoting the culinary culture of the area in the schools of Përmet through active training courses.

The proposal is to divide the training courses into two phases:

- Active and cooperative learning to be carried out in class through seminars;
- Outdoor learning through workshops and direct practice activities to be carried out outside the school premises during specific periods throughout the year. This phase can also be devised as after-school activities at the homes of village elders for small groups of students, in order to give them the opportunity to see, touch and learn everything that concerns typical food products and their processing and transformation in a domestic context<sup>(a)</sup>.

In order to implement this Action, it is necessary to place at its centre the competencies of the school and to actively involve the older inhabitants who safeguard the local traditional culinary knowledge. NGOs and cultural associations that are active in the recovery of traditional products and in enhancement of traditional cuisine could provide an important contribution to this Action.

### S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

*A.3 Creating a Digital Inventory of Traditional Recipes and Memories of local culinary culture<sup>(b)</sup>*

The Action aims at documenting and cataloguing typical recipes from the culinary tradition of Përmet, which will result in the drafting of a *Digital Inventory*, understood as a tool for the knowledge of the food heritage and as an archive of memories to be passed on to future generations.

The acquisition of information should take place in the field in accordance with appropriate cataloguing methods and be complemented by audio-visual documentation.

The information sheets should include the following contents:

- The history and provenance of the recipe;
- The raw materials used and their main physical, chemical, microbiological and nutritional qualities;
- Processing and production techniques (preservation, maturing, etc.);
- The traditional tools used in the production process.

It would be necessary to devote some attention to the activity concerning the audio-visual documentation of ancient food-processing practices and traditional tools, as elements that greatly influence the quality and flavour of the traditional dishes, in view of their gradual substitution with current processes and tools. This Action could be promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and by the Gjirokastrë Regional Government, while the implementation on the territory could be managed by the Municipality of Përmet, involving in it NGOs, as well as experts in food science, anthropologists and enologists.

The *Digital Inventory* could be disseminated both at the local scale and through an *ad hoc* geoportal created by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for safeguarding and enhancing the country's culinary culture<sup>(c)</sup>.

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#### A.4 Creating an Atlas of Typical Local Products

The *Atlas of Typical Local Products*<sup>(d)</sup> aims at collecting and narrating the wealth and variety which the culinary heritage of the area has to offer, through the mapping of the places of production of typical products, the description of the types of foods and the recognition of the producers who work using traditional techniques.

This dissemination tool could be used to link the various individual places of productions so as to create some 'itineraries of taste'. It could then be used as a pretext to describe the food practices and rural lifestyles of places, as well as a tool for enhancing the landscape resources and cultural sites of the area in question.

The drafting of the *Atlas* could be entrusted to the NGOs and cultural associations active in the field of the recovery of traditional products and the enhancement of the traditional cuisine of Përmet; it would be available online and continuously implementable.

### S6 Enhancement Strategies

#### A.5 Recognition of typical products in accordance with Law 9863/2008

This Action abides by the procedures for obtaining the National Food Quality Certifications, in accordance with those articles of L. 9863/2008 which regulate the Origin and Geographical Indications of food products (Përcaktimi i origjinës dhe i treguesve gjeografikë të ushqimeve – art. 32) and the Indication of the traditional food products (Treguesi "Produkt ushqimor tradicional" i ushqimit – art. 33). First of all it is necessary to identify those typical products that may reasonably aspire to the said certification; their recognition as such would ensure their safeguarding and allow for greater food safety. For products for which a recognition procedure has not been started yet, it is advisable to initiate the registration procedures for obtaining the brands "Tregues Gjeografik i Mbrojtur" (Protected Geographical Indication, art. 32) and "Produkt Ushqimor Tradicional" (Traditional Food Product, art. 33) for the following typical products: fine varieties of *raki* (mulberry, oregano, strawberry tree or other wild fruits); *shurup trëndafili*; *salcë shakulli*, and *djath nape* cheeses; *kole*; *pastërma*; fine varieties of honey (*mare*, *bedunicës* and *trumëza*).

Afterwards, it would be desirable to encourage association initiatives among the local producers of the selected food products in order for them to present the request for recognition before the competent entities, in accordance with the relative laws and regulations in force.

A systemic cooperation would be needed among public and private entities (local institutions, NGOs, Albanian companies with experience in the field of the recognition of typical products) for the formulation of the application.

#### A.6 Assessing the UNESCO Cultural Heritage candidacy requirements for typical local food products

This Action is aimed at the creation of a study group for assessing the possibility of presenting the candidacy of two typical local products – *gliko* and *salcë shakulli* cheese – to be listed by UNESCO as intangible heritage.

*Gliko* is part of Përmet identity: it has emphasised for generations the values of hospitality and community spirit. The product presents authenticity features not only in terms of quality, but also in terms of production processes, respect for the maturing of raw materials and safeguarding of ancient artisan traditions. In the case of *salcë shakulli* it is precisely the preparation, jealously safeguarded by generations of shepherds, which constitutes a cultural *unicum*. This cheese represents a 'rite' symbolically connected to transhumance and is the result of a laborious production technique which goes back to the sage practice of recycling (milk, animal hides, locally invented work-tools, etc.)<sup>(e)</sup>.

#### A.7 Promoting experiential tourism for enhancing the local culinary heritage and preventing land abandonment

Promoting the culinary heritage through cooking courses and tasting itineraries, together with experiential tourism, could represent a great opportunity for the area of Përmet. From this point of view, tourist activities could be based on the concept of 'doing or cooking together', which involves the visitor in the experience of preparing a dish or a typical product with the help of the local inhabitants (the elderly, shepherds, fishermen, etc.).



‘Doing or cooking together’ is a process that begins with the gathering of raw materials, continues with their transformation and ends with the consumption of the final product, all following local ancient customs. At the same time, participants have the opportunity to catch a glimpse of the everyday lives of the rural community they are visiting.

The initiative could be undertaken in different contexts, such as:

- In village homes, in the case of the preparation of typical dishes and other artisan home-cooking products (*raki, gliko, zahiret*, etc.);
- On the River Vjosa, recognised for the quality of the typical fish known as *buzëtrash i Vjosës*, to enjoy the experience of “fish and eat” (participation in the rite of fishing, preparing, cooking and eating fish directly on the spot);
- In mountain huts on the Trebeshinë-Dhëmbel-Nemërçkë mountain range, in the case of the preparation and tasting of dairy products linked to the tradition of transhumance. The objective of this initiative is to discover life in the mountain pastures, the production process of mountain hut products, such as *salcë shakulli* and *djath nape* cheese, and to generate awareness and appreciation for the authentic specificities of the food products. The place, in this case, expresses the inner lives, the history and identity of shepherds and their activities. The huts can also provide temporary accommodation in order to give the visitor the possibility of enjoying a more complete experience in direct contact with shepherds. This initiative could be linked to other itinerant events to be organized on the trails and alpine pastures, aimed at the landscape and the culinary enhancement.

This tourism supply can be combined with other initiatives connected to the recovery and enhancement of Përmet’s traditions (see chap. I.2).

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### Notes

- a) A similar event is “Gatesat me gjyshet” (Cooking with grandmothers), which takes place in Kosinë every year on August 14 (see chap. I.2).
- b) A positive initiative was undertaken by the NGO CESVI that, in collaboration with the local community, is gathering information on typical products and recipes belonging to the culinary tradition of the area of Përmet in order to bring them to the attention of the Ark of Taste (Slow Food).
- c) For a similar experience, see the initiative promoted in Italy by the Ministry for the Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism. (See <[https://www.culturalimentare.beniculturali.it/mibact\\_paci](https://www.culturalimentare.beniculturali.it/mibact_paci)>).
- d) The Action is inspired by the Atlante dei prodotti della Lombardia (see: <<https://www.regione.lombardia.it/wps/wcm/connect/3f8b0f75-6817-4ddf-a70d-6d421bb28404/Atlante+prodotti+della+Lombardia+2017.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE-3f8b0f75-6817-4ddf-a70d-6d421bb28404-mpj1psg>>. See also the Atlante dei Prodotti Agroalimentari del Trentino, promoted by the Autonomous Province of Trento (<<http://www.trentinoagricoltura.it/Trentino-Agricoltura/Pubblicazioni2/Monografie/Atlante-dei-Prodotti-Agroalimentari-del-Trentino-edizione-2012>>).
- e) See (from minute 19): <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wne-kGbwGg&t=1051s>>.



## Traditions, social practices and local craftsmanship

### Traditions and cultural heritage

The villages of Bënjë, Kosinë and Leusë enjoy the privilege of belonging to a geographic and cultural area that is known for the hospitality of its inhabitants and is rich in traditions appreciated throughout the country for their beauty and expressiveness.

The sacredness of the guest is a well-known concept in Albanian culture and in the area of Përmet the respect for the ‘stranger’ is even more intense. Homes are literally opened and made available to the visitor, who is offered traditional culinary products that always accompany the rite of welcoming. In the past, when a guest visited the house for the first time a lamb or kid was slaughtered, a luxury which the owners themselves could ill afford in their everyday lives. In particular, the head of the animal was offered to the guest as a sign of respect. The welcoming rite was organised in both spatial and social terms: the guest would be seated in one of the corners of the *oda* (the main room of the house), generally situated opposite to the place where the master of the house sat; brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews and sometimes even first degree cousins would participate in the banquet and often would invite the guest to lunch or dinner in their own homes. A shared conviviality was thus triggered, providing opportunities for cultivating friendship and social interaction in a circular manner (Saliu, 2011). Although the rite of hospitality has suffered a gradual weakening, because of the deep changes that have taken place both during the time of the Communist regime and over the past few decades, it is still alive and well, albeit in different forms.

Përmet belongs to the cultural territory of *tosk* iso-polyphony, whose most illustrious representative is Laver Bariu (Nurka) – who was born in Përmet in 1926 (Fig. I-2.1). The folk groups that he has sung and played with (traditionally known as *saze*), or those he has formed himself, represent the apex of artistic quality and musical production between 1950 and 1990 (Tole, 2007). A street in Përmet is named after Bariu,

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Figure I-2.1  
Laver Bariu,  
the well-known  
iso-polyphony  
musician from  
Përmet. [Courtesy:  
Roland Tasho]

and a commemorative plaque is placed on the facade of the building where he lived until his death in 2014.

Përmet has distinguished itself for its inhabitants' devotion and passion for knowledge and study since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when primary and secondary instruction was beginning to become widespread throughout the country (Dragoj, 2013). There were schools in many villages and until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the language of education was Greek<sup>1</sup>. In 1909 – during the Congress of Dibra – the representatives of the Sublime Porte accepted the requests of the local population to open schools in Albanian, giving the opportunity to choose between the Arab or Latin alphabet. Albanians chose the Latin alphabet and began immediately to prepare for opening schools. The first Albanian language school in the area of Përmet was located in the village of Badëlonjë (Saliu, 2011). By 1920 there were schools also in Leusë and Kosinë. In Bënjë, instead, the school had deeper roots: the building was built immediately after the church (therefore after 1879) and one of its first teachers was Ilia Dilo (Sheperi), an intellectual who taught in Bënjë from 1883 to 1895. Dilo kept an intense correspondence with the brothers Frashëri and with Andon Zako Çajupi (famous literary figures of the time), and in 1927 published in Vlorë one of the most celebrated books on Albanian grammar.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the tradition of the cultivation of roses, which led to the denomination of Përmet as “the city of roses” (Saliu, 2011). Still today, during the flowering, in the streets of the city and alleys of villages, roses of different colours and varieties are seen at the entrances of gardens, peeping over enclosure walls (*avlli*) or even climbing house facades.

<sup>1</sup> The Ottoman Empire had been tolerant toward the choice language of instruction in the schools. The proximity to Greece and the constant influence of Orthodox Christian religion in the area of Përmet had originally determined the adoption of the Greek language.

### Traditional festivities

Traditional festivities were numerous and often involved the inhabitants of various villages in the area. Among these, it is mostly religious feasts that have survived.

The Feast of the Dormition of Mary is celebrated in Leusë and Kosinë according to a ritual (which takes place throughout all of Southern Albania) that gathers people around the church on the night of August 14 and concludes with a mass in honour of the Virgin Mary on the following morning. Many migrants who return to their places of origin for the summer holiday also participate in the feast. While in Leusë the religious ritual takes place in an intimate atmosphere, in Kosinë the social interaction seems to prevail and music or events linked to the local culinary tradition accompany the celebration. In the church of Bënjë (also dedicated to the Virgin Mary), instead, the feast takes place on November 21 (the day of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary) and is strongly linked to the tradition of healing miracles. In the past, after the mass there was a small concert of *saze*, which contributed to enkindle the atmosphere and prepared the ground for the ‘profane’ feasts, with banquets full of culinary delicacies cooked by the women of the village.

Unlike the other two villages, Kosinë is distinguished from the religious point of view by the entrenched presence of a Bektashi community. The most important Bektashi feast is known as “Sultan Nevruz” (Nevruz literally means “new year” in the Persian language). On that occasion, the Bektashi faithful gather in their place of worship (*teqe*) for prayer. In the case of Kosinë, the nearest *teqe* is the one in the nearby village of Alipostivan, which is also a holy place of pilgrimage. In Kosinë there is also a non-Bektashi Muslim minority, mostly consisting of women who came from nearby villages as wives to Orthodox and Bektashi families. Mixed marriages are very common in the area of Përmet and are a good example of the religious tolerance in this region of Albania.

### Local craftsmanship

Traditional crafts in Përmet are closely linked to the history of its weekly market. It used to take place within an orthogonal grid of courtyards and alleys on which stood the workshops of artisans and the shops of merchants<sup>2</sup>. Its origins date back to the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In Përmet, as early as 1922 there were 342 artisans and 123 workshops, among which 16 cobbler shops, 21 tailor shops and 22 *opingarë* (shoemakers); it also included 21 water mills, which provided flour to 3 bakeries. Many labourers worked in the 16 stone quarries and the 42 workshops with *avlimende* (weaving looms), where the women were regularly employed or even self-employed. There were also 2 tinsmiths, a watchmaker and 2 tanners (Dragoj, 2013).

The market of Përmet began its decline during the Thirties<sup>3</sup> and completely disappeared during World War II (Adhami, 2001<sup>b</sup>) with its dramatic consequences: the city and the surrounding villages were burned or bombed, the livestock and harvests lost, the shops and artisan production endangered.

<sup>2</sup> The market included a vast area of the current urban park, in the proximity of the city’s former church.

<sup>3</sup> For Adhami (2001<sup>b</sup>) only due to King Zog’s inefficient policies; for Dragoj (2013), also as a result of the economic crisis of 1929.

The collectivisation process undertaken by the Communist regime during the after-war period, through agrarian reforms and the creation of state-run cooperatives, radically changed the economy of the country and consequently that of Përmet; artisan production was gradually replaced by industrial production guided by specific artistic directives derived from a unitary language and aimed at both domestic demand and exportation<sup>4</sup>.

During the Nineties, as a result of great social and economic changes, what remained of popular culture during the years of the regime was further lost, both in Përmet and in the rest of Albania.

#### Artifacts and work tools

The territory of Përmet offers a distinguished artisan tradition, as can be seen by visiting the Museum at the Multifunctional Centre of the city which houses valuable examples of tools and decorative objects in stone, copper, bronze, wood, finely embroidered fabrics, intertwined objects of vegetable fibres, etc. (Fig. I-2.2).

Traditional tools and furniture which were widespread throughout Albania could also be found in the houses of peasants in the area of Përmet: *sofër* (table), *magje* (kneading trough), *djep* (cradle), *dybek* (butter churn), as well as a variety of containers for water, spirits and dairy products, some in wood and others made from animal hides (Fig. I-2.3). Artifacts and work tools were produced by those who used them (peasants, shepherds, etc.)<sup>5</sup>, or else were made by “nomadic artisans”<sup>6</sup> (among whom there



Figure I-2.2  
Wood  
craftsmanship:  
a detail of the  
iconostasis in the  
Church of the  
Dormition of Mary  
in Leusë.

<sup>4</sup> Export was limited to cheap products, such as souvenirs and ornaments.

<sup>5</sup> In the farming sector, ploughs with metal parts were only introduced between the two world wars, mainly imported from Greece, Italy and Czechoslovakia (Shkurti, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> This refers to the artisans of the *Jevgjit* community, which perhaps emigrated from Egypt during the Turkish invasions of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, as well as to those of the *Cigan* (or Romani) community, who came from North-West India during the Middle Ages). These communities settled throughout the Balkans, Albania included.

were skilled smiths) – whose women were well-known for basket weaving, wickerwork and embroidery. They would operate through a door-to-door or made-to-order service (Adhami, 2001<sup>b</sup>).

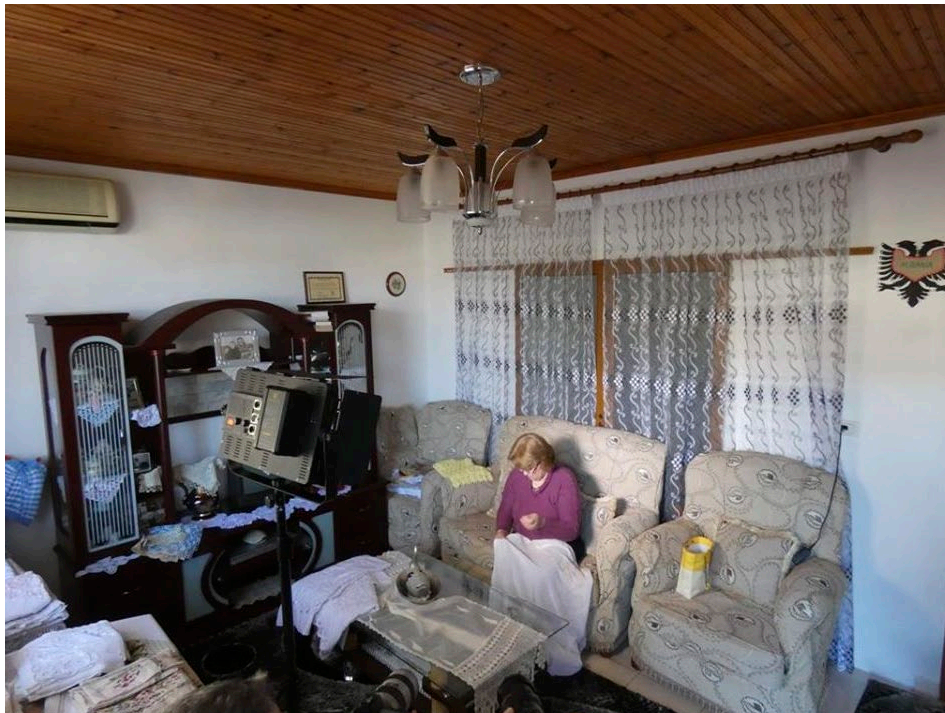
Also the artisan production of the traditional dress and wool fabrics were linked to the skills of women in weaving and embroidery (Saliu, 2011). The use of the traditional dress in Përmet was widespread until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Dojaka, 2017), after which certain accessories – such as the *guna* (a sort of raw wool cloak, which reached the feet) – were used exclusively by shepherds. With the establishment of the Communist regime and as a result of ideological as well as practical reasons linked to the organisation of work and of collective life, the habit of wearing traditional dress was gradually aban-



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Figure I-2.3 – A handcrafted kitchen utensil (known as *saç*) for cooking traditional food.

Figure I-2.4 – A woman practicing the embroidery tradition. [Courtesy: CESVI, Albania]

Figure I-2.5 – The art of working fabrics with the traditional *avlimend*. [Courtesy: CESVI, Albania]

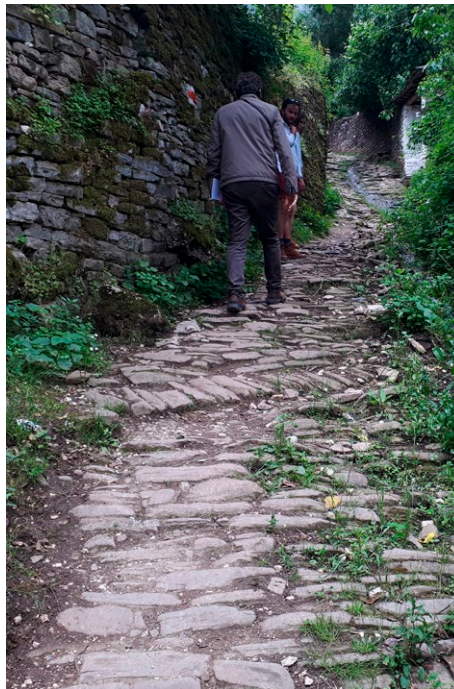
done. Most of the traditional garments that are found today in the area of Përmet (as in most of Albania) are unfortunately industrially produced, due to both of the loss of traditional know-how and of the high cost of raw materials and labour.

Two other instruments which were widespread and connected to female work are the weaving loom (*avlimend*) (Onuzi, 1985) (Fig. I-2.4) and the *dërstilë*, a complex mechanism used for washing fabrics, especially those made of wool and of large dimensions, such as blankets (Saliu, 2011). The *avlimend* was usually placed in a special area within the domestic courtyard, yet there are cases – as Adhami (2001<sup>b</sup>) points out – in which several of these devices are placed in a collective space (Fig. I-2.5). The *dërstilë* was generally placed inside mills, as in the *Mulliri i Drithit* of Bënjë (see sect. II.2.2), which had one of the largest *dërstile* in Albania.

In the area of Përmet there are currently approximately fifty craftsmen working in the production of artifacts, gathered in six main activities: basket weaving, knitwear and tailoring, pyrography, coppersmiths, stonemasons and carpenters. Unfortunately, only about half of these artisans are still active<sup>7</sup>.

### Traditional building

Building workers were especially active during the period between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, when great civil works were built (Mile, 1984; Muka, 2007; Meksi *et al.*, 2016) (Figs. I-2.6 and I-2.7).



6



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Figure I-2.6 – Leusë. A traditional pavement in kalldrëm.

Figure I-2.7 – Leusë. A traditional roof covering made of dry-assembled stone slabs.

<sup>7</sup> Source: NGO CESVI, Përmet.



Testimonies on the role and capacity of the foremen in the area of the Vjosa Valley of the have reached our days through the chronicles of travelers from the North of Europe (see Leake, 1835). Their accounts speak, in particular, of the exceptional skills of the itinerant and seasonal master builders (*mjeshtrat shëtitës stinorë*) (Muka, 2007) who went from village to village searching for work opportunities<sup>8</sup> (see Brunnbauer, 2004). According to Muka (2007), the fame of these builders was so great and widespread throughout the Ottoman Empire that it has remained reflected in the Turkish language. For example, the road pavement involving the use of river pebbles or split stones (*kalldrëm*), is still known as *arnavut kaldırım* (literally Albanian cobblestones). The itinerant master builders were organised (under the direction of a foreman), into groups of 10-12 people plus 2-3 apprentices (often family members), as well as 3-4 *argat* (unpaid helpers). Like the members of a coterie, they communicated in a professional language known as *purishte* (Muka, 2007, citing M. Kaucky).

After the Balkan wars and World War I, the new borders between Albania and Greece reduced the area of action of the itinerant master builders; in the following years, they gradually disappeared (Muka, 2007).

#### Critical issues and future prospects

The recovery and strengthening of traditions and rituals at the community scale, in addition to positively influencing the consolidation of identity processes, can also trigger the development of the experiential forms of tourism, which these Guidelines wish to promote. Unfortunately, in Albania, and especially in rural areas, years of Communist regime and the constant migration of the younger and more active sectors of the population have effectively weakened both artisan culture and entrepreneurship. To this must be added the general reluctance of Albanians towards the cooperative associations, which could play an important role in the development processes as well as in terms of social cohesion<sup>9</sup>.

Përmet is not immune to this general condition. However, some specific anthropological and social potentialities confer on the area a privileged status with respect to other rural contexts in Albania. First of all, Përmet and its villages can rely on a great wealth of traditions handed down from generation to generation. To this must be added the great availability of the inhabitants to get involved, as was shown, for instance, by their participation in the projects devoted to the recovery of old crafts organised by the NGOs operating in the area<sup>10</sup>.

It is on this basis that several policies and actions can be realistically activated, with the aim of reshaping inherited cultural models into new updated versions.

<sup>8</sup> According to Pichler (cit. in Brunnbauer, 2004) in the nearby region of Kurvelesh, construction work was the main form of itinerant labour.

<sup>9</sup> This reluctance, at least in part, could be interpreted as a form of reaction against the days of the Communist regime when, with the abolishment of private property, cooperative production was imposed on the population.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, "Nuove possibilità di inclusione sociale delle donne e giovani disoccupati nelle aree rurali", a project born in 2015 from the collaboration among two NGOs (CESVI and Milieukontakt) and the Municipality of Përmet.

## Intervention strategies

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### S1 Educational and Training Strategies

*A.1 Promoting educational projects aimed at the creation of new skills and job opportunities in the craftsmanship sector*

This Action aims at providing knowledge and skills related to the craftsmanship sector (see A.5). It is developed through the following educational projects:

- *Workshop on art and craft design*, involving Albanian professional designers and teachers from the faculties of Architecture and Design, Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology. They, together with local artisans, could guide the trainees toward forms of experimentation with hand-made processes, thus opening new perspectives for the production of artifacts belonging to the local tradition. Workers from the cooperatives and state-owned artistic enterprises from the time of the Communist regime could also play an active role in this project. Although these workers previously operated in a serial production system, their knowledge and technical skills are an essential link with traditional artisan know-how, as well as a precious testimony of the processes of transformation of historical crafts which took place during the Communist period<sup>(6)</sup>;
- *Summer school on traditional craft*, involving Albanian artisans who have carried out their work abroad. In order to broaden knowledge, part of the educational activities could be undertaken abroad, in similar contexts to Përmet;
- *“Yard-school” on the restoration of the cultural heritage*, involving local master craftsmen. The purpose is to provide the trainees with practical knowledge and skills relating to the processing of traditional building materials and components (flagstones for roofs, stone cornices, wooden doors and windows, roof carpentry, etc.) allowing them to apply the acquired competencies in the restoration of a real building.

### S3 Social Cohesion Strategies

*A.2 Promoting the transfer of tacit knowledge through inter-generational meetings in schools*

The Action aims at involving the elderly population of the villages in activities that include a dialogue with school students. The telling of autobiographical stories can contribute to maintain alive the traditions and help to rebuild a collective memory through which current social needs can be better understood and addressed. This would re-activate an inter-generational communication, which has been weakened by the mass emigration of young people from the villages.

The Action could be carried out at the elementary and middle schools in Përmet and in the surrounding villages.

### S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

*A.3 Drafting of a Technical Handbook on Traditional Local Building*

This Action is aimed at the transmission of technical information regarding materials and building techniques used in traditional building in the Region of Gjirokastër. The handbook, in addition to being a useful tool for the restoration and renovation of those traditional buildings which have survived years of abandonment and neglect, should be aimed at avoiding the dispersion of practical knowledge linked to local artisan know-how (for example carpentry work, roofing, stone paving, decoration and finishes, etc.).

### S6 Enhancement Strategies

*A.4 Creating a Museum of Iso-Polyphonic Music in Përmet*

This proposal contemplates the establishment of a place devoted to the history of iso-polyphony, including the exhibition of musical instruments, photographic documentation and interactive panels with audio and video material. Visitors could listen to *tosk* polyphonic music while enjoying a *raki* or a *gliko*. A specific section could be devoted to the figure of Laver Bariu, a native of Përmet, considering the importance of the master in the musical history of the country.

*A.5 Fostering the creation of a new craft business*

This Action is based on the educational projects described in Action A.1. It could be supported by the NGOs operating in the area of Përmet and developed in two different categories:

1. Enterprises or cooperatives involved in the production of everyday artifacts and ornaments and in the restoration of historical buildings with the use of local materials and traditional techniques. They require the know-how and experience of the last remaining artisans who are still active;
2. Enterprises or cooperatives who aim at innovating the sector of traditional crafts (*art and craft design*). They require close collaboration between professional designers and local craftsmen.

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#### A.6 Building a local products marketplace in Përmet

The historic market of Përmet has been for centuries the fulcrum of the city's economy.

This Action aims at building a small market hall that could stimulate and provide visibility for the typical culinary and artisan products of the area, serving also as a magnet for tourism.

The choice of the building area, in addition to being easy to reach, must be based on quantitative assessments (indoor and open-air spaces for exhibition and sale of products and artefacts; space for tasting food products, etc.) and in accordance with the needs of potential sellers (inhabitants, artisans, farmers, shepherds).

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#### A.7 Promoting the area through local feasts and festivals

The Action aims to promote the organisation of local feasts and festivals, especially during the summer, that can help to increase the attraction, in terms of tourism, of a region full of traditions such as Përmet. This would involve both recovering ancient events from traditional culture and devising new ones, thus creating a *Calendar of the festivities of the Vjosa Valley*.

The inclusion of some of these festivities in the *National Calendar of Local Festivities* is one of the objectives of this Action<sup>(b)</sup>.

##### FEAST OF SHËN GJINI (ST. JOHN) IN BËNJË

This feast – which takes place on June 22 – belongs to the tradition of the villages of Përmet, and expresses some pagan elements related to the summer solstice. In the past the young people would light bonfires and a competition would ensue between neighbouring villages (for example between Bënjë, Novoselë and Ogdunan) to establish which was the more intense and long-lasting bonfire (Kola, 2002). Today, as a result of rural depopulation, this feast is almost forgotten.

##### FEAST OF THE HARVEST IN BËNJË

Festivities in Bënjë used to take place on one of the threshing floors (*lëm*) of the village and were accompanied by bonfires lighted with straw from the new harvest. Also in this case a pagan element is involved, related to the rites of fertility of the land (Muka, 2007). The proposed date is September 21, the day of the autumn equinox. The festival could be itinerant: it could begin on the *lëm* of the village with the lighting of the bonfire and then move to the *Mulliri i Drithit*, an important place for the memory of agricultural traditions in the village, where the festivities could be accompanied by traditional music (see A.9.1, chap. I.3). A refreshment area could be prepared for the occasion, to taste the products of the local cuisine.

##### STREET FESTIVAL IN LEUSË

A festival along the narrow streets of Leusë could be arranged in correspondence with the Feast of the Dormition of Mary (August 14). Tourists and inhabitants - including emigrants who return to the village in the summer - could meet, sit on *sofate*<sup>(c)</sup> and taste local food inside the courtyards, while listening to live music performed by local folk groups.

##### “THE DAY OF ROSES” IN PËRMET

Since roses are the symbol of Përmet, a festival could be devoted to them during their blooming period, which is also when food products which use rose petals are prepared in the homes of Përmet (rose syrups and jams).

The festival could offer the inhabitants the double opportunity of exhibiting the varieties of roses belonging to the area and of preparing, tasting and selling food products made with rose petals (see Chapter I.1).

The *Calendar of the festivities of the Vjosa Valley* could be disseminated through the website of the Municipality of Përmet as well as the websites of the NGOs, the associations for the promotion of tourism and the tour operators active in the area.

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#### A.8 Enhancing the tradition of cultivating roses

The Action aims at promoting and strengthening a peculiar tradition of Përmet and to enhance the appearance of the town and villages. It could involve both the management of green public areas and care of the courtyards of houses. In the urban park of Përmet, in particular, a rose garden could be cultivated with all the autochthonous rose varieties from the South of Albania.

The application of the Action on private property should include the free distribution of seeds to people willing to participate; in the villages, it may be useful to rely on the village headmen (*kryepleq*) to inform the inhabitants of the community they represent.

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## S7 Management Strategies

### A.9 Establishing forms of support for artisan enterprises

In order to address the needs for development and innovation presented in Action A.5, the new artisan enterprises require a support action divided into the following activities<sup>(d)</sup>:

- Market analysis and studies, as well as definition of perspectives of development for identifying ‘targets’ (inhabitants, tourists, etc.);
- Support for the local artisan workforce by specialists for the manufacture of competitive products, not only for tourism-related demand, but also for the domestic market;
- Intermediation and promotion support for the marketing of artisan products.

The NGOs that operate in the area of Përmet could offer a useful contribution in the implementation of this Action.

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### Notes

- a) The Central State Film Archive (AQSHF – Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror i Filmit) is an essential source of information on the activities of cooperatives and artistic companies operating during the Communist regime.
- b) Concerning the three villages of Përmet which are the subject of our study, the only festivity which is included in the *National Calendar of Local Festivities* for the year 2019 is the Feast of the Dormition of Mary in Kosinë (August 14). See <<http://www.mjedisi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Kalendari-2019.pdf>>.
- c) The *sofat* is made up of two masonry benches placed on the sides of the entrance door to the house courtyard. See chapter I.4.
- d) The Pro-Përmet Consortium, a Group for Local Action (GLA), currently provides support to local producers and merchants, mainly from an administrative and fiscal perspective.

## Landscape

The area of the Municipality of Përmet shows a mosaic of heterogeneous landscapes that have resulted from a sedimentation of signs and traces that nature and the local communities have left over time (Fig. I-3.1).

This chapter analyses the main features of the landscape heritage, focusing on the villages of Bënjë, Kosinë and Leusë.

### The natural landscape

The predominant value of Përmet's landscape lies in the contrast between the vast natural areas of conifer and broadleaf forests and other areas where shrub/sclerophyll formations and bare rock prevail. More than 50% of the territorial surface has been declared a National Park, through Decree no. 1631 of the Council of Ministers, dated 17.12.2008. The park – known as “Bredhi i Hotovës-Dangëlli” – extends throughout the N-E area comprising the village of Bënjë and the Lengarica River (Fig. I-3.2).

Bënjë is located in a high hilly area that reaches a maximum altitude of 898 metres above sea level. The hills are shaped by the steep slopes that abruptly dissolve in narrow valleys marked by the erosion of the many watercourses. The soil is composed of very heterogeneous *facies* of flysch, with a prevailing presence of argillite, siltstone and sandstone, with layers of calcareous olistoliths (Fig. I-3.3).

Given their geomorphological composition, the slopes that develop in a N-E direction are also subject to landslides, due to the intense surface erosion (Bashkia Përmet, 2020).

A similar situation occurs in Leusë. The village has the same geological composition, yet is entirely located on an area that suffers from hydro-geological instability. The area features a number of hills with slopes of varying degrees of inclination that descend in a S-N direction, with a maximum altitude of 673 metres above sea level.



Figure I-3.1  
The Vjosa Valley  
seen from Leusë.

Figure I-3.2  
A scenic view of the  
natural landscape  
in Bënjë.

Figure I-3.3  
Bënjë. The  
soil's geological  
composition shows  
intense superficial  
erosion.

Much of the forest areas consist of artificial plant formations with a prevalence of pines (wild, maritime, black) and acacia, which resulted from the reforestation campaigns promoted by the Communist regime from 1965 onward. The soil has a dense presence of trees, which alternate with outcrops of bare rock and sections with partial covering of spontaneous vegetation. Where slopes are less steep, as in the area to the east of the village, land is used for shrubby pastures or for herbaceous crops cultivations (Fig. I-3.4).

Although the village of Kosinë presents the same geological features as Bënjë and Leusë, it is morphologically more varied and complex, as a result of a mixture of hills and plains. Next to the arable land along the Vjosa Valley, in the direction of the low hills (which do not rise higher than 400 metres above sea level), there are limited parts of the land with gullies and grazing areas. Newly planted forest vegetation is also present, consisting mostly of chestnut groves and pines (Fig. I-3.5).

#### The water landscape

The water landscape is a result of a rich hydrological heritage and natural and anthropic elements. Its features are so ingrained in the context as to constitute a highly remarkable monumental and identity defining landscape. The hydrographic basin of Përmet consists of the Vjosa River and its tributaries, Lemnica and Lengarica. Vjosa is the longest watercourse in Southern Albania. It originates in the lower Pindus, near the Zygo pass in mount Smolikas, in Greece (Fasolo, 2005) (Fig. I-3.6).



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Figure I-3.4 – Leusë. A rural life scene with a pine forest in the background.

Figure I-3.5 – A grazing area and new forestry plantation in the surroundings of Kosinë.



Figure I-3.6  
The Lengarica  
River in the  
surroundings of  
Bënjë.

The valley of the Vjosa has guided and affected the origin of many settlements (Saliu, 2011) and the infrastructure network of the area, together with the ancient roads that connected Epirus to Thessaly in one direction and Illyria and the Adriatic Sea in the other. Although the Vjosa is the main feature of the river landscape, several minor watercourses crisscross the region under scrutiny.

The water landscape of Leusë and Kosinë stands out for its linear-oriented streams that flow straight from the adjacent mountain ranges, shaping the steep slopes of the hills. Minor watercourses are flanked by a rich riparian vegetation, both arboreal and shrub-like, and often show signs of problems linked to the lack of maintenance (Fig. I-3.7).

The case of Bënjë is connoted instead by a more varied and complex water landscape caused by the passage of the Lengarica River. The Lengarica Valley includes numer-



Figure I-3.7  
Leusë. Minor  
watercourses  
flanked by a rich  
(arboreal and  
shrub) riparian  
vegetation.



ous landscape assets and is also a strategic area due to the meeting of roads that connect the region of Dangëllia to the villages of Sheqeri and Kolonjë. The first element that presents an evident landscape value is the Lengarica Canyon, which was declared a Natural Monument in 2002<sup>1</sup>. This canyon is a long and deep cut that reveals layers of calcareous rock, created by the eroding activity of the Lengarica River. The steep walls in the karstic ecosystem, together with the multi-colour shades that are gradually revealed, turn the canyon into a natural work of art. The canyon stretches across a length of almost 4 km, with a height of up to 100 m and a width that varies between 20 and 30 m (Fig. I-3.8).

Along the canyon, there is a vast system of karstic caves, some of which are connected through tunnels (Bashkia Përmet, 2020). Worth mentioning are the Katiu and Pëllumbave Caves, which were used as prehistorical settlements during the Neolithic (2200-2000 B.C.) and presumably abandoned around 1000 B.C., when the inhabitants moved to the villages of Dedejan, Lëkurës and Rezës (Saliu, 2011) (Fig. 1-3.9). These two caves were discovered by an archaeological expedition in 1978 (Kola, 2002). Many utensils and fragments of ceramic vases were found revealing a great wealth and variety of decorations, as well as great mastery of the decorative technique known as “Devoll style”, which has also been found in caves located in the area of Korça, specifically in Mat and Tren (Saliu, 2011). These two sites – which according to Kola (2002) are the oldest population settlements in the area of Bënjë and of Albania – bear witness to manifestations of the culture and artistic know-how which have been preserved to this day. It is not surprising that the caves were declared “cultural monuments” by the Ministry of Culture<sup>2</sup>. Katiu Cave, which is located to the west in proximity of the thermal springs of Bënjë, is difficult to access due to the lack of implementation of safety measures concerning the rocky wall above the entrance; whereas Pëllumbave Cave, located to the east of the canyon, cannot be reached on foot due to its steep location on the rocky cliff.

The Lengarica River offers one of the most remarkable anthropised water landscapes remaining in the area of Përmet as witnessed by the thermal springs of Bënjë whose waters have been appreciated since antiquity for their curative properties<sup>3</sup>. They belong to the vast geothermal system that extends from the Lengarica River to the gorge of Vormoner on the Sarandoporos River in Greece.

Katiu Bridge<sup>4</sup> stands elegantly above the thermal baths becoming a part of the river landscape. Thanks to its aesthetic value, it confers identity and character to the whole natural area (Fig. I-3.10). The bridge soars above the river, linking the villages of Bënjë and Delvinë in Shqeri. It is part of a system of 17 bridges built in the area of Përmet between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, only a few of which remain to this day (Saliu, 2011)<sup>5</sup>.

In addition to Katiu Bridge, in Bënjë – upon the stream of Bënjë (*përroi i Bënjës*) – there are two other bridges, both Cultural Monuments: *Ura e Bënjës* (Bënjë Bridge)<sup>6</sup>, at

<sup>1</sup> Decree of the Council of Ministers no. 676 of 20.12.2002.

<sup>2</sup> Decree no. 184 of 6.5.2015.

<sup>3</sup> The springs of *Banjat e Bënjës* have been visited for centuries by peasants to cure ailments, especially scabies and some animal diseases.

<sup>4</sup> Declared category I Cultural Monument, by the Ministry of Education and Culture, with Decree no. 1886 of 10.06.1973.

<sup>5</sup> Katiu Bridge is described in sect. I.5.1.

<sup>6</sup> Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture no. 1886 of 10.06.1973.



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Figure I-3.8 – View of the Lengarica Canyon, Bënjë.

Figure I-3.9 – Katiu and Pëllumbave Caves: prehistoric settlements dating back to the Neolithic period.

Figure I-3.10 – The landscape of the Lengarica River near the Katiu Bridge and the thermal baths.

Figure I-3.11 – Bënjë Bridge upon the *përroi i Bënjës*.

the entrance to the village; and *Ura e Dashit*<sup>7</sup> (now in ruins), located on the boundary with the village of Vinjah (Fig. I-3.10).

These three bridges are tangible signs of the ancient history of the village in close physical relation and in harmony with the natural components of the place.

Another singular element in the fluvial landscape of the Leengarica River is the watermill *Mulliri i Drithit*. Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the mills, managed mostly by old noble families or by the Church, constituted an essential component of the agro-food production system based on grain produced in Korça (Adhami, 2002). Thanks to the wealth of watercourses, they became widespread throughout the entire region of Përmet, and in particular along the banks of the *përroi i Bardhë* River. The construction of *Mulliri i Drithit* dates back to 1878 and is a rare case in Albania of a fortified mill (Adhami, 2002). It consists of a space for the grinding of cereals and another destined to the washing of wools and fabrics through a mechanism known as *dërstilë* (Stylla, 2011). Despite its value, which has been recognised by a ministerial decree<sup>8</sup>, *Mulliri i Drithit* is in a state of ruin (Fig. I-3.12). In any case, it is the only remaining link between the river, agriculture and the surviving communities; of all the other ancient mills in the area, there are in fact no traces.

#### The agricultural landscape

The agricultural landscape includes a wealth of centuries-old signs and experiences, which survive in several forms: weaving of the agricultural fields, terracing, ancient working and cultivation techniques and buildings. They are, as a whole, the complex palimpsest of the cultural values of the community (Fig. I-3.13).

Agricultural activities are mostly concentrated in the areas of Bënjë and Kosinë, which possess a rich hydrographic network and geo-pedological conditions that have contributed to the development of a thriving agriculture.

The village of Bënjë is a significant testimony to the link between agricultural landscape and forms of community organisation. There are two agricultural areas here:

1. The slopes of the hills along the Rruga e Bënjës road, and
2. The valley of the Lengarica River, which due to the features of the soil and to their orientation are the most suitable for the development of an agricultural economy.



Figure I-3.12 – Above: The *Mulliri i Drithit* in a period photo [Courtesy: NICH]. Below: The mill today.

<sup>7</sup> Decree of the Ministry of Education and Culture of 08.01.1977.

<sup>8</sup> The Ministry of Culture, with Decree no. 182 of 06.05.2015, declared the mill, category I Cultural Monument.

There is not a real agricultural system in the hilly areas at present. Part of them are used for the cultivation of valuable products (especially fruit trees, such as walnuts, plums, figs, pomegranates, mulberries and grapevines), while those closer to the village give rise to a minute network of vegetable gardens distributed on the terracing that affect the shape of the settlement system.

Vegetable gardens express the everyday rural dimension of the village and are fundamental elements of the morphology of the built environment. Generally enclosed by dry stone walls, they mark the boundaries of the property and also serve as buffers between domestic space and open agricultural areas. These elements are greatly rooted in the dwelling culture of all villages in the area of Përmet.

Terracing is also linked to the cultivation of olives, probably since the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when it was brought by people who migrated from Lëkurës (Sarandë).

The landscape of the grapevine, which has been cultivated since the foundation of the village, is quite different. According to Kola (2002), the ancient vineyards, divided into plots of land for every family, were located next to the wheat threshing floor (*lëm*) of the Naskovë family and on the two sections of the main road that descends to the Bënjë Bridge.

Wine-growing landscapes are the result of the varieties cultivated and have generated different forms depending on the type of grapevine. The prevailing cultivation system is the pergola (*hardhi me pjergulla*) (Fig. 1-3.14). The pergola grapevine was cultivated in Rrepe, Thermë, Tajmat, on the road that leads to the *Mulliri i Drithit*, but mostly in the courtyards of houses (Kola, 2002), to household, for decoration purposes and to protect the house from the summer sun. Pergola grapevines, widespread also in the dwellings of Kosinë and Leusë, are considered a 'relic' of the traditional grapevine landscape that continues to be preserved and handed down from generation to generation.



Figure I-3.13  
Terraced vegetable  
garden in Leusë.



Figure I-3.14  
Kosinë. A  
courtyard covered  
with grape pergola.

The soil and climatic features of the area have also privileged the cultivation of white mulberry and the breeding of silkworms (a tradition now lost) by some farming families from the village that produced silk yarn or exported the silkworms to other regions in Albania (Kola, 2002).

The agricultural landscape along the Lengarica Valley is connoted, instead, by a network of fields that are distributed in regular geometric shapes and comprise mostly with arable land with or without trees.

Benjë was renowned for the cultivation of spring onions (traded since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the area of Përmet, but also in Gjirokastër, Skrapar, Berat and Korça), corn and several varieties of cereals. According to Kola (2002), wheat cultivation dates back to remote times as witnessed by the presence of four threshing floors (*lëm*) in the village. The construction of threshing floors was widespread throughout Albania. From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onward, with the dissemination of corn which had become a primary source of livelihood, the use of threshing floors was progressively reduced (Muka, 2007). The threshing floor was usually made in a ventilated area. It had a circular shape, with a diameter of approximately 3-6 metres, perfectly levelled and paved with slabs of stone. Horses or mules, tied with a rope to a central post known as *strumbullar*, moved according to the circular perimeter and crushed the spikes, thus freeing the grains from their husks. The last phases of the productive cycle consisted in husking and transporting the clean wheat to the *Mulliri i Drithit* for grinding. The threshing floor was considered as a sacred space – in the same way as the cemetery was – and where building was forbidden. Paradoxically, this belief contributed to safeguard these spaces and to preserve a testimony of great historical value, not only in Bënjë, but also in numerous rural contexts in Albania (Muka, 2007).

The area of Kosinë, unlike that of Bënjë, shows a rural agricultural landscape that has evolved through time, partially losing its original features. Over the past

few years, the growth of the village and the transition from subsistence agriculture to increasingly intensive forms of agricultural practices is producing a sudden loss of cultural values and of the traditions that have been built up over time. Kosinë is in close relationship to the Vjosa and to the tributaries of the Lemnica, which have favoured a greater agricultural productivity. As in Bënjë, also at Kosinë the agricultural landscape can be divided into two types. The first is featured by a hilly landscape with a network of irregularly shaped fields, which, together with the dense mosaic of vegetable gardens, is the ancient agricultural fabric where high-value crops (walnuts, plums, figs, pomegranate, black and white mulberry, grapes) and vegetables are grown. The second is featured by an agricultural layout of open fields with regular geometric shapes situated along the Vjosa Valley. Here the soil and environmental



Figure I-3.15  
The agricultural  
landscape of the  
Vjosa Valley near  
Kosinë.



Figure 1-3.16  
A flock of sheep  
in the environs of  
Leusë.

conditions have favoured the production of fodder and cereals such as wheat, hulled wheat, corn, rye and barley (Fig. I-3.15).

In Leusë, the geo-pedologic conditions and the steep slopes have affected agricultural activities, which are limited to scarce arable surfaces.

The quality of the landscape of Përmet is also linked to the practice of high-altitude transhumance shepherdry, to which the numerous alpine pastures bear witness (Fig. I-3.16). In the region of Gjirokaštër the main places where this periodical migration takes place are the range of Trebeshinë-Dhëmbel-Nemërçkë (in the summer) and the mountains of Sarandë (in the winter), which connect directly with the Pindus mountain range in Greece (Sorotou, 2014). As in other rural Albanian areas, the migration of the younger and active sectors of the population resulted finally in a decline of transhumance. This ancient shepherdry practice is, however, an important factor in the history of the region and a tradition that contributed to the formation of its agro-sylvo-pastoral landscape. As a result, it should be rediscovered and enhanced also with tourism-oriented purposes. Of the three villages studied, transhumance is still practiced only in Leusë.

#### The trail network

In the landscape system, the historical routes such as trails, mule tracks or sheep-tracks play a key role (Fig. I-3.17). In the Gjirokaštër Region this network of walkways has historically determined the development between communities and places and has recently become an attractive factor for promoting tourism. According to CESVI (2017-2018), in the vast area of Përmet, every year there is an increase in demand for tourism and hiking. Unfortunately, however, this valuable heritage is not reaching its full potential.

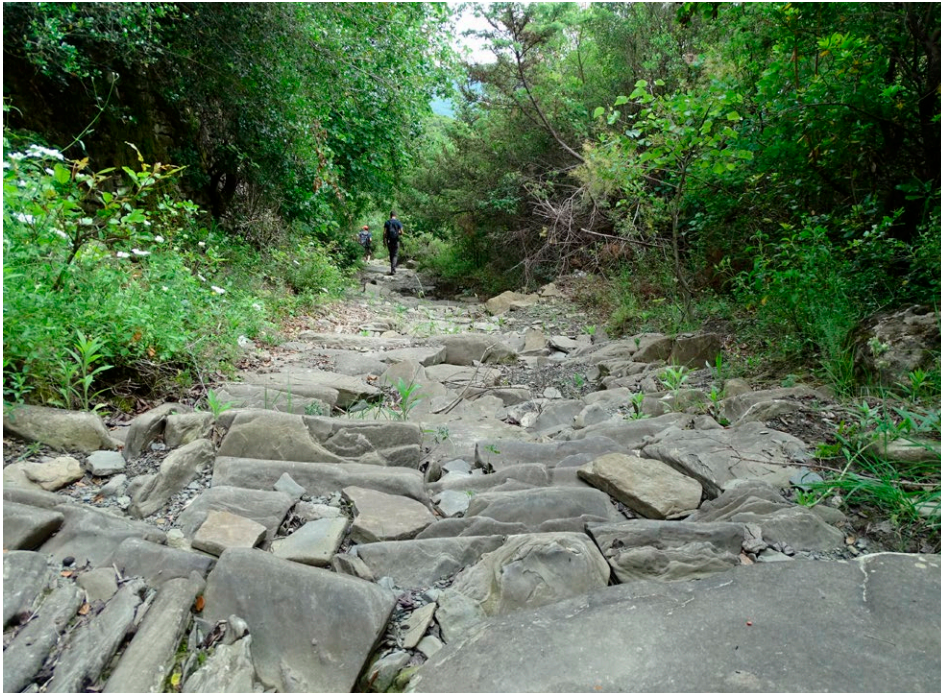


Figure 1-3.17  
A detail of the path connecting the village of Bënjë with the Katiu Bridge.

In the region, the issue of the trail network is sporadically addressed by associations operating in the area or by ministerial entities that, however, mostly limit their activities to the promotion of hiking trails.

Due to a lack of a single entity responsible for the trail network management, the actions on an operative, administrative, organisational, and normative level are uncoordinated. In order to enhance the trail network, it would be necessary: (1) to complete the survey of the paths<sup>9</sup>, (2) to collect them in a single database, and (3) to implement a platform for the management of geo-referenced contents. This also applies to network of transhumance trails, which has no official recognition and is not supported by historical references.

In order to promote the knowledge of the environmental, landscape and historical-cultural heritage of Përmet, a regional *Greenway System* can be an effective strategic tool for fostering forms of experiential, outdoor and eco-sustainable tourism that may also counteract the abandonment of the rural areas.

#### Critical issues and future prospects

To this day, the State considers as worth of safeguarding – through specific regulations – only “individual amenities”, groups of elements (monuments) and complexes, protected historical sites (for instance, the historical centre of Bënjë), as well as “landscape-environmental excellences” in which case the national legislation envisages the institution of nature parks. The safeguarding of the landscape is pursued in fact only in the territory of Bënjë, since it is located within the “Bredhi i Hotovës – Dangëlli” National Park, and only in reference to natural monuments<sup>10</sup>.

For this reason, it is necessary to activate a new nationwide process of landscape planning to produce adequate tools at a regional scale capable of regulating landscape in its entirety and of contextually recognizing its intrinsic value. This process is not self-evident since, both at the institutional and community levels, the degree of sensitivity toward landscape themes and values is extremely low and a scarce awareness and recognition of its true cultural value prevails.

This fact, further confirmed by field trips and interviews, also results in the absence of substantive projects concerning the landscape enhancement. It is therefore necessary to build a culture of the landscape based on actions that put in place new instruments and projects, capable of initiating social interaction mechanisms (see Morisi *et al.*, 2018) and synergic educational and awareness processes among councilors, inhabitants and professionals.

<sup>9</sup> A similar initiative has been promoted by ministerial entities, which have partially recorded hiking trails (only some of which have been surveyed) in the National Map of Hiking Trails, published in the form of WebGIS. (See: <<http://tourism.albinfo.al/>>). The map includes biking and hiking trails along the valley of the Vjosa and the Lemnica Rivers, and a hiking trail near the Lengarica River.

<sup>10</sup> In 2018 the Albanian government approved Act 27/2018 “Concerning cultural heritage and museums” which in its Fourth Section regulates “The cultural landscape heritage”, understood as “part of the territory which has historical, cultural, natural, morphological and aesthetic interest and whose features were modelled by the action of natural and/or human factors, as well as by their interaction” (art. 5). The Act provides for, among other things, the institution of the National Landscape Plan (art. 245). To this day, however, the procedure for its drafting has not begun.



## Intervention strategies

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### S1 Education and Training Strategies

#### A.1 Training of new professional figures and creation of competencies at the institutional level aimed at regional landscape planning

The aim of the Action is to train professionals – operating both within and outside of the public administration at the municipal level – capable of analysing and understanding the landscape in inter-disciplinary terms, as well as of drafting and implementing planning tools (urban and landscape planning).

This Action requires two types of measures:

- Organisation of refresher courses for public administration personnel concerning the safeguarding and regulation of the landscape and the respective responsibilities of the entities involved;
- Institution of university degree or postgraduate masters aimed at providing and building general and specific knowledge, as well as theoretical and professional competencies concerning the issue of the safeguarding and enhancement of the landscape.

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#### A.2 Promoting educational projects concerning the landscape and the environment

This Action is aimed at promoting educational projects (lessons, seminars, workshops) on the landscape and environment issues through special training programmes for teachers and students of the primary school in Kosinë and of the schools in Përmet. The Action should also provide information campaigns aimed at increasing the awareness of the local community towards environmental and landscape values<sup>(a)</sup>.

This Action, potentially replicable in all the schools of the Gjirokastër Region, needs a strong support from institutions and universities, as well as the collaboration of local guides and of the NGOs present in the area, which together should:

- Provide support to teachers in the design of the activities, supplying them with materials for landscape investigation and interpretation, and helping them to organise initiatives that personally involve the students;
- Promote practices aimed at the enhancement and safeguarding of the landscape/environmental heritage of the region;
- Foster a sense of belonging vis-à-vis the historical and cultural values of the local landscape.

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### S2 Planning Strategies

#### A.3 Drafting of the Landscape Plan for the Gjirokastër Region

This Action proposes the drafting of the *Landscape Plan* for the Gjirokastër Region, understood as the main governance tool, which combines the socio-economic development model of the Region with the need to safeguard the landscape and identity related resources of the area.

The Landscape Plan should be conceived as an “implementing planning tool” of the National Landscape Plan (L. 27/2018, art. 245) in interaction with other land-use planning tools, at different scales and in various sectors. It must not only be the result of an administrative, political and institutional process, but also a product, enhanced by scientific work, which generates knowledge through analysis, field observation and social interaction.

For the purposes of drafting the Plan it is also necessary to strengthen/update/adapt the information technology resources for landscape planning and to create a regional geographic information system that manages and implements the basic geographic information (cartography), which is currently lacking. For this end, the infrastructure of geographical data, managed by the Gjirokastër Region, should communicate and coordinate with the National Authority for Geographic Information (ASIG).

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### S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

#### A.4 Drafting of the Landscape Atlas for Përmet

The Action aims at producing a *Landscape Atlas* as a contribution to the knowledge of the landscape that highlights its features, form and history, as well as the use and the state of places.

The interpretation of the landscape for the purposes of the Atlas can follow the best-known analysis methodologies as applied to different international contexts<sup>(b)</sup>. The Atlas can provide support, in terms of knowledge, in the drafting of landscape planning tools and interact with the Community Maps referred to in Action A.5.

The digital version of the Atlas could be put on the website of the Municipality of Përmet, also with the purpose of offering the local population, visitors and scholars alike, the possibility of suggesting improvements or changes.

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#### A.5 Drafting of the Community Map of the villages of Përmet

A *Community Map*<sup>(e)</sup> is a participatory tool aimed at the self-knowledge and self-representation of the inhabitants in their inhabited space. It is a symbolic representation of a place through weak formalisation techniques (drawing, photography, collage, narrative, other graphic or cartographic materials, etc.). It originates from the active mobilisation of groups of inhabitants, especially the elderly, artists, local historians and students. The participatory process can be structured in various phases (interviews, public meetings, workshops, public debates etc.) and managed by specifically trained facilitators supported by NGOs, the local administration, universities and research centres.

The aim is to acquire the cultural, environmental, landscape and productive heritage values recognised by the inhabitants of the villages, recording identity-related values which are disappearing (due to endogenous and exogenous causes) and thus provide a fundamental contribution to scientific studies as well.

*Community Maps* could become support tools regarding the knowledge frameworks of the General Town Plan of Përmet (see Bashkia Përmet, 2020), defining the “structural invariants” (now absent) and the strategic forecasts. The maps could initiate a new phase of governance based on the ‘social construction’ of the Plan.

Some of their contents could be used as narrative elements in the descriptions of places, placed on information panels in the most significant spots in the villages.

In the case of Përmet, one could begin with the production of the *Community maps* for Bënjë, Kosinë and Leusë as a ‘pilot experience’ to then replicate in other villages of the Municipality.

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#### A.6 Recognition of transhumance as the historical essence and intangible heritage of the Gjirokaštër Region

The Action aims to initiate an inter-disciplinary research project that inquires into the phenomenon of transhumance from both a diachronic and synchronic perspective<sup>(d)</sup>. The goal is to offer a scientific contribution regarding a topic, which currently does not have enough historiographical sources.

The project, proposed for the sample area of Gjirokaštër (to be replicated perhaps at the national scale), should:

- Analyse the phenomenon of transhumance from a historical perspective, reconstructing a fundamental element in the rural history and landscape formation of the region;
  - Promote the case comparison and exchange of information with international networks and partners;
  - Offer opportunities for the enhancement of the trails and for the local communities to recognise the important role that transhumance has historically played in the region.
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#### A.7 Creating a Digital Hiking Trail Inventory

The Action aims to create a Digital Hiking Trail Inventory starting from the existing regional network of hiking and transhumance.

It is divided into two parts:

1. Survey the hiking, transhumance trails and all existing trail infrastructures (shelters and other types of facilities) and record them in a geo database using GIS technologies. The primary information source for the *Hiking Trail Inventory* is the National Hiking Map<sup>(e)</sup>; other information must be acquired on site.
2. Create a *Digital Hiking Trail Inventory*<sup>(f)</sup>.

This Inventory should provide the following information on each trail:

- Identification number or name of the trail;
  - Area of reference to which it belongs and local entities involved;
  - Map references;
  - Altitudes reached by the path;
  - Hiking times;
  - Classification of trails based on their level of difficulty;
  - Association/Entity in charge of management/maintenance (see A.15);
  - Points of interest (cultural and environmental, as well as springs, restaurants and refreshment areas, bird hides, etc.).
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## **S6 Enhancement Strategies**

### *A.8 Drafting a project for the environmental regeneration of the thermal area surrounding Katiu Bridge*

The environmental regeneration project of the thermal area must aim at improving the landscape quality of the place and increasing the services in support of the thermal activities.

Specific works (in accordance with the guidelines of the Management Plan for the “Bredhi i Hotovës – Dangëlli” National Park) should concern:

#### **IMPROVING VEHICULAR ACCESS TO THE THERMAL AREA**

The current access to the thermal area consists of a road that is partly asphalted and partly unpaved. For safety reasons it is necessary to repair any uneven sections of the dirt road.

#### **CONSTRUCTION OF A PARKING AREA**

The parking area should be located in an unobtrusive spot not far from the bridge in order to avoid discomfort for people with mobility difficulties. The site should be predominantly flat and adequately shaded and shielded through the planting of autochthonous plants and shrubs.

In addition to a parking area it is necessary to provide some car spaces for the vehicles of disabled visitors, personnel in charge of the management and control of the thermal area as well as fire and rescue personnel.

#### **REPAIR OF PEDESTRIAN PATHS**

The sections which are more uneven and difficult to travel need to be improved using, when possible, natural materials (such as wooden slats, stone slabs, etc.). The construction of paths equipped with safety and support systems (such as handrails or upstands at open edges of a path) has the purpose of making the area more accessible and ensuring greater safety for all visitors.

#### **CREATION OF PICNIC AREAS**

Due to the great number of visitors to the thermal area in spring and summer, it is advisable to provide for rest areas with tables, seats, rubbish bins, etc., adequately shaded for visitors and hikers who use the spot as a starting point for their hikes in the surrounding mountains.

#### **CREATION OF A LOCAL PRODUCTS MARKETPLACE.**

Along the approach path to the bridge, it might be useful to provide for small sales areas, where farmers, shepherds or simple inhabitants of the area could sell local products to tourists to improve incomes.

#### **CONSTRUCTION OF AN EQUIPPED CAMPGROUND**

A small campground equipped with services such as a refreshment area, changing room, showers and toilets at an adequate distance from the bridge should be provided for. The structures should be reversible and built with materials conforming to environmental sustainability criteria. The refreshment area could be easily used in order to offer day tourists the possibility to have a meal in a comfortable and well-equipped environment. The campground, in addition to providing a service to tourists, would also create job opportunities for the inhabitants of the area.

#### **MAKE THE ACCESSIBILITY TO THE THERMAL BATHS SAFE**

Katiu Bridge is lacking a parapet. To prevent falls but also to ensure greater comfort conditions for those suffering from vertigo, a protection device at the sides of the roadway would be necessary. It must integrate harmoniously with the bridge, but at the same time must be distinguishable from the existing structure. Moreover, it should be built taking into account the principles of minimum visual impact and reversibility.

Should this solution be considered too invasive, the possibility of a floating gangway may be envisaged. It should be used only during the months of the highest affluence of tourists in the thermal area (from May to October), removed during the winter months (in order to prevent damage caused by the overflow of the river) and adequately stored in a designated place. It is therefore necessary to build it with elements easy to assemble and store.

#### **IMPROVEMENT WORK ON THE THERMAL BATHS**

The baths do not currently present the minimum necessary safety features, such as, for example, steps for entering and exiting, handrails, anti-slip strips and support elements. With a targeted design, the necessary adaptations could be made without excessively altering the current appearance and layout. Furthermore, the idea of constructing stone seats near the baths could be considered, so as to offer support and greater comfort to users. Environmentally friendly solutions to expand the area of the thermal baths during the summer would be desirable.

**DRAFTING A COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEM**

Provide the thermal area with an adequate information and communication system that offers information to visitors concerning the main natural and historical features of the area and places of landscape interest, including signage for hiking trails and trail maps with all the necessary information for safely exploring the region.

Informative contents could also be provided through QR codes.

**SET-UP OF LIGHTING INSTALLATION IN THE AREA**

Establish an adequate lighting system in the area (currently entirely lacking) to allow the use of the thermal baths in safety even during the night. The lighting installation should be limited to strategic places (pathways, points of greater danger, thermal baths, etc.) and must adopt solutions that ensure minimum environmental impact and preserve the suggestive atmosphere of the place.

Since the thermal area is not equipped with electricity, we propose a system which combines photovoltaic panels and LED lamps.

**WASTE WATER DISPOSAL**

The disposal of secondary waste water produced in the area could take place through phytodepuration, a natural purification process that uses bacteria and plants present in the soil and in the water as active biological filters capable of reducing the pollutants present in the waste water.

All the listed measures should be based upon landscape continuity criteria in terms of form, colour, materials, building techniques, volumetric ratio. It is specifically recommended not to modify the existing vegetation features (through the felling of trees and the elimination of riparian formations), but rather to enhance them by adding new autochthonous plant species. It is also necessary to maintain the skyline and the same perceptive, scenic and panoramic appearance of the place, as well as the existing visual relationships.

For a project based on the measures envisaged in this Action, see Figs. I-3.18 and I-3.19.

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**A.9 Restoration of the Mulliri i Drithit for the stone-grinding of flours produced with local grains and the establishment of a short supply chain**

**A.9.1 Restoration of the Mulliri i Drithit and landscape redevelopment of the context**

The Action aims to initiate the reconstruction of *Mulliri i Dridhit* (literally “cereal mill”), returning it to the original function of stone-grinding cereals, thus fostering the recovery of the tradition of producing ancient flours and cereals, which has been lost.

For this purpose, it would be necessary to accurately reconstruct the entire building, which includes the grinding area and the *dërstilë* room, re-build the machinery and finally repair the hydraulic system in order for the grinding system to be fully functional.

Prior to the restoration work it is necessary to carry out a knowledge process based on two phases:

- Architectural survey of the mill (possibly through digital technologies such as laser scanner and photogrammetry) to fully understand and assess the current state of the structure;
- Historical analysis of the building to obtain in-depth knowledge of its history, the events surrounding it, its role in the community, as well as the machinery and grinding processes.

Restoration works should be carried out simultaneously with the measures aimed at the improvement of the landscape quality of the place and at the redevelopment of the surrounding areas, in other words:

- Repair the vehicular access route required for productive purposes;
- Build a small car park for the staff in an unobtrusive location;
- Repair the pedestrian pathway (including signage and lighting) as a section of the existing hiking trails;
- Rehabilitate the open spaces, recovering their original functional-landscape appearance and their relationship to the river;
- Provide an adequate information and communication system that explains the history of the mill, so as to disseminate knowledge about the place and its historical value;
- Build spaces devoted to community-related events (e.g. *Harvest Feast in Bënjë*, A7, chap. I.2) and to the promotion of tourism in the area so as to preserve the original function of the mill as a place of social interaction. Works for equipping the outdoor area should include light and low-impact removable structures, and provide for the use of natural materials that are compatible with the fluvial ecosystem processed by local craftsmen (see chap. I.2).

In order to carry out a proper landscape redevelopment, the following should be considered: (1) undertake a preliminary analysis of the context, (2) determine the parameters for the interpretation of landscape qualities and criticalities, and (3) base the works on landscape continuity criteria regarding the context of the Lengarica River.

It is specifically recommended not to modify the existing vegetal structure (through the felling of trees and the elimination of riparian formations), but rather to enhance it with the addition of new autochthonous plant species.

#### **A.9.2 Creation of a short supply chain for cereals to be ground in the *Mulliri i Drithit*<sup>(8)</sup>**

Following the reconstruction of the mill and its return to original function of stone-grinding cereals, we propose the creation of a short supply chain, which begins with the cultivation of cereals and culminates in the retail sale of products. Prior to this it is necessary to carry out research aimed at surveying the varieties of local cereals and ancient grains used in the past. If the recovery of the original function were not possible due to the lack of waterflow of the Lengarica River, we suggest resorting to an alternative system to make it work.

Management of the mill and of the supply chain itself could be entrusted to a community cooperative (or to a social enterprise), with the purpose of favouring the involvement of farmers, inhabitants of the village, food merchants and local restaurant owners (see Mori & Sforzi, 2018). This type of management can generate synergy and cohesion, help organise the necessary figures and activities and respond to the various needs of reciprocity.

The *Mulliri i Drithit* can also be the centre of educational projects related to it involving local history, architecture, food science, milling and cereal grinding techniques, etc. Once it starts functioning, it would offer great teaching opportunities due to the simultaneous presence of hydraulic and mechanic phenomena and traditional food production activities. It is well suited to become an educational workshop.

#### **A.10 Promoting the cultural and recreational enhancement of the Lengarica Canyon: iron paths and caves**

The Action aims at establishing a sport climbing route, equipped with metal cables, stepladders and other anchors fixed to the rock walls, with a starting point in the area of the thermal baths of Bënjë and arriving to the opposite side of the canyon.

Along the canyon there is a vast system of karstic caves, some connected between them by tunnels (Saliu, 2011). The iron paths can also provide an opportunity to enhance caves such as that of Katiu and of Pëllumbave, spaces that could exhibit copies of the objects found during the archaeological expedition of 1978.

Due to the height of the rock walls, the landscape and the eco-systemic balance of the Lengarica River, the following preventive measures should be considered:

- Limit the impact of the works;
- Carry out a preventive analysis for assessing the geological risks related to undertaking the works;
- Undertake a technical analysis for choosing materials according to their chemical and physical features and to the properties of the rock walls;
- Determine a monitoring plan for the canyon.

#### **A.11 Enhancing the main panoramas over the Valley of the Lengarica and the scenic views of the villages**

This Action levers on the open-air viewpoints that offer scenic vistas from which to contemplate the rural landscape and the places of cultural interest. The most important of these are the views over the three villages, the area of the canyon and of the thermal baths of Bënjë.

#### **SCENIC VIEWPOINTS EQUIPPED WITH FACILITIES**

In the scenic spots of the villages of Bënjë and Leusë and along the paths, there are viewpoints that offer a vast variety of visual attractions (ridges, forests, peaks, mountain passes, river valleys etc.). These natural panoramas are the ideal places for creating equipped viewpoints. For the completion of the necessary works (rest areas, railings, paving, etc.), we suggest the use of local materials and to entrust local craftsmen with their construction. Providing the viewpoints with informative panels including QR codes describing the flora and fauna, history and cultural heritage of the area is also recommended. The creation of equipped scenic viewpoints can be proposed also in Kosinë, both for the area of the Church of the Dormition of Mary that looks over the valley of the Vjosa River and the 'cistern hill', to the west of the new quarter of the village (see chap. I.4).

Two religious buildings used to stand on the top of the 'cistern hill', a small church and a *teqe*, which were demolished during the Communist period and replaced with bunkers. The site is still important to the community of Kosinë, as can be seen by the presence of a cross, a clear symbol of its past religious function.

We propose for its enhancement the following works:

- Site-specific art installations (sculptures or art installations, both permanent and temporary) to celebrate the memory of the place;

- Reconversion of the bunkers into ‘places of memory’. In this case, the suggestion is to demolish the above-ground section of the bunkers and to reconstruct the outline of the destroyed religious buildings, leaving them as symbolic traces of a past that is still alive in the memory of the inhabitants. The subterranean part of the bunkers, instead, could be used as an exhibition centre for narrating the history of the place through written documents, photographs and testimonials of the inhabitants<sup>(h)</sup>.

#### THE THERMAL BATHS AND THE CANYON OF THE LENGARICA RIVER

Build a scenic terrace in a place with a remarkable view that enhances the scenery of the springs and the Katiu Bridge. Prior to choosing the location for the terrace, it is advisable to carry out a detailed analysis of the viewpoints, the morphological features of the terrain and the feasibility of building or repairing a pedestrian pathway that makes it easily accessible from the thermal baths.

#### A.12 Restoration of the Bënjë Bridge

See A.1-A3, sect. I.5.1.

#### A.13 Enhancing the trail network

This Action aims to promote the natural, landscape and cultural heritage and fosters eco-compatible forms of tourism in the Gjirokastër Region through the hiking and transhumance trails.

It requires a process of recognition and enhancement including the following specific elements:

- Usability improvement of trails through works of adjustment with a low environmental impact;
- Visibility improvement of trails with appropriate signage and panels;
- Restoration of existing constructions along the trail (retaining and boundary walls, fountains, bridges, mountain huts, shelters and so on);
- Foster tourism-related usability through the construction of equipped rest areas, refreshment areas, infrastructures for equestrian tourism and hiking;
- Tourist promotion of the trails through the organization of events connected to the food heritage of the pastoral tradition (see A.7, chap. I.1).

In order to provide guidance for the implementation of this Action it may be useful to develop a handbook including the guidelines for the design, construction and maintenance of the trails, as well as of any relative collateral works<sup>(i)</sup>.

#### A.14 Creating a Greenway System<sup>(j)</sup>

This Action is aimed at creating a *Greenway System*, understood as an environmental, tourism-recreational and educational tool. It is designed to achieve the following purposes: (1) enhancing the extraordinary landscape variety of the area of Përmet, (2) fostering the knowledge of nature and respect for the environment, and (3) promoting active, responsible and sustainable forms of tourism.

In order to implement the Greenway System it is fundamental to invest in soft mobility through effective projects that enhance the entire network of paths, trails, gravel or dirt roads and water trails (such as the Vjosa, Lemnica and Lengarica Rivers) with various types of mobility (on foot, by boat, using pack animals, or other non-motorised forms of transport).

Following the model of international experiences, we suggest to activate thematic tourist routes, developed as projects for enhancing the usage, connectivity and permeability of the landscape, such as, for example:

- *The Bio-Bicycle Trails* project, with cycling paths added to the existing ones, extending also inside the Bredhi i Hotovës National Park<sup>(k)</sup>;
- *The Ancient Transhumance Trails* project, aimed at recovering the ancient pastoral trails and in particular the Përmet-Sarandë trail, as well as those of the Trebeshinë-Nëmërckë-Dhëmbel mountain range. This project can take advantage of the research proposed in Actions A.6 and A.7 and foster numerous events related to shepherding and the sampling of typical products (see A.7, chap. I.1)<sup>(l)</sup>;
- *The Paths of Culture and Religion* project (to be integrated with the “Rrugët e Besimit” one – The Routes of Faith – promoted by the National Institute of Cultural Heritage), with routes that lead to the most valuable cultural sites in the area;
- *The Trails of Biodiversity* project, which uses the existing trails in order to introduce visitors to knowledge and interest in the field of botany, to the natural habitats and high biodiversity of the Vjosa, Lemnica and Lengarica Rivers and of the Bredhi i Hotovës National Park;
- *The Trails of Water* project, aimed at the enhancement of Vjosa, Lemnica and Lengarica Rivers and of the hydraulic infrastructures that still exist<sup>(m)</sup>.

Përmet is an ideal place for testing this approach. The first elements for setting the foundations of a Greenway System could be: (1) the Lengarica Blueway together with the thermal area (A.8, A10), (2) the Lëuse-Përmet road (see A.2, sect. I.4.3), (3) the Lengarica-Bënjë trail (see A.9, sect. I.4.1), and (4) the horse trail that starts in Kosinë (see A.11, sect. I.4.2). Prior to carrying out this Action, it is necessary to undertake a territorial-landscape analysis of the whole municipal context and to establish strong cohesion and cooperation among the various local development stakeholders.

## S7 Management Strategies

### A.15 Entrusting the management of the hiking network of Përmet to a single entity

The Albanian national context lacks an institutional or associative structure devoted to the management of hiking trails. This obviously also applies to mountainous areas where operate the Albanian Federation for Mountain-Climbing and Mountain Tourism (Federata Shqiptare e Alpinizmit dhe Turizmit Malor), as well as various local associations.

In the specific case of Përmet there is the Mountain-Climbing and Tourism Association of Përmet (Shoqata e Alpinizmit dhe e Turizmit Malor Përmet), which could be entrusted with the promotion and maintenance of the hiking network of the Municipality, following the model of the Club Alpino Italiano (CAI).

### Notes

- a) See “Il paesaggio dell’Alpe” educational project, promoted by the Fondo Ambiente Italiano (FAI) (<<http://www.fondoambiente.it/il-fai/scuola/progetti-fai-scuola/educazione-ambientale/>>).
- b) Regarding the method for drafting a Landscape Atlas see Ghersi & Mazzino (2003). See also the Piano di Indirizzo Territoriale con valenza di Piano Paesaggistico della Regione Toscana (<<https://www.paesaggiotoscana.it/piano-paesaggistico/>>).
- c) Regarding the method for drafting Community Maps, refer to the experiences of the Parish Map in Great Britain. Refer, as well, to “territorial statute” of the Municipality of Montespertoli (Magnaghi, 2010) and to the experimental projects undertaken as part of the Progetto Integrato al Piano Paesaggistico della Regione Puglia. See <[http://www.paesaggio.regione.puglia.it/PPTR\\_2015/4\\_Lo%20scenario%20strategico/4.3\\_progetti%20integrati%20di%20paesaggio%20sperimentali.pdf](http://www.paesaggio.regione.puglia.it/PPTR_2015/4_Lo%20scenario%20strategico/4.3_progetti%20integrati%20di%20paesaggio%20sperimentali.pdf)>.
- d) See “Transumanza e Territorio in Toscana (TRATTO): percorsi e pascoli dalla Protostoria all’Età Contemporanea” research project (Pizziolo *et al.*, 2017).
- e) See <<http://tourism.albinfo.al/>>.
- f) See: (1) “Linee guida per la formazione della Carta inventario dei percorsi escursionistici della Regione Liguria” (<[http://www.ambienteinliguria.it/eco3/DTS\\_GENERALE/20110113/dgr1212\\_2010\\_linee\\_guida.pdf](http://www.ambienteinliguria.it/eco3/DTS_GENERALE/20110113/dgr1212_2010_linee_guida.pdf)>), (2) “La valorizzazione del patrimonio escursionistico regionale” (<[https://www.regione.piemonte.it/web/sites/default/files/media/documenti/2019-02/la\\_valorizzazione\\_del\\_patrimonio\\_escursionistico\\_regionale\\_ires.pdf](https://www.regione.piemonte.it/web/sites/default/files/media/documenti/2019-02/la_valorizzazione_del_patrimonio_escursionistico_regionale_ires.pdf)>), and (3) Act no. 5 of 2017 of the Lombardy Regional Government (“Rete escursionistica della Lombardia”).
- g) Italian successful experiences to draw inspiration from could be the following: “Valsusa Mill” in the Municipality of Bruzolo (province of Turin) (see <<https://www.italiachecambia.org/2019/11/recupero-mulino-valsusa-rilancia-agricoltura-intera-valle/>>), as well as “Pransani Mill” in Sogliano al Rubicone (a Municipality located between Forlì and Cesena) (see <<https://www.italiachecambia.org/2017/05/io-faccio-cosi-168-mulino-recuperato-produce-farine-grani-antichi/>>).
- h) The suggestion is inspired by the project known as “Ghost Structures”, undertaken by Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown at Franklin Court in Philadelphia (1976). See: <<https://www.associationforpublicart.org/artwork/ghost-structures/>>. The possibility of carrying out works on the bunkers requires the prior agreement of the Ministry of Defense – which currently holds possession of these structures.
- i) See Manuale per la realizzazione dei sentieri (Basilicata Regional Government and Club Alpino Italiano) (<[https://www.regione.basilicata.it/giunta/files/docs/DOCUMENT\\_FILE\\_2979249.pdf](https://www.regione.basilicata.it/giunta/files/docs/DOCUMENT_FILE_2979249.pdf)>).
- j) The project of the *greenway* – although in this case it concerns mainly the Municipality of Përmet – should be conceived as a project at the regional scale.
- k) A similar initiative was promoted by MiBACT and MIT through the project “Ciclovie” (see <<https://www.mit.gov.it/node/5383>>). See also the “Eurovelo” project, promoted by the *European Cyclist Federation* (<<https://ecf.com/>>).
- l) See <<http://www.leviedetratturi.com/progetto/>> and <<http://www.tratturomagno.it/tracturo3000>>.
- m) See <<https://www.bluwaysireland.org>> and other many initiatives undertaken with the collaboration of the *European Greenways Association* (<<https://www.aevv-egwa.org/#>>).

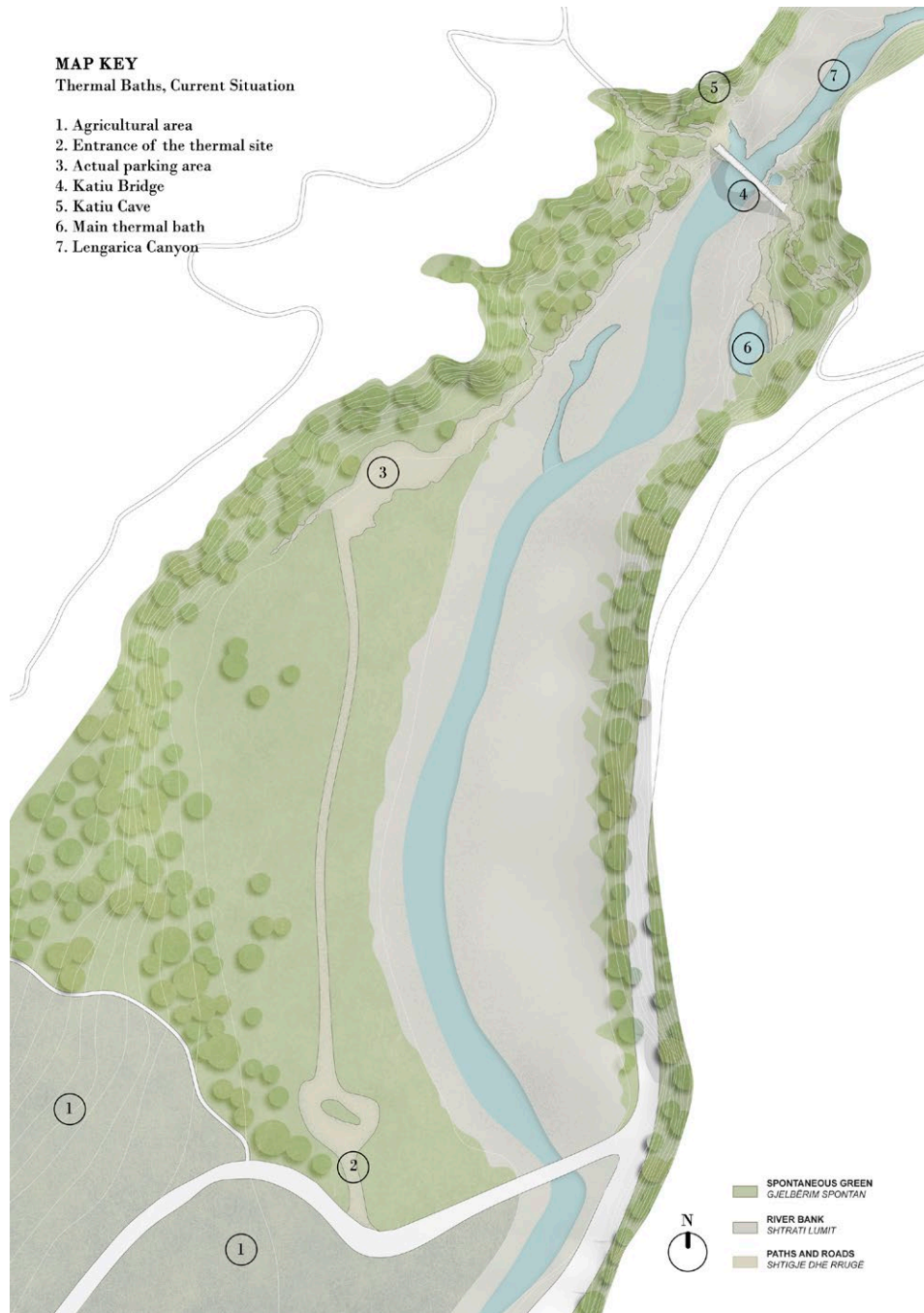


Figure I-3.18 – Redevelopment project of the thermal area in Bënjë. *Above:* Plan of the current situation. *Opposite page:* Masterplan of the project proposal. The project – designed by Dritan Kapo – aims to give new life to a multifunctional space by creating: new parking and picnic areas; a new scenic square; a wooden gangway across the river; new thermal pools; a phytoduration plant for treating the sewage; administrative, service and commercial facilities; sanitary facilities.



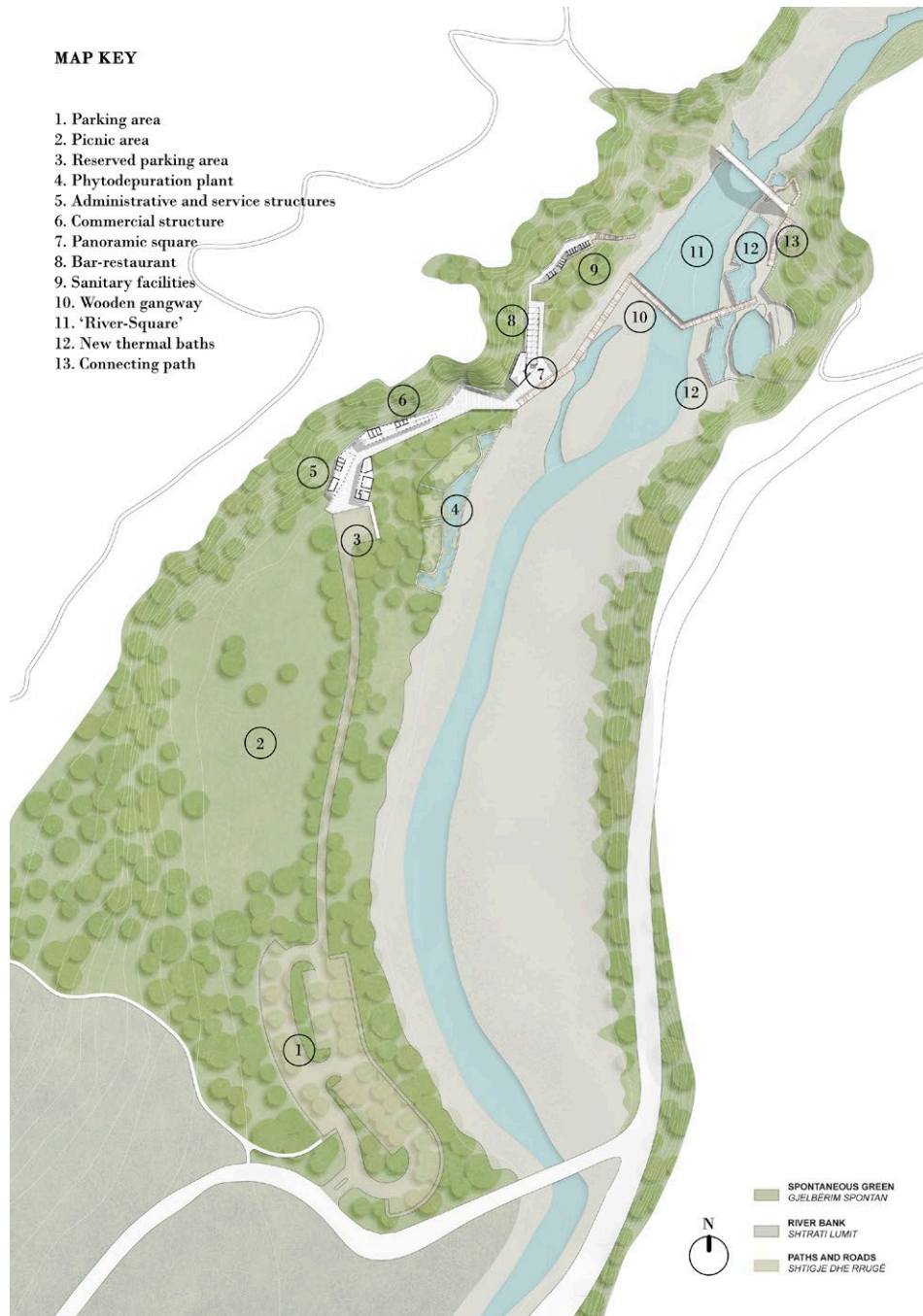




Figure 1-3.19 – Above, left: Plan of the project proposal for the thermal area in Bënjë. Above, right and Below: Renderings of the wooden gangway across the Lengarica River. A dry stone-wall (with a maximum height of 60 cm) allows the creation of a small dam which slows down the water flow, slightly raising the river level and, at the same time, creating an evocative reflection of the bridge on the water surface. The water that surpasses the stone barrier stimulates the senses and the emotional immersion in nature, through the sounds produced by the water and the refreshing droplets on the skin.

## Settlements and buildings

### SECTION I.4.1 – BËNJË

#### Historical overview

Traces of cave dwellings provide evidence of human presence in the area of Bënjë since the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. (Kola, 2002; Saliu, 2011). According to Frashëri (1969), during the last few centuries before the Christian era the area was inhabited by the Illyrian tribe of the Parauej, which had settled along the banks of the River Vjosa and the adjacent territories (Dangëlli, Shqeri, Nemërçkë and Dhëmbel). An Ottoman fiscal registry (*defter*) dating back to the year 1431 mentions a hamlet with the name of “Bano” or “Bana” in the area where the village is now located (Buharaja, 2018). It is probably the ruined settlement, which lies on the hillock known as “Bregorja e Bërçeve” (Kola, 2002). The reasons that led the inhabitants to abandon the original location of Bënjë<sup>1</sup> are unknown, and there is no certain information concerning the date of foundation of the current village. The only available ‘documentation’ consists of the inscriptions on the cornerstones and entrances of dwellings, all dated between 1860 and 1910.

During this span of time, the South of Albania underwent substantial socio-economic changes, as well as wars and local conflicts (Mile, 1984). In this scenario the transformation of peasant houses into more complex configurations, similar to city dwellings, is frequent. Two-three storey fortified dwellings were built, sometimes giving rise to authentic fortified villages. (Muka, Riza & Thomo, 2004). The fortified

<sup>1</sup> According to Kola (2002) the inhabitants abandoned the original settlement due to the lack of water and the unfavourable characteristics of farmland.

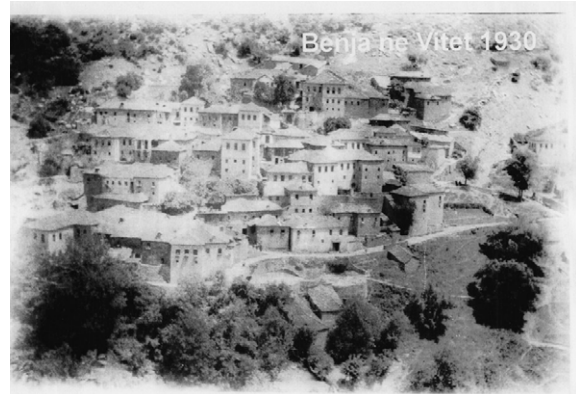


Figure I-4.1.1 houses of Bënjë, with aesthetic and typological features inspired on the stately homes of Gjirokaštër, belong to this phenomenon (Fig. I-4.1.1).

A traditional fortified dwelling in its landscape background.

The destiny of Bënjë was permanently marked by World War II, when a large section of the village was destroyed. The amount of damage and the alteration of the original urban fabric can be seen by comparing the current state with a historical photograph from the Thirties (Fig. I-4.1.2).

Figure I-4.1.2  
Above: The village of Bënjë in the 1930s. [Courtesy: CESVI, Albania].  
Below: Bënjë today. A large part of the settlement was destroyed during World War II.

With the fall of the Communist regime, the village, like many others in Albania, suffered an inexorable process of depopulation. It is currently inhabited by 80 people, most of whom are elderly; there are only 4 children in the village, all of whom go to school in Përmet.

#### The residential area

Bënjë is a settlement located on a slope with especially valuable landscape and architectural features, due to which it was granted recognition in 2016 as a “historic centre”<sup>2</sup>.

The village is approximately 15 km from Përmet. The road (Rruga e Bënjës) is asphalted and in good condition until the turn that leads to the thermal area. From that point onward, it becomes a rather rugged dirt road with accessibility and safety issues, which worsen during the winter months. The bad condition of the road has a strong

<sup>2</sup> Decree of the Council of Ministers no. 776 of 02.11.2016



Figure I-4.1.3  
The Church of St. Mary, surrounded by ornamental cypress trees, is a landmark located in a scenic point in the proximity of the entrance to the village.

impact on the quality of life of the community, since it contributes to the isolation of the village.

There are other communication routes, such as mule tracks and trails. Among these, one of the most interesting is the trail that begins near the Church of St. Mary (Fig. I-4.1.3), runs along the River of Bënjë, crosses it thanks to a bridge from the Ottoman period (*Ura e Bënjës*) and reaches the thermal area. Unfortunately, some sections of the trail are currently uneven (see Fig. I-3.17).

Benjë's road network includes a main street (*Guri i Konomit*) which crosses the entire village, and four local streets that branch off from it and follow the morphology of the slope. The streets, which were originally paved with the use of the local stone (*kall-drëm*), are in a state of disrepair and are only walkable.

### The traditional dwellings

#### *Typological features*

Dwellings present L-shaped and rectangular layouts; in the past there were also two and three-storey dwellings with U and E-shaped layouts (Kola, 2002) (Figs. I-4.1.4 - I-4.1.6).

Dwellings are traditionally distributed around a small courtyard (*oborr*) enclosed by a wall; often groups of dwellings form a single building. The courtyard is accessed from the street through an entrance gate protected by a canopy. The courtyard serves both distributive and service functions, since it is used for carrying out domestic ac-



4 Dwelling Service annexes Courtyard

5

Figure I-4.1.4

The urban settlement pattern of Bënjë's historic centre. [Author: Dritan Kapo]

Figure I-4.1.5

Two dwelling typologies in the historic centre of Bënjë. Above, the Prifti house.

activities, but it also plays an aesthetic role by emphasising the entrance. In it are located the oven, toilets, chicken coop, beehives and agricultural annexes, an expression of the rural life of the village (Fig. I-4.1.7).

The ground floors of the dwellings originally included the food pantry, the harvest storeroom, the stables and troughs. With the passage of time, the function of these spaces changed: they have mostly been turned into habitable spaces, like the ones on the upper floors.

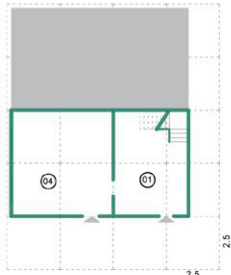
Houses usually have from three to ten rooms (in three-storey buildings). In the layout of the house, the main spaces were the room with the hearth (*shtëpia e zjarrit*) and the guest room (*oda e miqve*).

The *shtëpia e zjarrit* is the room that better represents the dimension of everyday life, since it is where food is prepared and eaten and where the family gathers, but it is also pregnant with symbolic values (Muka, 2007). The fire was always burning and its extinguishing was a sign of the coming of a period of bad fortune for the whole family. Occasionally this was the room where the head of the family slept.

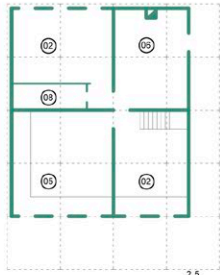
The *oda e miqve* was the reception room of the house.

It was exclusively for the use of men and for the main family rituals, such as wedding feasts and funerals (Muka, 2007). Important guests were received in this room, which was generally located on the uppermost floor and in a privileged position. The guests would also sleep there in case of prolonged stays. Great attention was given to the wooden ceilings, which in wealthier houses were abundantly decorated, as well as to the furniture, such as, for example, the *musëndra* (a typical cupboard) (Fig. I-4.1.8).

Original layout



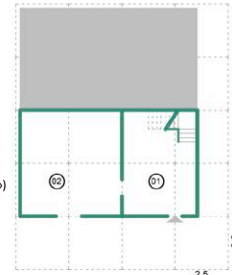
Semi-Basement Floor



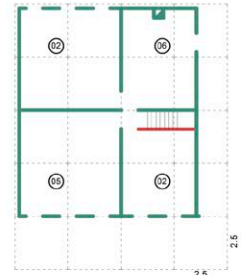
Ground Floor

- 01. entrance
- 02. bedroom
- 03. harvest storeroom
- 04. stables and troughs
- 05. guest room («koda e miqve»)
- 06. hearth room («shtëpia e zjarrit»)
- 07. Hallway and/or food storage room
- 08. storage closet

Transformed layout

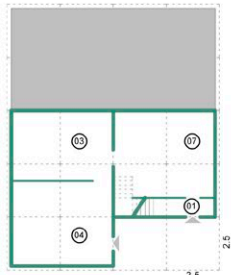


Semi-Basement Floor

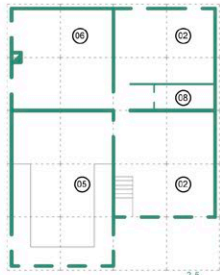


Ground Floor

Original layout



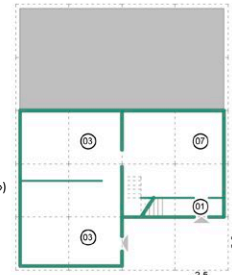
Semi-Basement Floor



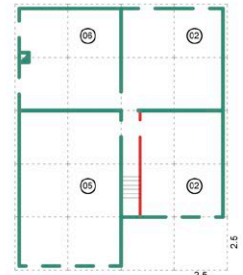
Ground Floor

- 01. entrance
- 02. bedroom
- 03. harvest storeroom
- 04. stables and troughs
- 05. guest room («koda e miqve»)
- 06. hearth room («shtëpia e zjarrit»)
- 07. Hallway and/or food storage room
- 08. storage closet

Transformed layout



Semi-Basement Floor



Ground Floor

6



7

Figure I-4.1.6 – Hypothesis on the original layout of the domestic space and transformations that occurred over time concerning two typologies of the historic centre of Bënjë. [Author: Dritan Kapo]

Figure I-4.1.7 – Beehives in a house courtyard of the village.



Figure I-4.1.8  
A guest room  
(*oda e miqve*) in  
an abandoned  
building of Bënjë.

Among the village dwellings whose original morpho-typological features are better preserved, it is worth mentioning the one belonging to the Prifti family (1868)<sup>3</sup> (see Fig. I-4.1.5 above).

#### *Building features and state of conservation*

The village preserves some of its original features.

The vertical load-bearing structure is a three-leaf stone masonry with a rubble core. The exterior face is made of coursed ashlar blocks bound with lime mortar. Inside the wall there are often longitudinal timber elements (repeated at regular intervals in height) probably joined together with small timber transversal connectors. The wall structures are on the whole of good quality, although there are some executive defects are found (for example, inaccurate toothing between walls). External openings have timber or stone lintels, or else lintels and relieving arches in stone, and their size generally increases on the upper levels of the building (Figs. I-4.1.9 and I-4.1.10).

Intermediate floors are in timber. They have transverse bracing elements included in the thickness of the beams. The flooring usually consists of boarding directly hammered onto the beams. Ground floors usually have the same structure as the intermediate floors.

There are often false ceilings made of plastered reeds or timber planks (Fig. I-4.1.11).

Partitions are made with a timber frame with planks nailed onto it or with woven reeds.

<sup>3</sup> This building was presented as a candidate for recognition as a category I Cultural Monument. To this day the request has not yet been accepted.



The roof is hipped. Its structure is often composed of trusses with rafters, tie beam and king post. The boarding is placed directly on the trusses and above it there is a covering made of dry-assembled stone slabs.

Enclosing and retaining walls are made with dry-assembled squared-off stone elements.

Overall, numerous constructions were found to be in bad conditions, and many are in a state of ruin. In general, there is severe damage to uninhabited buildings, which in many cases require the implementation of urgent safety measures in view of subsequent consolidation and restoration works. Many houses have collapsed roofs; water leaks have damaged and continue to inexorably damage the building. In some cases, there is rising damp from the ground and invasive shrub vegetation. Landslides and subsidence have brought about serious damage to the masonry, which is visible in most of the buildings in the village.

#### Public space

In the absence of real squares, the public life of the village takes place in the streets, open-air workplaces and at the Church of St. Mary, which dates back to the year 1873 (Kola, 2002). This religious building, which during the Communist regime served as a storehouse for grain and timber, was used not only for liturgical, but also for social purposes. Its portico (*hajati*), especially, was the place where the community met or gathered during secular ceremonies (Fig. I-4.1.12). The area in which it stands now in a state of neglect, includes a complex of open spaces, dirt roads and buildings, as well as the village school, which stopped functioning in 2017 due to the absence of students. Before the main entrance to the church, there is a small courtyard with a well and a gate, which serves as threshold to the exterior section (Fig. I-4.1.13).

In the past, the village streets were an important space for interaction; their margins offered sufficient space and opportunity for socialising. To the east of the settlement, at the crossroads, there is a clearing known as “Ndërgurë”, which was used by the men of the village as a meeting place (Kola, 2002).

Masonry benches (*sofat*) placed on both sides of the entrance to the courtyards of the houses marked the passage from the street to the dwelling space. The *sofat* – a distinctive element of vernacular architecture in Përmet (Adhami, 2001<sup>b</sup>) – is a place of tran-



Figure I-4.1.9  
Detail of a corner  
with wooden ring  
beam.



Figure I-4.1.10  
Detail of a  
composite solution  
for a window  
header.



Figure I-4.1.11  
A decorated  
wooden false  
ceiling in a guest  
room.



Figure I-4.1.12 – Interior view of the Church of St. Mary's portico.

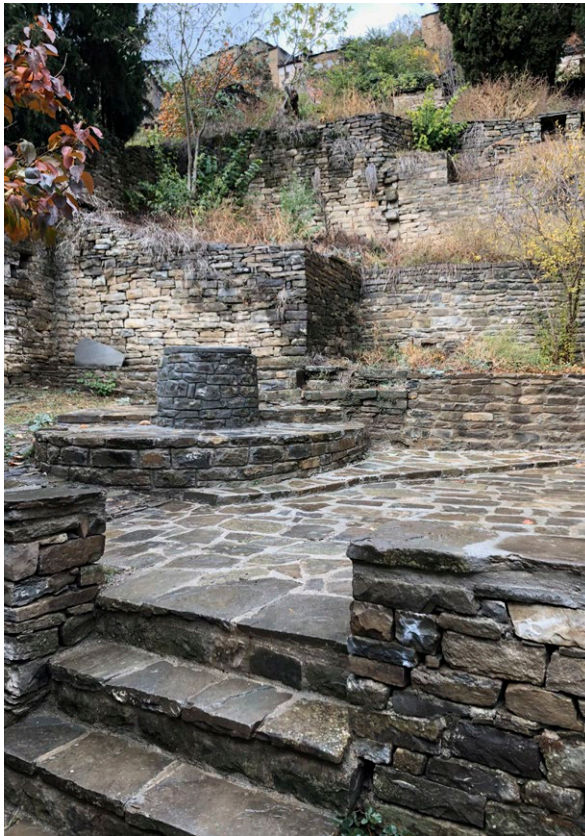


Figure I-4.1.13 – The small courtyard, with a well at its centre, before the entrance of the Church of St. Mary.

sition between the public and private dimensions of living, as well as a place for social interaction and domestic work (embroidery, food processing, etc.) (Fig. I-4.1.14).

Other places that were equally important in community life were the fountain “Gurrëza e fshatit” and the threshing floors (*lëm*).

The fountain, which is currently inaccessible and in a bad state of preservation, is located in a very evocative landscape, connoted by dry stone walls and oak trees. It was a place for work and social interaction for the women of the village, supplied water to the families and served as a trough for watering animals (a function that is still active today).

The threshing floors are valuable testimonies to the agricultural identity of the village and to the peasant culture for which they were sacred places where it was absolutely forbidden to build (Muka, 2007). They had a flat circular surface (with a diameter of approximately 6 m), perfectly leveled and paved with stone slabs. The end of the harvest was celebrated with a popular feast that took place on the threshing floor. According to Kola (2002), there were six threshing floors in Bënjë. It was possible to visit only one of these (which is in a state of neglect, yet with its main features still easily identifiable).

#### Infrastructure networks

Based on the testimonies of the villagers, both the water supply system (renovated in the past decade) and the electric power system (installed in the Seventies) provide for the needs of the inhabitants throughout the year. However, the safety conditions of the electrical system of single buildings and public lighting are critical. Lampposts are mounted on cement poles (which are also used for distributing electricity to the houses) and have a negative impact on the traditional architecture of the village.

An even greater problem is the absence of a depuration plant for waste water, which currently flows into the stream that runs next to the village<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> The treatment of waste waters is a priority explicitly mentioned in the Development Plan for this area (Plani Operacional i Zhvillimit Vendor, 2016), also included in the current General Town Plan.



Figure I-4.1.14  
A *sofat* as a transition place between the public and the private dimension of living.

#### Public services, shops and tourist facilities

In Bënjë there is no public service for the collection and treatment of rubbish. Waste is thrown by the inhabitants onto an open-air dump located near the fountain, and periodically burnt.

All basic public services are lacking, with the exception of health services, limited however to a medical doctor and a nurse who visit the village once a week and can be reached by phone in case of emergency.

Despite the presence of important tourist attractions (the Church of St. Mary, Katiu Bridge, the thermal baths, the canyon and the “Bredhi i Hotovës” National Park), there are no basic tourism services or restaurants in the village. The only possibility of accommodation is at the house of a former schoolteacher that has been transformed into a *bujtinë* (guest house). From information obtained on-field, it would seem that other inhabitants are willing to follow his steps.

The lack of services is further exacerbated by the absence of a public transportation system that could provide a connection with the thermal area and Përmet.

There is no mobile phone signal in most of the village.

### Critical issues and future prospects

The set of landscape and architectural qualities that characterise Bënjë make it a recognisable place, with a precise identity, still capable of conveying the message of its original *genius loci*.

Despite the weaknesses described, this village, which is protected by the State, presents a wealth of qualities and it is therefore realistic to start a virtuous circle that could actively involve the local community and contribute to its socio-economic and touristic development.

Bënjë is an interesting case to which to apply the formula of the “dispersed hospitality” (see Dall’Ara, 2010), a form of accommodation that can create socio-economic value and promote social cohesion, the historic built heritage, the well-known culture of hospitality, and the pastoral and rural life. Dispersed hospitality could become for Bënjë the fulcrum of a sustainable development project, beginning with the conversion of dwellings into accommodation facilities and gradually involving the various components of public space, services and infrastructure networks.

In order to consistently correlate the various actions it is necessary to develop and implement an urban development instrument such as the Urban Recovery Plan (Plani i detajuar për zonat e rëndësisë kombëtare të trashëgimisë), aimed at safeguarding and enhancing the landscape and architectural heritage of the village in full compliance with regulatory obligations.

## Intervention strategies

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### S1 Education and Training Strategies

#### A.1 Organising educational activities for promoting the culture of hospitality

This Action aims at teaching the inhabitants of the village principles, methods and tools of dispersed and cooperative hospitality (see A.12).

The educational activity can be carried out in public meetings and seminars, organized by public and private entities active in the field of tourism promotion in the Municipality of Përmet.

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### S2 Planning Strategies

#### A.2 Preparation of the Bënjë Urban Recovery Plan

The Action aims at carrying out the urban planning instrument (Plani i detajuar për zonat e rëndësishme kombëtare të trashëgimisë) introduced by article 44 of Law 27/2018 (“Për trashëgiminë kulturore dhe muzetë”) which concerns protected historic centres. The purpose is to recover the built heritage in the village and initiate processes of re-use and functional conversion in the sector of tourism and in accordance with the provisions of said law and of the “Regulation for the historic centre of Bënjë” (Decree no. 776 of 02.11.2016).

This Regulation divides the village into two homogeneous zones which are subject to specific prescriptive measures:

- The historic centre (*Qendra Historike e fshatit Bënjë*), subject to restoration and conservative renovation actions, as well as to the total ban on new constructions in both public and private open spaces (art. 5);
- The buffer zone of the historic centre (*Zona e Mbrojtur*) in which expansions and new constructions are admitted within the limitations established in article 6.

The Action has been drawn up on this zoning and is divided into the 3 phases described below.

#### PHASE I. SURVEY

Prior to the drafting of the *Recovery Plan*, we suggest carrying out an investigation aimed at the knowledge and cataloguing of the existing built heritage, structured in the following manner:

- Historic, urban and landscape overview of the village;
- Cadastral inquiry (to determine who are the owners of the buildings);
- Analysis of the typological, functional and constructive features of the historic heritage;
- Identification of additions and alterations to the original buildings;
- Analysis of the state of conservation of the buildings (analysis of failure and decay);
- Cataloguing of buildings and open spaces into homogeneous categories.

The survey may be carried out through on field inquiries (selected interviews and architectural survey of buildings and open spaces<sup>(4)</sup>) and the analysis of scientific literature, including sources available from public entities and institutions.

#### PHASE 2. DRAFTING THE PLAN

##### Zone: Historic centre

Regarding the historic centre, the *Recovery Plan* shall:

- Propose restoration and conservative renovation actions with the aim of renovating the uninhabited historic built heritage – that is in a state of disrepair – fully respecting its formal, typological and technological elements;
- Provide for new intended uses that are compatible with the original identity of the village’s centre;
- The buildings, once refurbished, could host public services (to be placed in publicly-owned buildings, such as the former village school) or accommodation facilities (see A.10, A.12) designed to strengthen the village tourism offer. The functional conversion projects should safeguard the identity features of traditional buildings and the spatial and functional composition of the dwellings. Special attention must be put on the renovation and/or conservation of typical spaces such as the *oda e miqve* and the *shtëpia e zjarrit*, as well as on decorations of false ceilings and traditional furniture (e.g. *musëndra*).

With regard to private open spaces, we suggest measures that aim at:

- Regenerating private vegetable gardens and orchards, terraced with dry enclosure walls, so as to safeguard a ‘relic’ of the minute agricultural landscape and an everyday practice that reflects the rural identity of the village. From this perspective, our suggestion is to eliminate all the added structures that have a negative impact on the urban landscape, and to maintain all autochthonous plants (typical cultivations such as walnuts, plums, figs, pomegranate, white and black mulberries, as well as grapevines and other agricultural products) that add value to the landscape and ascribe identity to private space;
- Safeguarding the *sofat* and the entrance solutions with aesthetic value so as to preserve the identity of the village;
- Restoring the courtyards of houses that bear typical features and quality of dwelling. Conservation of the spatial patterns, as well as courtyards’ uses and original features – pavings, staircases and decorative elements in split stones, autochthonous plants (roses, for example) and grapevines on pergolas (*hardhi me pjergulla*) – are recommended;
- Restoring the threshing floor (*lëm*) by using local materials and traditional building techniques. We recommend restoring the original paving, keeping the stone slabs and respecting the circular geometric design of the threshing floor.

*Zone: Buffer zone of the historic centre*

Regarding the buffer zone of the historic centre, the *Recovery Plan* must establish criteria in terms of dimensions and rules for the inclusion of new building works in respect of the following objectives:

- Privilege housing units with traditional plan layouts (“U”, “E” or “L” typologies) and maintain the building-courtyard-garden relationship with the aim of preserving the continuity with the existing settlement fabric;
- Providing indications concerning: materials, technologies and installations, exterior shell and types of roofs, facade solutions, doors and windows and other elements that decorate the facade, so that the new constructions can be inserted into the urban landscape in accordance with compatibility criteria, thus mitigating the visual impact and in respect of the morphological features of the place;
- Basing the projects on environmental sustainability principles, favouring when possible the use of eco-compatible materials and renewable energy.

Concerning green spaces, which in Bënjë comprise structural components of the traditional settlement fabric and determine the form of the urban landscape, it is necessary that:

- Courtyards respect the specific features of the existing ones (cobble pavings, stone stairs and decorations with autochthonous plants and grapevines on pergolas (*hardhi me pjergulla*);
- Vegetable gardens with natural and agricultural value ensure aesthetic and functional quality through the choice of autochthonous plant species and enclosure systems that are consistent with local traditions.

#### PHASE 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

The implementation of the *Recovery Plan* can be undertaken under public or private initiative in accordance with the provisions of Part II – Section II “Ruajtja e pasurisë” of Law 27/2018.

The recommendation is to structure the recovery actions – both those regarding the historic centre and those concerning the area surrounding it – into Minimum Intervention Units (MIU).

A system of reward-based incentives (linked to the quality of the actions and the safeguarding of traditional features) could be promoted in order to encourage the conversion of the existing heritage into tourism facilities by private operators, as well as measures for supporting private ventures<sup>(b)</sup>.

### S4 Living Quality Strategies

#### A.3 Ensuring adequate infrastructures

The upgrading of infrastructure networks (water and electricity supply, collection and treatment of wastewaters) in accordance with the provisions of the General Town Plan (Bashkia Përmet, 2020: 211, 216) is the necessary premise for any hypothesis of tourism development in the village.

Prior to designing these works, it is recommended that the following surveys be carried out:

- Inquiry as to the state of water and electricity supply and of the collection and treatment of waste waters;
- Assessment of the conditions of safety and efficiency of the systems and of domestic devices;
- Analysis and programming of works based on the provisions contained in the General Town Plan and in the sector plans;

- Feasibility study and preliminary cost analysis.

During the entire cognitive process (from the identification of needs to the evaluation of intermediate and final impacts), it is necessary to constantly interact with the inhabitants, through the mediation of the head of the village.

#### *A.4 Creating a service for rubbish collection and disposal*

Rubbish produced in the village is currently dumped in an open-air landfill and periodically burnt by the inhabitants.

In order to protect community health and the environment and in view of the tourism development of the village, it is necessary to supply rubbish bins and dumpsters for waste sorting and to establish an efficient rubbish collection and disposal service<sup>(2)</sup>.

This Action underlies the construction, by the Municipality of Përmet, of a plant for the collection and treatment of sorted waste and requires awareness by the inhabitants of the need to separate rubbish into different categories.

#### *A.5 Enhancing public lighting*

The Action aims to install an adequate lighting system for streets and collective open spaces, so as to offer the community and visitors better comfort and safety conditions. These lighting devices must have low energy consumption and be properly integrated into the architectural context of the village.

The manufacture of the lighting devices could be entrusted to local artists/artisans (see A.5, cap. I.2).

#### *A.6 Improving the condition of the road that connects the thermal area to the village*

The Action aims to carry out repair works on the road from the thermal area to the village, at the same time as the new public lighting system. Since the current road (mostly dirt) is wide enough for most of its length, it would be worthwhile to determine a few scenic viewpoints that allow visitors to stop and contemplate the beauty of the landscape.

#### *A.7 Constructing a parking area*

With the purpose of improving the tourism supply, it would be advisable to build a car park in an appropriate area in the proximity of the village.

In order to mitigate the environmental impact of this parking, the recommendation is to:

- Adapt the size of the parking area to the needs of the community and the expected flow of tourists;
- Use permeable paving in order to favour the ground absorption of rainwater;
- Plant autochthonous shrubs and trees between the parking spaces;
- Install a low energy consumption and high efficiency lighting system.

#### *A.8 Establishing a public transport line*

With the aim of enhancing both the quality of life of the inhabitants (many of whom are elderly and do not have a private transport vehicle) and the development of tourism, it is necessary to provide a public transportation service that connects Bënjë with the thermal area and continues on to Përmet. This service could vary depending on the season. For example, during the summer the service could have a pre-established schedule, whereas in the winter it could become an on-call transportation service, with varying itineraries and schedules, depending on the mobility requirements of both inhabitants and visitors.

#### *A.9 Repairing the path that links Bënjë to the thermal area*

Many tourists who visit the thermal area are not aware of the existence and beauty of Bënjë. This Action aims at repairing the hiking path (parts of which are currently impassable) that connects Bënjë to the thermal area and passes through a remarkable landscape.

The redevelopment work should include:

- Removing from the trail any obstacles and/or hazards (weeds, shrub and tree branches, rocks, etc.) that obstruct the path;
- Survey of the track, indicating any critical issues and potentialities;
- Repairing and securing the path with the use of adequate consolidation techniques in those places where the ground is occluded or uneven;
- Build the paving of the section of the path in *kalldrëm* that goes from the Church of St. Mary to the Bënjë Bridge;
- Production and placement of signage and information panels concerning the thermal baths, the history of the village and the bio-diversity of the area;

- Establishment of equipped rest areas and scenic viewpoints to be enhanced, where appropriate, by works of art made by local artists;
- Placement of adequate fall protection elements wherever necessary;
- Installation of a lighting system along the path.

The recovery work undertaken on this path can serve as a model to be applied to other trails, such as the one that leads to the *Mulliri i Drithit* (see chap. I.3, A.9).

It would be advisable to carry out this Action at the same time as the project on the thermal area described in chap. I.3, A.8.

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#### *A.10 Creating additional public and tourist services*

This Action proposes the construction of:

- A first-aid medical office. This medical service could be open daily in the summer, when there are more tourists and emigrants return to the village, and work as an on-call service during the other seasons;
- A tourist welcome centre, with an ATM included, offering visitors information on the landscape and architectural assets of the area and the recreational and sports activities available (for example guided tours, rafting on the Vjosa River, etc.).

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### **S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies**

#### *A.11 Safety and conservation works to make dangerous buildings safe*

Many of the village's buildings are in a precarious state of conservation. Identified problems involve mostly structural parts that in some cases present evident signs of instability and are therefore a safety hazard. The Action provides for the necessary safety measures, through temporary works. When the remained standing parts are minimal in relation to the whole building and do not have any particular architectural value, the option of demolishing and rebuilding may be evaluated. In such cases it is necessary to classify and store the demolished material so as to reuse it during the reconstruction of the buildings.

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### **S6 Enhancement Strategies**

#### *A.12 Creating a Dispersed Hotel in Bënjë<sup>(d)</sup>*

This Action aims at favoring the recovery of the existing built heritage (beginning with any uninhabited structures), socio-economic development, social cohesion and the enhancement of the local tourism offer through the creation of a dispersed hotel (Dall'Ara, 2010).

It should ensure:

- Rooms distributed throughout the village;
- Common services grouped in one or more buildings;
- Hospitality services connected to the traditions of the place and the promotion of crafts, typical products and iso-polyphonic music;
- Unitary management, organised in an entrepreneurial manner and on a communal basis, for example through the establishment of a community cooperative<sup>(e)</sup> (see Mori & Sforzi, 2018), which activates grass-root energies and strengthens social cohesion. The community cooperative attempts to produce value through an approach that enhances resources, both human and territorial. The various networks of local stakeholders (farmers, artisans, enterprises, association representatives, village elders and shepherds) should play leading roles in this type of enterprise.

The creation of the dispersed hotel should take place in conjunction with the Actions contemplated in chapters I.1, I.2, and I.3, which promote the land resources, food heritage, local crafts, iso-polyphonic music, etc.

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#### *A.13 Regenerating public spaces*

The Action proposes to redevelop the existing public spaces in order to strengthen the sense of belonging among the inhabitants of the village, to increase the levels of safety and accessibility of places and to enhance their typical features. Redevelopment projects must be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the "Regulations for the historic centre of Bënjë" established by the Decree of the Council of Ministers no. 776 of 02.11.2016.

Prior to the projects listed below it is necessary to carry out an analysis of the symbolic role of the individual public spaces in the everyday life and social practices of the community, as well as of their architectural and technological features.



**RESTORATION OF ROADS (WITH KALLDRËM PAVING) AND OF RETAINING WALLS**

The streets of the village as they are today are not very practicable and have a negative impact on the touristic image of the village. It is therefore necessary to repair them and make them more accessible to the various groups of users. The project should combine the tradition of ancient stone paving with new mobility needs. We suggest the use of local materials and patterns that are simple and resemble the existing ones, as well as respecting the uniformity of walking surfaces in all the areas covered by this project. It is necessary to provide handrails in steeped road sections, so as to make them safer for all, particularly the elderly (who are, now, the majority of the villagers).

The renovation of the streets should be accompanied with the construction of a rainwater disposal system that must respect the transverse profiles of the roadways.

The stone retaining walls that run along the streets of the village must be consolidated and repaired; any existing invasive plant species, if harmful, must be removed.

**RESTORATION OF THE “GURRËZA E FSHATIT” FOUNTAIN AND OF THE SURROUNDING SPACE**

This work aims at repairing the water system, cleaning and replacing any missing or damaged parts so as to enhance the overall state of the place. Since the location of the fountain is difficult to access, the original path that leads to it from the residential area should also be repaired.

**ESTABLISHMENT OF REST AREAS AND SCENIC VIEWPOINTS**

Given the dominant position of the village over the surrounding landscape, it would be desirable, where possible, to establish rest areas, scenic viewpoints, terraces and other types of spaces for contemplating the valley. These projects must respect the authenticity of the places, using materials that are compatible with the original ones, thus ensuring consistency and harmony between the existing and the new.

**S7 Management Strategies***A.14 Preparing the Urban Maintenance Plan of the historic centre of Bënjë*

This Action is aimed at the preparation of a *Maintenance Plan* to ensure a programmed procedure of assessments and works for the maintenance of public spaces and the architectural heritage with the purpose of preserving through time the value, functions and qualitative features of the historic centre of Bënjë in accordance with Decree no. 776 of 02.11.2016.

The *Maintenance Plan* should provide for a detailed planning of the operations to be undertaken. It should determine the right time to carry them out and the most adequate executive practices, the management of the costs, the operators in charge of maintenance procedures and the competent workforce. With the purpose of involving the community in the processes of urban maintenance, and also with the intention of strengthening the sense of belonging to the village, some of the tasks regarding collective spaces (those which are less onerous and more straightforward, such as the cleaning of some spaces) may be entrusted to a community cooperative or carried out directly by those inhabitants who wish to improve the place they live in.

**Notes**

- a) The preparation of a data sheet is recommended, in order to describe each building in a structured manner. The sheet should include information upon the building typology, construction techniques, the state of conservation, structural conditions, and its evolution in time. For an example of a data sheet, see Annex 2.
- b) To this purpose refer to the European regulations concerning sustainable tourism (for example the Charter of Sustainable Tourism; Charter of Lanzarote) and/or the indications developed by UNWTO (United Nations World Tourism Organization).
- c) See Bashkia Përmet, 2020: 171, 238.
- d) Among the many Italian examples, one that presents similarities to the case of Bënjë is the dispersed hotel of Santo Stefano di Sessanio, in Abruzzo (<<https://www.sextantio.it/santostefano/albergo-diffuso-in-abruzzo/>>).
- e) There are many examples of community cooperatives that manage dispersed hotels in Italy. An interesting case is the Mediaeval hamlet of Borgo del Fiume (in Fiumefreddo Bruzio, Calabria) (<<https://www.borgodifume.it/>>).

## SECTION I.4.2 – KOSINË

### Historical overview

The settlement of Kosinë stands next to the Church of the Dormition of Mary (12<sup>th</sup> century), which perhaps once was part of a monastic complex (see sect. I.5.2) (Fig. I-4.2.1).

We have no knowledge of when people first settled near the church. The first evidence of the existence of the village is of a much later date. According to François Pouqueville – a French doctor who was on a diplomatic mission to the court of Ali Pasha of Ioannina between 1806 and 1815 – in Kosinë in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century there were approximately 20 families of shepherds, probably Vlachs. (Adhami, 2001<sup>a</sup>). Constantin Burileanu – who visited Kosinë in the first decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century and dedicated it a chapter of his *I Romeni di Albania* travel book – refers that 45 Vlach families and only 3 Albanian families lived in the village (Burileanu, 1912).

The hilly area on which the cistern that ensures the supply of water to the inhabitants is located, is a significant place in the historical memory of the village. The cistern was made during the years of the Communist regime, together with some bunkers that replaced two religious buildings, a small church and a *teqe*, the Bektashi place of worship. The campaign for the destruction of religious buildings that began in 1967 did not spare this area of Kosinë, and completely erased the material memory of the place. After the fall of the regime, and in opposition to its destructive fury, the villagers carried out a deeply meaningful symbolic gesture when they placed a white cross by the entrance to one of the underground bunkers. A slender but powerful, indisputable sign in the landscape, it is the expression of a strong collective will to rise above the effacement of memory and the violence suffered on one of the most intimate levels: that of the relationship with the sacred.



Figure I-4.2.1  
A view of the village  
of Kosinë with  
the Church of the  
Dormition of Mary  
in the background.

### The residential area

Kosinë is one of the largest villages in the Municipality of Përmet, which is 7 km away. It is located in the proximity of road SH75, which runs along the slopes of Mount Kosinë and the Vjosa Valley. The river interacts with the life of the village and connects it to Përmet and Këlcyrë.

The settlement is divided into four different quarters, one of which is known as “quarter of the Vlachs”. The oldest quarter is located on the ridge and near the church, with which it occupies the upper part of the village.

When compared to Leusë and Bënjë, the centre of Kosinë is more featureless. Unlike the other two villages, Kosinë has lost many of the small functional spaces on the sides of the streets which served as areas for rest and social interaction (*sofat, kroi, gardhi*), as well as the *kalldrëm* paving. Furthermore, most of the dwellings were built during the years of the regime, or else after the Nineties (Fig. I-4.2.2). In the oldest quarter, however, there are still some traditional buildings which keep the link to the past alive (Fig. I-4.2.3).

### The traditional dwellings

#### *Typological features*

Orographic factors strongly affect the morphology of the village. The houses are located on both sides along the sloping main road, producing a ‘double comb’ distributive layout (Fig. I-4.2.4).

The prevailing building typology is that of the isolated rural house built inside an enclosed courtyard that has agricultural annexes and orchards (Fig. I-4.2.5).

The original dwelling usually consists of a three-part rectangular building that faces the street on one side and the countryside on the other. Dwellings are usually two-storey, the first slightly below the street level. In the past the mixed use of dwellings was common: the ground floor for agricultural purposes and the upper floor for residential purposes. With some exceptions, today both levels of the dwellings are used for residential purposes. This transformation of the use of the spaces probably derives from the need to accommodate married children and therefore from the expansion of the family nucleus.

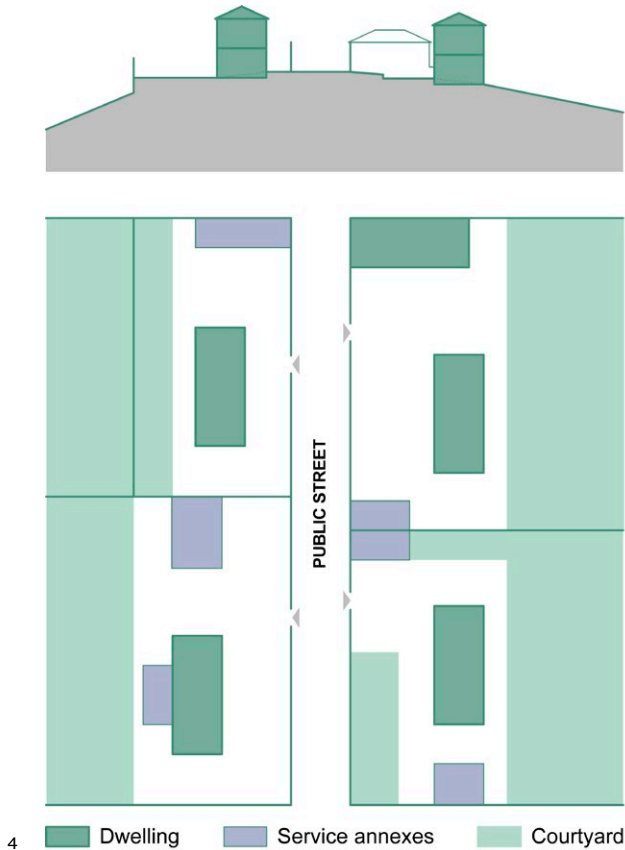
During the Seventies and Eighties L-shaped single level houses became widespread. Subsequent buildings do not present features that connect them to the historic building typology (Fig. I-4.2.6).



Figure I-4.2.2 – A typical building typology of the Hoxha regime years.



Figure I-4.2.3 – A traditional building in the oldest quarter of the village.



5

Figure I-4.2.4 *Building features and state of conservation*

The urban settlement pattern of Kosinë. [Author: Dritan Kapo]

Figure I-4.2.5  
Enclosed courtyards in Kosinë.

Historic buildings in Kosinë have undergone many modifications over the years. Appurtenance areas, for example, only rarely preserve their original dry-assembled stone enclosure walls (Fig. I-4.2.7).

Walls are made with three-leaf stone masonry whose exterior face presents exposed ashlar. In some ruined houses it is possible to see timber reinforcement elements embedded within the walls and arranged in horizontal planes, which run continuously along the length of the walls.

The original partitions, with frameworks of timber and reeds plastered with mud mortar, have been replaced in many cases with walls made with hollow bricks. Exterior openings usually have timber or stone lintels. In more recent works there are larger openings with lintels in reinforced concrete.

The original wooden floors were mostly replaced by cast-in-place reinforced concrete floors.

Roofs are the parts of the old houses that underwent fewer modifications; they are of the hip type and covered with stone slabs.

Recent dwellings usually have a reinforced concrete structure, envelopes and partitions in hollow bricks and roof covering in brick tiles.

The old buildings of Kosinë which have been continuously inhabited generally do not present serious deficiencies, since they have undergone periodical restoration works, maintenance and replacement of decayed elements. In some cases, however, some deep cracks that have sometimes been filled with mortar can be seen.



These cracks can be due to seismic activity or else to incorrect restoration works. Some abandoned buildings are in a state of ruin; others are still well preserved (for example, the former general store of the village and the warehouse facing the square S. Dhima) (Fig. I-4.2.8).

**Public space**

When attempting to identify the original public space in Kosinë, it is inevitable to refer to the Church of the Dormition of Mary (see sect. I.5.2). The church is located at the main point of access to the settlement, in a dominant position surrounded by the fluvial landscape of the Vjosa and the forests of fir, oak and pine. In addition to its religious function and thanks to the open spaces that surround it, the church has historically played an important social and collective role.

Figure I-4.2.6 Hypothesis on the original layout of the domestic space and transformations occurred over time concerning two typologies of the historic centre of Kosinë. [Author: Dritan Kapo]



7



8

Figure I-4.2.7 Near the church, there is also the village school (pre-school, primary and middle).

A dry stone retaining wall. The green area that surrounds the school is used by the students as a courtyard and by shepherds as grazing land for their flocks. It blends into the beauty of the surrounding landscape and lives in close symbiosis with the most ancient nucleus of the village,

but at the same time constitutes an unfinished space that lacks functional and formal motivation (Fig. I-4.2.9).

Figure I-4.2.8  
The former general store of the village.

The village's square (Stefan Dhima square) is located where the main street crosses the one that leads to the new quarters. For the inhabitants of Kosinë the square seems to be more of a place of passage than a place for resting and for social interaction. The role of meeting place is taken instead by bars, frequented exclusively by males, as is usual in rural Albanian areas (Fig. I-4.2.10).

Near the square are the sports field and a playground. The latter is in a state of disrepair and is therefore not used. As in the past, the actual 'playground' for the village children seems to be the street.



9



10

### Infrastructure networks

Overall, the water and electricity supply networks are more efficient in Kosinë than in Leusë or Bënjë, and this is also true for the systems of dwellings. Most houses have a water tank on the roof equipped with an autoclave. These tanks, usually blue in colour, are a distinctive feature of the urban landscape (Fig. I-4.2.11).

Sewers do not provide for the separation between black and grey waters and discharge directly into the Vjosa untreated.

Unlike Bënjë and Leusë, Kosinë has a municipal rubbish collection service. Unfortunately, dumpsters are emptied at irregular intervals, often causing congestion, which in turn results in bad smell and, more importantly, hygiene and health issues.

Along the streets there are lampposts mounted on cement poles that also serve for distributing electricity to the houses. The last road repair works have led to an improvement of the public lighting system as well.

Figure I-4.2.9  
The open space around the school.

Figure I-4.2.10  
The Stefan Dhima square in the centre of the village.



Figure I-4.2.11  
Blue water tanks as  
a hallmark of the  
urban landscape.

#### Public services, shops and tourist facilities

The village has the main public services (post, first-aid medical office, nursery, elementary and middle school), but lacks any places of social interaction other than bars. In the interviews carried out during the on-site visits, some women complained of the lack of a place for socialising and for after-school activities for their children.

There is no public parking area, nor is there a public transportation system connecting the village to Përmet.

The village has no accommodation, restaurants or other tourism-related services.

Many dwellings have Internet connection and the quality of the mobile phone signal is generally adequate, with the exception of some isolated areas of the village.

In Kosinë there are two bars and a small general store. There are not tourist accommodation (July 2020).

#### Critical issues and future prospects

Kosinë has undergone through the years a process of expansion due to the modest yet gradual increase in population.

Currently, there are a number of deficiencies related to the public spaces and services, as well as the total absence of activities capable of promoting tourism.

A first aspect in which it would be necessary to invest concerns the enhancement of cultural and social services that favour social cohesion. These services should be developed in synergy with projects aimed at returning spaces for children to play in, the square, and the open space surrounding the school and the Church of the Dormition of Mary to the community. This open space, reinterpreted in a new functional key, could play an important role in the process of enhancement of the village, especially considering the iconic value of the church (see Fig. I-5.2.8).



On the other hand, it is necessary to invest in the promotion of tourism, encouraging the process of recovery of the unused built heritage and its conversion into accommodation facilities as well as in the creation of tourism itineraries. They should pass through a variety of landscapes and historic-cultural attractions, including the Church of the Dormition of Mary, triggering various collateral activities: accommodation in *bujtinë*, food and wine tasting and trekking-guide services (Fig. I-4.2.12).

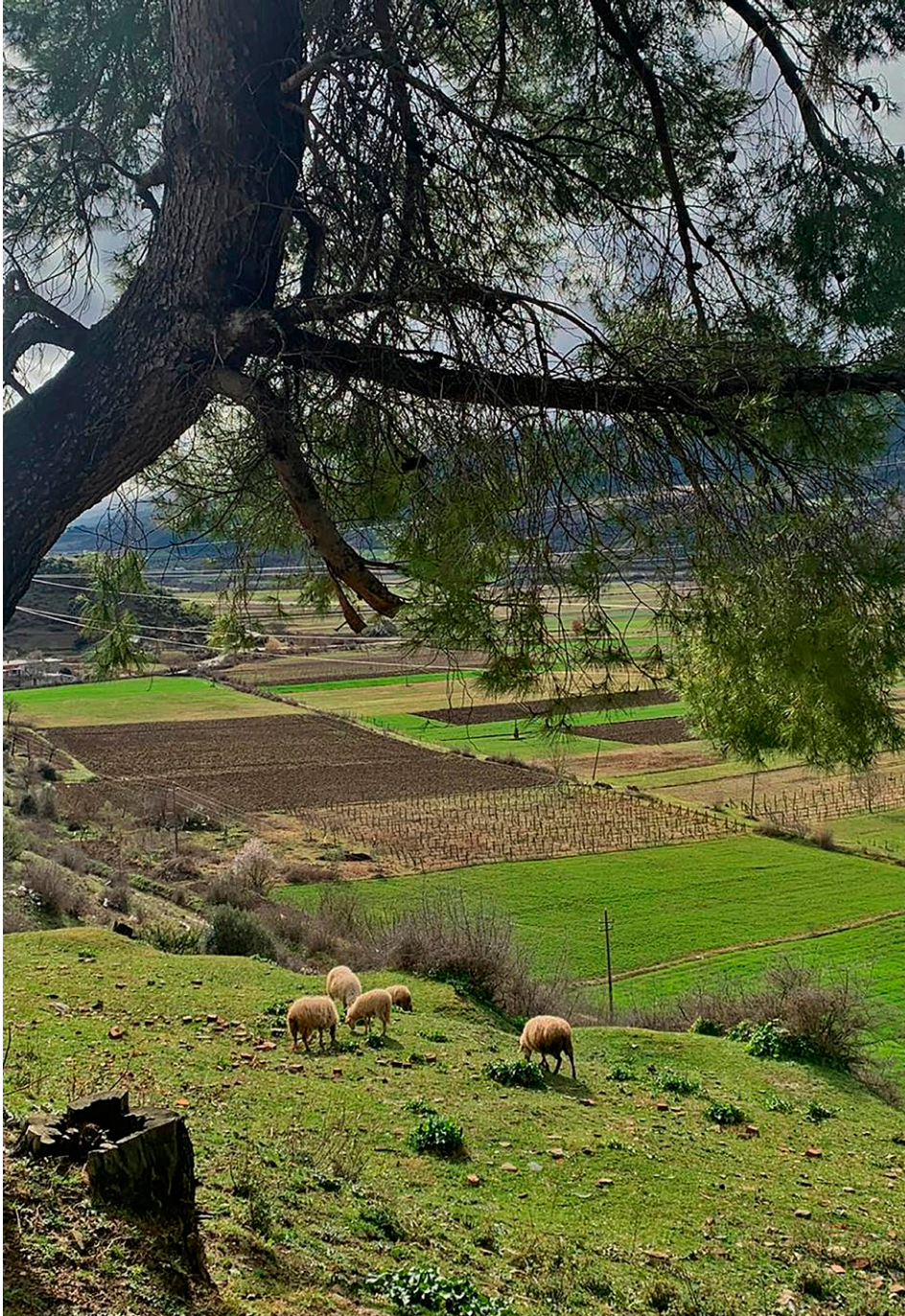


Figure I-4.2.12  
A view of the Vjosa  
Valley from the  
area surrounding  
the Church of the  
Dormition of Mary.  
[Photo: Samuela  
Hidri]

## Intervention strategies

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### S1 Education and Training Strategies

#### A.1 Environmental education project in the school of Kosinë

Carrying out an awareness campaign among the students of the school of Kosinë concerning the importance of a careful management of the waste cycle, is to be considered a strategic action. The students, in turn, could bring this awareness of responsible behaviours vis-à-vis the environment to their families. In order to carry out this type of activity, teachers could receive support from environmental organisations and the NGOs that operate in the area and have experience in these matters. Educating the population to correctly dispose of waste may also be a useful tool for strengthening their sense of care for the place they live in.

This Action is preparatory for Action A.4.

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### S3 Social Cohesion Strategies

#### A.2 Creating a Community and Artisan Centre

In order to support women's aspirations for a greater social and economic autonomy, we suggest creating a meeting and work place which includes:

- Interaction spaces for women;
- Play areas for children;
- Small equipped workshops for traditional activities, both related to women (such as embroidery or weaving) and to men (wood and metal work or pyrography);
- Space for selling the artisanal products made in the workshop.

In the centre of the village there are currently abandoned buildings that could house this social structure. In order to begin with the workshops, a preparatory activity could be devised with support from the NGO CESVI, which over the past years has organised several educational activities concerning the revival of ancient crafts in the area of Përmet.

Through this Action, Kosinë could be included in the Albanian Network for Rural Development (ANRD), a network of associations and NGOs (both Albanian and foreign) which has been active since 2015 in the promotion of rural culture through a series of projects aimed at involving the local community in a "community based sustainable development"<sup>(a)</sup>.

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### S4 Living Quality Strategies

#### A.3 Ensuring adequate infrastructures

See A.3, sect. I.4.1

#### A.4 Enhancing the rubbish collection system

This Action aims at improving the management of domestic waste so as to enhance the quality of life of community members, as well as tourism development.

For this purpose it is necessary to act on two levels:

- Activate the system of waste recycling, in accordance with the General Town Plan of Përmet (Bashkia Përmet, 2020: 171, 238), providing the village with adequate dumpsters.
- Increase the waste collection system (which is currently intermittent).

The efficiency of this Action depends on the presence of a waste collection and treatment centre providing a service for the whole municipal area.

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#### A.5 Enhancing the usability of the vehicular road that passes through the village, in accordance with local traditions

The streets that pass through the village should be provided with gutters to carry away rainwater.

Where possible, it is advisable to build sidewalks.

It is also advisable to repair the *kalldrëm* paving of the historic road that runs along the enclosure wall of the church and reaches the entrance to the village.

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#### A.6 Construction of a parking area

See A.7, sect. I.4.1

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## S6 Enhancement Strategies

### A.7 Restoration and conversion of uninhabited buildings into traditional accommodation facilities

This Action aims at favouring the conversion of the traditional dwellings of the village which are now uninhabited into *bujtina*.

The *bujtinë* is a sort of guest house, often characterised by a traditional architecture and by the wish to bring the visitor closer to the local culture (for example through meals based on traditional recipes, furniture and decorations typical of the traditional rural house, the possibility of participating in everyday activities, etc.)<sup>(b)</sup>.

Redevelopment works should be carried out in accordance with the recognised cultural conservation methodologies. Therefore the recommendation is to:

- Preserve the typical morphological, dimensional, technological features of traditional architecture;
- Improve the accessibility to the building and its open spaces;
- Maintain/re-establish the relationships between the buildings and their context;
- Limit any buildings' extensions to the short sides of the ground floors, paying special attention to the treatment of exterior facades so as to better highlight the historical stratification of the building;
- Carry out the structural rehabilitation works (restoration of static safety and seismic improvement) as contemplated by the regulations in force;
- Upgrade building systems in view of the new functions, in accordance with standard engineering principles and regulatory codes;
- Design sustainable solutions concerning energy savings and interior comfort.

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### A.8 Restoration of the school and the surrounding area

The village school – located at the centre of a panoramic space that overlooks the Vjosa Valley – is in urgent need of functional and hygienic-sanitary redevelopment works.

The redevelopment project should provide for:

- Structural rehabilitation of the building so as to ensure static safety and seismic improvements;
- Accessibility to both exterior and interior spaces;
- Renovation of technological systems and equipment, using sustainable solutions for energy saving and interior comfort;
- Renovation of the toilet facilities;
- Replacement of school furniture;
- Construction of a gym where children are able to carry out recreational and sports activities during the winter.

The redevelopment of the outdoor spaces of the school for their use in recreational and sports and/or after-school activities in the service of the community should be undertaken at the same time as the project for recovering the open spaces surrounding the church (see A.6 and A.10, sect. I.5.2).

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### A.9 Repair of the sports field and the playground

This Action aims at redeveloping the sports field and the village playground.

For the sports field the following works are suggested:

- The construction of a pedestrian access to the field;
- The construction of an equipped changing room;
- The repair of the field and the existing fence;
- The installation of benches and of an adequate lighting system.

Regarding the existing playground, it is necessary to rethink the space and to construct, in full respect of safety requirements, play equipment inspired on the local tradition conceived together with the children and made by local artists/artisans.

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### A.10 Redevelopment of Stefan Dhima Square

The village's square requires a design aimed at making it a welcoming place well integrated into the urban fabric.

To this end we propose the following:

- Conceiving the square as a flexible space linked to everyday life activities (rest, social interaction, etc.) and to the organisation of small community events (such as a farmer's market);

- Providing for the use of forms and paving materials which are consistent with the local context;
- Using furniture preferably made by local artist/artisans and autochthonous plants;
- Applying the inclusive design principles;
- Using an energy-saving and highly efficient lighting system.

It would be advisable to extend the redevelopment project also to the areas adjacent to the square, where three businesses (two bars and a small general store) are located.

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#### *A.11 Promoting the creation of a horse trail*

In connection with the rural vocation of the place, its strategic location from a naturalistic point of view and with the *Greenway System* Action (A.14, chap. I.3), we suggest the creation of a horse trail<sup>(c)</sup>, so as to increase the touristic potential of the village. This project could become an interesting opportunity for an integral land promotion that includes history, nature, education, tourism, tradition and the local typical production.

For this purpose our suggestion is to:

- Set the horse trail along the existing network of paths, or else develop it through the repair of other tracks which are suited to equestrian tourism, so as to create an offer in combination with other types of hiking (e.g. cycling) and suitable for hosting environmental education projects;
  - Provide the chosen trails with adequate signage, as well as with equipped rest areas;
  - Build a stable for the horses, connected to an outdoor space for them to walk or run around.
- 

#### *Notes*

- a) ANRD is a member of the Balkan Network for Rural Development and of PREPARE (Partnership for Rural Europe). There are currently four ongoing multi-year projects, mostly financed by the European Union (see <https://anrd.al/ongoing/>), that are devised for offering: educational courses aimed at social inclusion and the creation of specific skills; the opportunity for creating small local enterprises; and support to Civil Society Organisations (OSC).
- b) In order to implement this Action it would be advisable to promote incentives on the model of the SARED Programme “Mbështetja për Bujqësinë dhe Zhvillimin Rural në zonat e prapambetura të Shqipërisë”. (See <<https://bujqesia.gov.al/udhezuesi-per-aplikantet-3/>>).
- c) Some interesting examples have been developed in Tuscany, specifically “Le ippovie della Provincia di Livorno” and the “L’ippovia del Monte Pisano”, in the Municipality of Capannori (see <<https://www.regione.toscana.it/documents/10180/24008/Aree+naturali+protette+toscane/>>).

### SECTION I.4.3 – LEUSË

#### Historical overview

The first settlement in Leusë is mentioned in Ottoman fiscal records as far back as 1431. The location of the village perhaps derived from its vicinity to an easy route toward Ioannina that thus ensured a swift communication with Greece.

The current village was probably consolidated during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a residential district of Përmet, inhabited predominantly by merchants, artisans and intellectuals. Despite constant emigration (especially to the United States, Turkey and Greece), the number of inhabitants reached its maximum in 1923.

The fire caused by the Nazis during World War II (Saliu, 2011) marked the history of the village. From that moment onward, a period of decline began for Leusë that is still ongoing; from a prosperous and lively village it turned into a semi-abandoned hamlet waiting to be regenerated.

The episode of the fire brought about a drastic change also to the original layout of the settlement, which featured by two-storey buildings with formal and building features that were typical of stately homes. From that period, a few buildings have survived, as well as *kalldrëm* paved streets and the enclosure and retaining walls that continue to constitute the structural apparatus of the settlement's fabric (Fig. I-4.3.1).

With the advent of the Communist regime, the original inhabitants of the village (most of whom emigrated to Greece) were replaced with peasant families from the surrounding villages working in the new collectivised structures (agricultural cooperatives).

#### The residential area

Leusë is located on the slopes of Mount Dhëmbel, at 1.3 km from Përmet. It is a village with a compact morphology affected by orography features.

The road that links it to Përmet is very bumpy and is only practicable with 4-wheel drive vehicles such as SUVs; on foot it takes 40-50 minutes to reach Përmet. The overall conditions of the road, worsened by the absence of lighting, hamper the everyday life of the villagers (most of whom are elderly) and undoubtedly limit the flow of tourists who may be interested in visiting the Church of the Dormition of Mary and the village itself.

Similar problems concern the inner *kalldrëm* streets are steeply sloping and are passable, with some difficulty, only on foot.



Figure I-4.3.1 – The main street of the village paved in *kalldrëm* and its water drainage channel in the middle.



Figure I-4.3.2  
A traditional  
entrance door to a  
courtyard with the  
*sofat*.

#### The traditional dwellings

##### *Typological features*

During the post-war period, the village maintained its vocation as a prevalingly sylvo-pastoral settlement. This is reflected also in the dwelling culture, which reduces to a minimum the residential space.

The most widespread typology is the isolated one-storey house, placed at the centre of an enclosed courtyard with dry stone walls. The main entrance includes the typical stone *sofat* facing the street (Fig. I-4.3.2). The courtyard determines the urban landscape and establishes a close relationship between the place of dwelling (house) and that of work (domestic and agricultural).

In comparison to Bënjë, courtyards are larger in Leusë and include the vegetable garden and all service annexes (storerooms, larders, kitchens, stables, toilets, etc.). These are distributed along the inner walls of the enclosure following an order related to the needs of the family nucleus. The configuration of the courtyard probably derives from the small size of the dwelling. The vegetable garden plays a central role in terms of basic food supply and is a historically rooted component of the dwelling culture (Figs. I-4.3.3 and I-4.3.4).

Dwellings usually consist of a tripartite rectangular building with the entrance in a central position on the long side of the rectangle. The hallway leads from the entrance to the two opposite rooms. In houses that originally had two-storeys, the hallway housed the staircase. There is no evidence that in these houses the ground floor was originally used as a stable, or for placing the services, especially considering the purely residential nature of these residences before the fire of 1943. It was very probably, used as a living area, with the bedrooms on the upper floor.

The modifications (enlargement of doors and windows, expansions, demolition and reconstruction of the house, etc.) which the buildings underwent through time have generated floor plan variations that have transformed the functional layout of the dwelling.

The expansions – which for reasons of executive simplicity were undertaken through a horizontal, rather than vertical addition of volumes – took place in three different ways:

1. Expansion by *rotation*, which permits the placement of the added volume near the entrance, with an independent entrance. This addition often results from the enlargement of the family (for example the case of adding a bedroom for a married son);
2. Expansion by *translation*, in order to build a new space for services (bathroom, kitchen with oven, a storeroom) which were originally located outside;
3. Expansion by *amassing*, which generates small rooms for satisfying a wide variety of everyday needs. The toilet, the kitchen-dining room and, more rarely, the bedroom, are placed in the middle of the larger side of the building and in proximity of the hallway, thus producing a T-shaped plan layout (Fig. I-4.3.5).

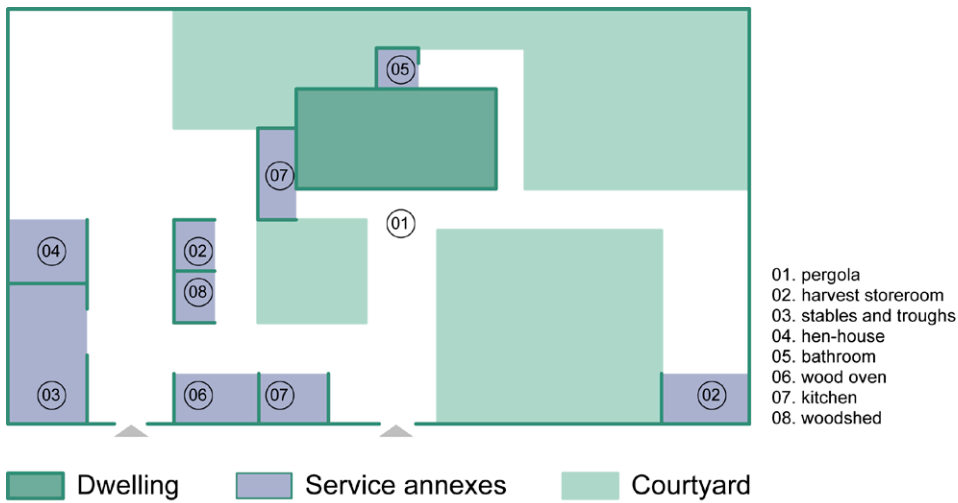


Figure I-4.3.3  
 The layout of the dwelling spaces in Leusë. [Author: Dritan Kapo]



Figure I.4.3.4  
 A flowery courtyard in a dwelling of Leusë.

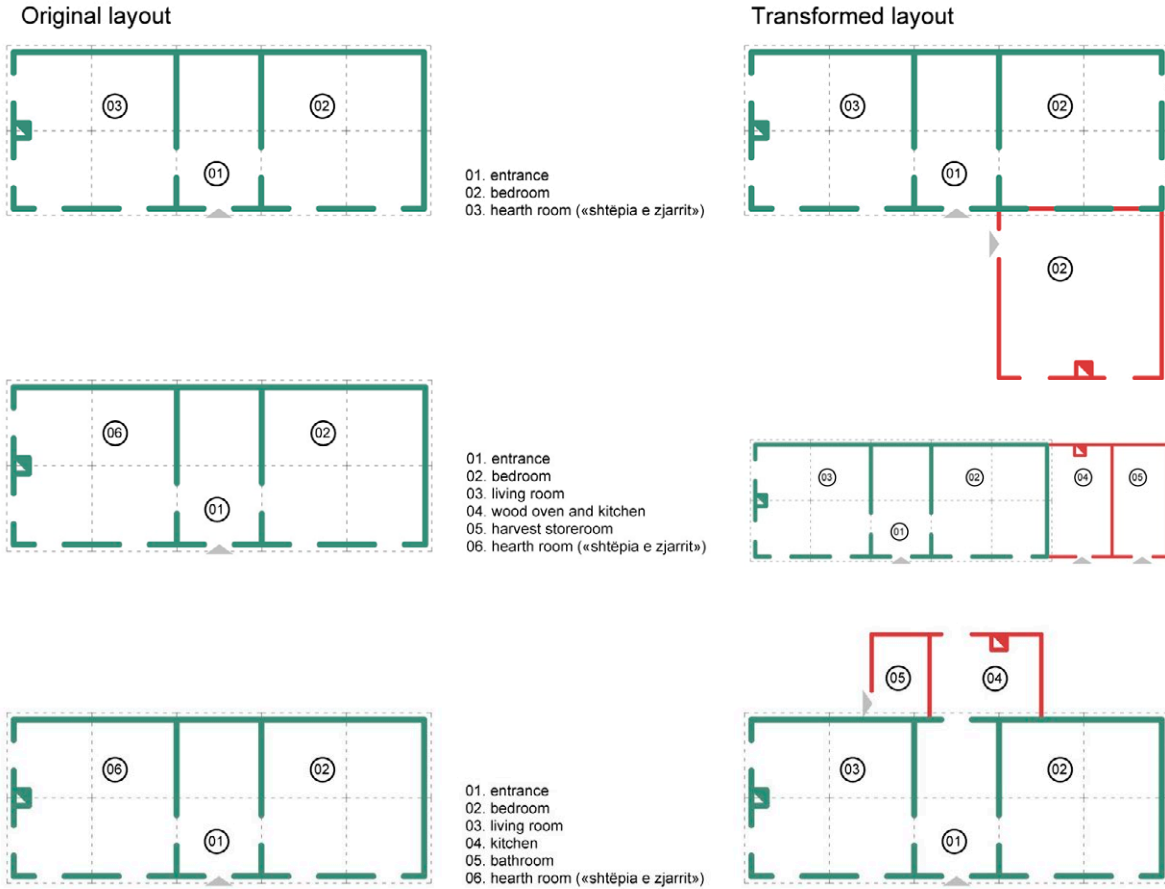


Figure I-4.3.5 *Building features and state of conservation*

Hypothesis on the original layout of the domestic space (*left*) and transformations that occurred over time (*right*). Above: Transformation by rotation. Middle: Transformation by translation. Below: Transformation by amassing. [Author: Dritan Kapo]

The buildings in Leusë are characterised by the use of the local stone: masonry, roofs, enclosure walls and pavings are all made of this material. Enclosure and retaining walls, which often survived both wars and earthquakes, are dry-assembled with rectangular stone blocks (Fig. I-4.3.6).

The load-bearing walls of houses are built with three-leaf masonry with a thickness of 50-70 cm. The external face is made of regular ashlars bound with lime mortar. The presence of anti-seismic protection devices such as ring beams and timber frames within the masonry, tie-rods for arch reinforcement and wedges, bear witness to a history of earthquakes and of the attempts to respond to horizontal actions.

In older buildings, exterior openings are generally smaller. Headers are of different types: from simple stone or timber lintels to more complex ones with lintels and relieving arch. In more recent cases, there are wider openings with lintels in reinforced concrete.

Intermediate floors are usually in timber, with a simple frame and transverse stiffening elements in the thickness of the beams. The floor is completed with boarding directly nailed onto the beams, which is also the paving of the upper storey. A less common variation is the floor made of beams and joists that support the boarding floor.

Ground floors usually present the same structure as intermediate floors, thus confirming their original residential use.





6



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Figure I-4.3.6 – An abandoned stone building in Leusë.

Figure I-4.3.7 – The roof carpentry of a house in Leusë.

Some of the ground floors have been replaced by reinforced concrete slabs over a crawl space, in which case they are often paved with ceramic tiles.

Partitions are usually made with timber and reeds.

The structure of the roof is usually composed of simple timber trusses with rafters, tie-beam and king post (Fig. I-4.3.7). The boarding is nailed to the trusses and on it the dry-assembled stone-slabs of the covering are laid.

There are often false ceilings (made of plastered reeds or of timber planks) supported by timber elements.

Many buildings present major structural problems due to a variety of causes: abandonment, earthquakes, lack of maintenance, inadequate restoration works, etc.

### Public space

Public space in Leusë consists of an ensemble of elements – the Church of the Dormition of Mary and its portico, the fountains, the streets and the small square near the former school – which carry out their function in close connection with the buildings around them.

The essence of the community finds expression in the Church of the Dormition of Mary (see sect. I.5.3) and its portico (*hajat*) where once, after mass, the inhabitants gathered for the village assembly (*kuvendi i fshatit*) (Saliu, 2011).

In addition to this place with its double nature (secular and religious), the other important public spaces in the life of the community were the village's three fountains (*kroi*) (Fig. I-4.3.8). One of these is located along the road to Përmet, while the other two are in the village. The fountains are built using the same building techniques found in other rural contexts in Albania. Although part of their functions have been lost (they are currently used only to supply water and for watering animals), the *kroi* are identity-conveying elements of the place, since they bear witness to the work and life of the community. The two *kroi* located in the village are set into the stone walls of courtyards and are components of the urban space in relation with the network of winding lanes paved in *kalldrëm*.

The street in Leusë is not understood only as the physical network in support of the movement of people and of flocks led to the surrounding pastures or into the mountains for the practice of transhumance, but also as the backbone of the public space system on which the functioning of life itself in the village depended. It was a multi-functional space consisting of a set of components and places. This sylvo-pastoral and partially agricultural vocation can be easily understood when walking along the streets of the village, where recesses or seats along the retaining walls were used for leaning heavy objects, or simply as surfaces for sitting and resting (Fig. I-4.3.9).

The entrance of the courtyards with their *sofat*, which in Leusë take on a special symbolic and aesthetic value, are worthy of mention. They communicate with the outside through a whole series of minute signs to be read and interpreted and are so varied that it would seem that no two are alike. They are the hallmarks of the village.

The only 'square' in the village is located at the point where three lanes cross: it is the space opposite the former school. This irregular space is bounded by two buildings. At the moment its usability is compromised as a result of very damaged paving, while its formal aspect is weakened by the state of decay of the buildings facing it.

The urban components described so far reveal a masterful use of public space, made of functions, forms and behaviours, and evoke a simple and artless world concealed under years of degradation and abandonment. Although they have become weak both in terms of usage and the loss of their role as privileged places in the collective memory,

these components are an unquestionable element of identity and a potential value to be preserved and enhanced.

#### Infrastructure networks

The inhabitants of Leusë face a critical situation regarding the supply of both water and electricity (cf. Bashkia Përmet, 2020). The waterworks supply low-quality water (for drinking purposes the inhabitants still use the water from the *kroi*) and in a discontinuous manner. The constant interruptions of the electric service and the low-voltage impeding the proper functioning of a recently installed pump plant, are an obstacle to the installation of water tanks with autoclaves, and compromise the use of home appliances (in particular boilers and washing-machines).

Leusë does not have a sewage network. Sewage is mainly disposed of in leaching cesspools located in the courtyard. Likewise, greywater, together with rainwater, are dispersed directly into the ground.

Domestic waste is disposed of in an open-air dump along the road to Përmet and periodically burnt.



Figure I-4.3.8 – A fountain in the centre of the village.

#### Public services, shops and tourist facilities

There are no public services and shops in the village.

For hosting tourists there are 3 guest houses (July, 2020).

There is no mobile phone signal in many areas of the village.

#### Critical issues and future prospects

The authenticity of the built heritage and the presence of the Church of the Dormition of Mary, confer on Leusë a peculiar image that can be taken advantage of when determining recovery strategies aimed at the development of tourism.

This image is strengthened by the strategic location of the village, by the sylvo-pastoral identity that is reflected in the quality of dairy products, and last but not least, by the generous sense of hospitality of its inhabitants.

The human, landscape and architectural wealth offered by the village must certainly be safeguarded but in order to activate a process of regeneration, several action need to be taken concerning those weak points that slow down any hypothesis of development. From this perspective, it seems neces-



Figure I-4.3.9 – Stone seats along the street.



Figure I-4.3.10  
The poor conditions of the road to Përmet make the life of the villagers difficult and hamper the tourism development possibilities.

sary to intervene globally on all the infrastructure networks and on the redevelopment of the road that connects the village to Përmet (Fig. I-4.3.10).

Part of the large abandoned built heritage could be used as accommodation facilities (e.g. *bujtina* and services focused on the culinary tradition). This integration, by strengthening the artisan tradition of food production and supporting a family-based agricultural economy, could have positive effects also in view of the desired re-population of the village.

## Intervention strategies

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### S1 Education and Training Strategies

#### A.1 Organising educational activities aimed at promoting the culture of hospitality

See A.1, sect. I.4.1

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### S4 Living Quality Strategies

#### A.2 Redevelopment of the road between Përmet and Leusë and construction of a small car park at the entrance of the village

In view of the development of tourism and of the betterment of the quality of life of the community, repair of the road that connects the village to Përmet must be considered a priority.

The road, due to its landscape potential, should be designed in terms of slow mobility, favouring the perception of the landscape of the Vjosa Valley and enhancing its attractions, beginning with the Church of the Dormition of Mary which, from its dominant position on the hill, is first seen by the visitors.

The following works are proposed:

- Signage for the village and the church from the main roads in Përmet;
- Repair of the road in *kalldrëm* paving using local materials and patterns;
- Installation of a road lighting system;
- Creation of rest areas and viewpoints at scenic panoramas, including the appropriate information panels;
- Planting of autochthonous trees and shrubs on the sides of the road.

Vehicular access should be made available to villagers, tourists, emergency vehicles and public transportation.

We suggest the construction of a small parking area, near the church and in an unobtrusive position, adequately shaded by autochthonous trees and properly illuminated. The paving of the parking area should be of a permeable type to prevent harmful rainwater run off.

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#### A.3 Ensuring adequate infrastructures

See A.3, sect. I.4.1

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### S5 Knowing and Safeguarding Strategies

#### A.4 Cognitive enquiry and cataloguing of the built heritage of Leusë

See Phase I of the *Urban Recovery Plan* proposed in A.2, sect. I.4.1

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### S6 Enhancement Strategies

#### A.5 Restoration and conversion of uninhabited buildings into traditional accommodation facilities

See A.7, sect. I.4.2

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#### A.6 Creating a Multi-functional Centre in the former village school

The location of Leusë at the crossroads of existing tourism itineraries makes the village a strategic place for the exploration of the area.

The Action proposes the creation of a *Multi-functional Centre* at the former village school, a building that expresses the traditional architecture of the village.

This Centre could house the following functions:

- A visitor centre, with info-point and ATM;
- A shop for tasting and purchasing the typical products of the village;
- A small community centre for consolidating the sense of belonging to the village and its traditions.

The redevelopment project should include:

- Structural rehabilitation in order to ensure the static safety of the building and the anti-seismic improvement envisaged by technical regulations;
- Redevelopment of the technical plants in relation to the new functions;
- Redevelopment of the outdoor space;
- Use of sustainable solutions for energy saving and interior comfort.

Management of the *Multi-functional Centre* could be entrusted to a community enterprise/cooperative (see A.1).

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#### A.7 Redeveloping urban spaces

This Action aims at redeveloping the existing public spaces so as to enhance the inhabitants' quality of life and develop tourism.

Prior to this it is necessary to carry out an analysis of the components of the urban landscape and of their role in the everyday lives of the villagers.

We suggest the following works:

##### RECOVERY OF THE STREETS AND SQUARES

- Rehabilitation of streets with *kalldrëm* paving and repair of the retaining walls that run alongside them (see A.13, chap. I.4.1);
- Repair drains for carrying off rainwater, as well as water from *kroi*, choosing those solutions with a lesser impact so as to alter the overall image of the original road network as little as possible;
- Installation of a street lighting system using solutions that are in harmony with highly sensitive context;
- Redevelopment of the square in front the former school. Our suggestion is to use materials, forms, street furniture and plants that are as consistent as possible with the local context.

##### RESTORATION OF SOFAT AND COURTYARD ENTRANCES

This work aims at restoring the *sofat* and the aesthetically valuable entrance doorways so as to safeguard an identity element of the village. Prior to this, we recommend cataloguing the various types of doors through the analysis of the original colours and materials that are still in use.

##### RESTORATION OF THE THREE FOUNTAINS OF THE VILLAGE

See A.13, sect. I.4.1.

Works should increase the levels of safety and the degree of accessibility and enhance the typical urban elements while respecting the authenticity of spaces, taking into consideration the compatibility with the original materials and ensuring coherence and harmony between the existing and the new. In all cases, where possible, works should be entrusted to local artisans/artists.

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## Architectural assets

### SECTION I.5.1 – THE KATIU BRIDGE IN BËNJË

Katiu Bridge, listed as a category I Cultural Monument since 1973, is located over the Lengarica River, a tributary of the Vjosa, in a strategic and highly scenic position. It is 6.2 km from the Përmet-Tri Urat SH75 state highway and 13.6 km from Përmet (Figs. I-5.1.1 - I-5.1.3).

The name of the bridge derives from “kadi”, or the local version “kati”, a word that indicated a judge during the Ottoman Empire. The bridge was given its name probably in honour of the person who commissioned it or played an important role in its construction.

The bridge was used in the past by the inhabitants of the area to go from the hill of Bënjë toward the villages of the region of Shqeria and vice-versa. Much of its original importance has been lost and today it is only used by tourists to reach the thermal baths that surround it, or else occasionally by shepherds when they take their flocks to graze in the surrounding hills.

The bridge is part of a system of architectural and landscape elements of great value: the thermal baths, the prehistoric caves and the canyon of Lengarica River are all near it. The ruins of the *Mulliri i Drithit* are located to the south, following the course of the river.

Figure I-5.1.1  
View of the Katiu  
Bridge before the  
restoration works in  
1982 showing the  
damage suffered by  
the left abutment  
(looking upstream)  
during World War  
II. [Courtesy:  
Municipality of  
Përmet]



Figure I-5.1.2  
The downstream  
facade of the Katiu  
Bridge.

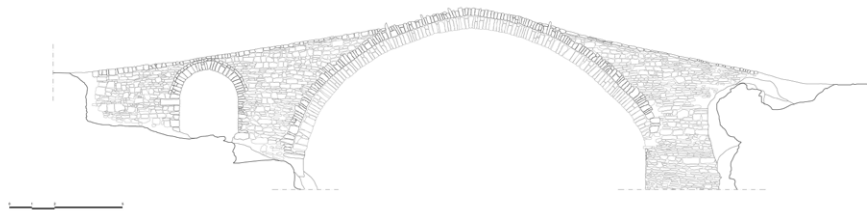


Figure I-5.1.3  
View of the Katiu  
Bridge and of the  
thermal baths.





### Historical and typological framework

According to Shtylla (2013), Katiu Bridge belongs to a series of bridges of the same type and period built in various places in Albania. This scholar maintains that the bridge dates back to the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, and this hypothesis finds a confirmation based on its similarities with other bridges present in the area (Shtylla, 2013).

The construction of Katiu Bridge thus belongs to a fertile period between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, during which many religious and civil works were undertaken by order of the Ottoman Empire. Other bridges in the area of Përmet were built in the same period, such as the bridges of Limar, Nivan, or Petran of which unfortunately only fragments remain today.

The bridge consists of a single arch, slightly lowered, with a span of about 15.50 m. In the haunch towards the east bank of the river there is a flood arch of about 2.70 m high and 1.30 m wide. In addition to reducing the loads carried by the structure of the bridge, the flood arch has the main function of easing water flow during floods and consequently reducing the dynamic action on the piles (Shtylla, 2013).

The bridge has no parapet: on top of the arch, some of the voussoirs protrude from the sides of the walking surface. Comparing this bridge with others stone bridge in the area, it can be supposed that these voussoirs originally served as curbstones aimed at preventing carts and animals from sliding while crossing the bridge (Lole, 1998; Kola, 2002; Shtylla, 2013) (Fig. I-5.1.4).

### Constructional features

The bridge is built of sedimentary stone (limestone and sandstone with lime mortar joints) following good construction techniques so as to effectively counteract external actions, such as water pressure. The care with which the building was made is recognisable in the abutments, in the construction of the flood arch and in the four transverse steel tie rods with wedges. Steel tie rods used to be inserted into the masonry when still incandescent; during cooling, thanks to the contraction of the iron, they enabled to tightened the structure. This guaranteed an enhanced functioning of tie rods and wall elements (Shtylla, 2013) (Fig. I-5.1.5).

On the left side of the bridge looking downstream, the ruins of a wall of considerable height can be noted, perhaps a part of a construction connected to the bridge. In the bottom part of this wall, the springing portion of an arch ring can be seen. Considering the presence of thermal springs in the immediate proximity of the bridge, a hypothesis may be that these remains are those of a wing wall with an arch, which allowed the water from the spring to flow into the river.



Figure I-5.1.4 – The roadway of the bridge.



Figure I-5.1.5 – A detail of the head of a transverse steel tie rods lacking of wedge.

### State of conservation

Katiu Bridge is in fair condition from a structural point of view. The decay of the materials depends not only on natural causes and ageing, but also and mainly on lack of maintenance.

In 1982 the bridge underwent restoration and consolidation work which involved the reconstruction of a portion of the left abutment of the bridge looking upstream. This abutment had been severely damaged by the events that occurred during World War II. The reconstructed portion can be easily distinguished because the quality of the ashlar is very different from the original ones<sup>1</sup> (Fig. I-5.1.6).

A second restoration campaign took place in 2018. It concerned the repair/replacement of missing ashlars in a part of the right abutment looking upstream and the re-pointing of the mortar joints. These works were not properly carried out in terms of material, technique and colour and have a negative impact on the appearance of the bridge (Fig. I-5.1.7).

During the field analysis, the absence of some ashlars was detected, in particular in correspondence of the intrados of the arch and of the right abutment looking downstream. Some spots (chromatic alterations) caused by chemical agents, the presence of some efflorescence and the superficial deposit of biological material were also observed. In some sections, there are traces of invasive vegetation among the ashlars that, if neglected, could further damage the mortar joints and progressively weaken their performance (Fig. I-5.1.8). Given the situation concerning incongruous elements (both structural and formal), it is necessary to carry out a comprehensive action involving the cleaning and restoring of the original material and chromatic features.



Figure I-5.1.6 –  
A detail of the  
abutment restored  
in 1982.

<sup>1</sup> On one of the 'new' ashlars the date "1982" has been carved, exactly as happened in the past when master-builders left their 'signature' on the stone.



Figure I-5.1.7 – A view of the bridge looking upstream showing the restoration work carried out in 2018.

Figure I-5.1.8 – A detail of the arch intrados.

## Intervention strategies

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### S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

#### A.1 Historical research

The Action aims to build an information framework as comprehensive as possible regarding the period of construction, the materials used and any restoration works that may have taken place.

#### A.2 Scientific survey of the building

The Action aims to provide a complete survey documentation of the bridge. In addition to the already available laser scanner survey<sup>(a)</sup>, it would be useful to gather all existing documentation and carry out a comparison of all documented surveys so as to have a chronology of works and obtain full knowledge of the building.

#### A.3 Preliminary analysis of the building

This Action aims at determining a comprehensive framework, necessary for carrying out any further in-depth analysis, and to identify any possible ongoing structural issues that, if neglected, could worsen and eventually require more complex and expensive works.

It relies on the scheduling and development of technological and structural investigations for the purpose of identifying any possible structural issues and to implement the adequate measures for repairing the damaged and compromised elements.

#### A.4 Restoration works

Through this action we suggest a series of specific restoration works on the decayed, damaged or incongruous sections of the bridge:

- Replacement of missing ashlars, in particular on the right abutment looking downstream and on the intrados of the arch;
- Replacement, based on the original materials and techniques, of the missing wedges;
- Repointing of the mortar joints on the two sides of the right abutment looking upstream<sup>(b)</sup>;
- Restoration of the sections of the cobblestones of the bridge which are incongruous with the original appearance;
- Cleaning of the wall facing in the sections affected by the presence and accumulation of alien materials.

### S6 Enhancement Strategies

#### A.5 Establishing an efficient information and communication system

Establishing an adequate information and communication system, would in the first place, guide the visitors approaching the building from the main roads; and secondly, once on site, would describe the monument and its history in relation to the past events concerning the village and the area.

Historical and technical information can be enriched with the oral stories transmitted by the locals, so as to strengthen the connection with the context and its memory (see A8, chap. I.3).

### S7 Management Strategies

#### A.6 Static monitoring of the bridge

This Action suggests the implementation of an adequate static monitoring of the bridge, even though the preliminary analysis did not reveal any signs of structural problems currently evolving. To this end, it is advisable to plan structural investigations in order to highlight any ongoing problem and eventually envisage measures to restore any damaged or compromised structural elements. The monitoring of the bridge will also allow identification of any failure, movement or settlements that could occur in the future.

#### A.7 Drafting of a Maintenance Plan of the bridge and of the surrounding area

The aim of this Action is to guarantee the preservation of the beauty of the place and to offer both villagers and visitors the opportunity to use and enjoy an orderly, clean and properly managed space, through the drafting of a *Maintenance Plan* (Caterina & Fiore, 2005).

The plan should establish the various maintenance measures, their periodicity, the workers assigned to carry them out, etc.

The following activities should be specifically provided for:

- Ordinary maintenance of the bridge, with periodical weeding and removal of any biological coating and accumulated materials such as dirt and dust;
- Ordinary maintenance of the area surrounding the bridge, including cleaning, taking care of the greenery and maintenance of any equipment and installations.

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*A.8 Establishing a surveillance and control system*

A single operator who manages the entrance of vehicles and visitors currently regulates access to the area of the bridge during the tourist season.

The Action suggests to strengthen the control system with a second operator in charge of surveilling and controlling the area of the bridge and of the thermal springs and of providing assistance in case of need.

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*A.9 Enhancing the rubbish collection and disposal service in the thermal area*

There are currently some rubbish bins in the thermal area that, especially during the summer, are still insufficient for the proper disposal of the amount of rubbish produced by visitors, and are not emptied with the necessary frequency.

The Action suggests to enhance the rubbish collection and disposal service in the thermal area in order to preserve the natural and aesthetic features of the place and to avoid the dispersion of waste and the resulting damage to the environment.

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*Notes*

- a) A complete survey of the bridge was undertaken in June 2019, during the Analysis Phase of the “The Diaspora as a Resource for the Knowledge, Preservation and Enhancement of the Lesser Known Cultural Sites in Albania” research project.
- b) The repointing of the mortar joints and the replacement of the missing ashlar in one of the abutments were completed during the last restoration work (2018) undertaken by the Swedish NGO CHwB (Cultural Heritage without Borders) based on the official project of the Institute of the Cultural Monuments drafted in 2015. See <<https://ata.gov.al/2018/09/19/ura-e-katiut-ne-fshatin-benje-i-nenshtrohet-restaurimit/>>.

## SECTION I.5.2 – THE CHURCH OF THE DORMITION OF MARY IN KOSINË

The Church of the Dormition of Mary is located at the entrance of the village of Kosinë, in a position overlooking the valley of the River Vjosa. It is an isolated landmark surrounded only by a few trees (Fig. I-5.2.1).

The village school is situated in the vast area below it. Until the restoration works of 2017<sup>2</sup> there was also a low enclosure wall that marked the limits of the church grounds on all sides just like a classical *temenos*.

The church is approximately 7.7 km from Përmet, and can be easily accessed on foot or using means of transportation.

### Historical and typological overview

The church of Kosinë is located in an area outside of the inhabited centre and constitutes the fulcrum of an area, which in the past apparently belonged to a monastic complex<sup>3</sup>. The area surrounding the church still includes ruins and traces of foundations of a series of structures adjacent to the church, which were demolished in the late Seventies<sup>4</sup>.

Archive photographs clearly reveal the presence of a very thick bell gable at a distance of approximately 5-6 m from the entrance to the church, which included a bell-fry<sup>5</sup>. To the south of the bell gable there was another compact structure that exceeded in width the facade of the church, whereas to the north of it there stood a longitudinal structure, which occupied the entire extension of the side of the church<sup>6</sup> (Fig. I-5.2.2). These additions did not present any particular architectural value and were probably built at different times.

Once all the 'alien' elements have been removed, the clear body of the church remains, which recalls the Byzantine tradition of the period between the Comnenus (1075-1185) and the Palaeologus (1224-1453) dynasties (Stylianou & Stylianou, 1997). The building has been unanimously dated between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries (Meksi, 2016; Thomo, 1998; Meksi, 2004). Vocotopoulos (2003), thanks to his personal interpretation of the inscription on a brick tile of the apse (Popa, 1998)<sup>7</sup>, aligns with this

<sup>2</sup> Although the restoration works was undertaken in 2017, the project dates back to 2014 (Stratobërdha *et al.*, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> This information was provided by the local inhabitants as well as by architect Gentjan Stratobërdha, who is in charge of the restoration and preservation works for the Albanian Autocephalous Orthodox Church.

<sup>4</sup> The Technical Report regarding the 1976 restoration work (Frashëri, 1976) records the decision to demolish the structures adjacent to the church. This is also confirmed by the photographs from 1981-82 in which the structures are no longer present.

<sup>5</sup> The year 1868 was carved on one of the ashlar, probably signalling the year of its construction (Popa, 1998)

<sup>6</sup> The Technical Report regarding the 1976 restoration work (Frashëri, 1976) specifies that the longitudinal body of the building to the north was used during the Hoxha regime as the village post office. Thus, it cannot be excluded that it may have been built during the first decades of the regime.

<sup>7</sup> The inscription mentioned by Vocotopoulos is the one published by Popa in the book dedicated to inscriptions in Albanian churches, and was located in a circular brick inserted under the pediment above the apse.



Figure I-5.2.1  
View of the church  
from the village.



Figure I-5.2.2  
The church  
before the 1982  
restoration  
campaign. *Left:*  
View from north-  
east (with the  
added volume still  
present). *Right:* The  
XIX Century belfry  
now demolished.  
[Courtesy: NICH]

hypothesis, but furtherly specifies the date of the construction by locating it in the last decade of the 12<sup>th</sup> century.

From the point of view of the plan composition, the church in Kosinë belongs to the domed cross-in-square typology. However, a slight 'irregularity' is present because of the two small rooms that laterally connect the narthex with the naos. These belong to the narthex from a spatial point of view, thus breaking the cross-in-square scheme in the western part of the church. The arms of the cross are not equal: those with an

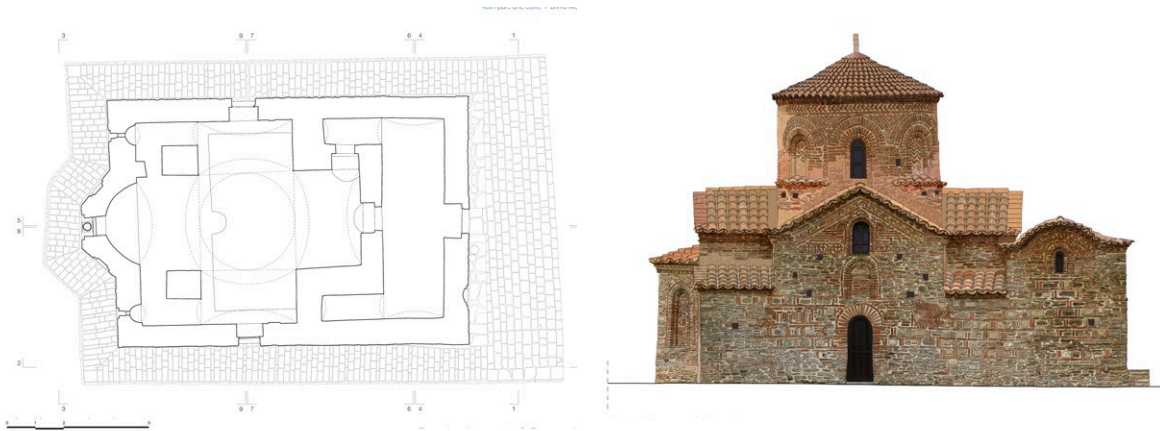


Figure I-5.2.3 east-west direction are slightly longer than those with a north-south direction. This somehow strengthens the hypothesis that the church belonged to an archaic period of Byzantine architecture.

Left: Floor plan of the church. Right: Photoplan of the north facade.

In the central section of the cross there are four pendentives on which stands the drum of the semi-spherical dome. The apse confirms the general trend of small rural Byzantine churches and presents a concave semi-cylindrical surface on the inside and polygonal on the outside (Meksi, 2004).

The entrance to the church is located on the western side, through the narthex that conducts into the naos. In addition to the main entrance, it is possible to enter the church also through two secondary doors located on the north and south facades. These two entrances, which had previously been walled, were re-opened in 2014 (Stratobërdha *et al.*, 2014) (Fig. I-5.2.3).

#### Constructional features

The Church of the Dormition of Mary is made of stone and bricks. From the restoration reports (1982; 2014) and from the meetings held with Albanian scholars involved with the church<sup>8</sup>, it was made clear that the stone used for its construction is local, whereas there is no information regarding the origin of the bricks.

The masonry is not regular and the stone elements vary in size. On the external walls, a *cloisonné* masonry technique can be found. In addition to the decorative aspect, this technique also has a structural purpose. In fact, this solution – which commonly uses irregular stone blocks – defines constructive sub-units (or macro-blocks), that are more stable from a mechanic point of view<sup>9</sup> (Fig. I-5.2.4).

In 1982, the external plaster was removed<sup>10</sup>. It is probable that after the removal of the plaster, some parts of the masonry were improperly restored, since the technique of setting the stone elements is not extended to the whole wall surface, but only to some portions. It is thus possible to suppose that the sections where *cloisonné* masonry is now present are the result of the various restoration works carried out since 1982, and

<sup>8</sup> Meetings took place on 3/8/2019 and 6/8/2019, respectively, with professors Pirro Thomo and Aleksandër Meksi.

<sup>9</sup> On the use of *cloisonné* in South-East Europe, see Reusche, 1971.

<sup>10</sup> According to professor Meksi the church was not originally plastered, thus justifying the decision to recover the original *facies* of the church.



therefore do not necessarily belong to the original masonry. These operations demonstrate the evident will of the restorers to align the church of Kosinë with the dominant Byzantine church model.

The roof of the church consists of a wooden structure; over time both the geometry and the roof covering have been modified. The previous covering of split stone slabs was replaced (in 1982) with a covering of brick tiles. It is not possible to say with certainty whether the original roof of the late 12<sup>th</sup> century had a brick or stone covering<sup>11</sup> (Figs. I-5.2.5 and I-5.2.6).

#### State of conservation

Structurally the church is in good condition. It should however be recalled that for many decades (especially during the years of the Communist regime) it was in a state of abandonment and neglect that caused a number of problems to the building elements and to the interior decorations (Fig. I-5.2.7).

The most important recent restoration work was carried out in 2017 (based on a project drafted in 2014). It involved the walls, the repointing of mortar joints, the construction of a drain channel around the perimeter of the church, the reconstruction of the roof covering and the waterproofing of the roof<sup>12</sup>. Unfortunately, the problem concerning water leaks has not yet been fully solved.

The National Institute of Cultural Heritage (NICH) recently approved the restoration of the wall paintings (Vokopola, 2019). Prior to this, problem of water leaks through the roof, as well as of the rising damp that still affects the northern and eastern walls of the church, should be solved.

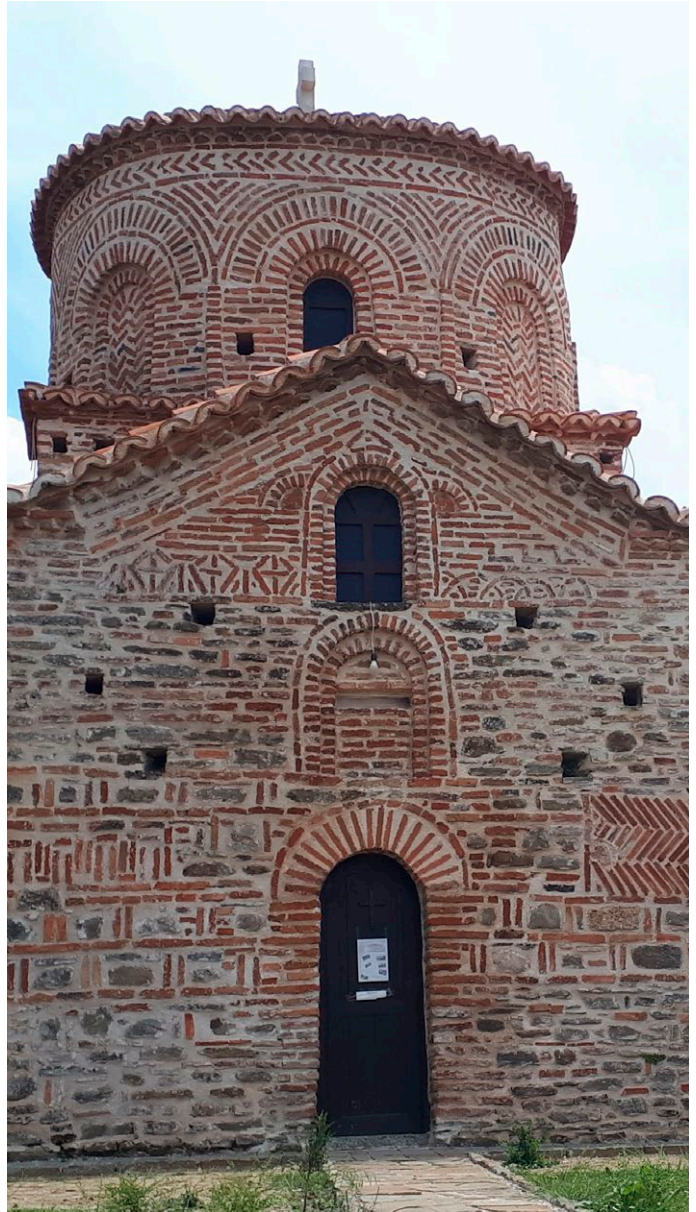


Figure I-5.2.4 – Detail of the north facade of the church with the cloisonné and other decoration techniques.

<sup>11</sup> Stone slab roof covering was also found in other churches in the area between Gjirokastër and Korça, such as, for example, the churches of Labovë e Kryqit and of Ristozë in Mborje.

<sup>12</sup> According to the restoration project (2014) a type of mortar called *horasan* was used on the extrados, as well as on the joints and as plaster. This type of mortar is made of ground bricks (*chamotte*) and lime in a 1:1 ratio.



Figure I-5.2.5 – Views of the church before the 1982 restoration campaign. [Courtesy: Pirro Thomo]



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7

Figure I.5.2.6 – Detail of the roof of the apsidal pediment and of the drum.

Figure I-5.2.7 – View from below of the drum and cupola with the Christ Pantocrator.

## Intervention strategies

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### S3 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

#### A.1 Historical research

The Actions aims at gathering all the available information regarding the historical knowledge of the church, its furnishings (including the iconostasis and its icons), as well as the structures which were previously located in the surrounding area. Special attention must be given to the wall paintings inside the church that are partially covered by other paintings or plasters.

State institutions and the Albanian Orthodox Autocephalous Church will be the primary sources for obtaining the necessary documentation, but also oral evidence from the locals and any documents found in Kosinë (such as period photographs) may be useful for the purposes of historical research.

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#### A.2 Scientific survey of the building

See A.2, sect. I.S.1.

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#### A.3 Preliminary analysis of the building

See A.3, sect. I.S.1

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#### A.4 Restoration works

The following works are aimed at opposing the main causes of decay and to halt any existing deficiencies. These works must be consistent with international restoration principles and standards<sup>(a)</sup>.

#### ROOF WATERPROOFING

Despite the restoration works, there are still signs of run-off and a high percentage of humidity inside the church. Roof waterproofing is pivotal for the preservation of the building and the safeguarding of the wall paintings. The works must be preceded by investigations aimed at identifying and accurately locating the necessary works to be undertaken.

#### WALL DAMP PROOFING

This mostly concerns some sections of the walls to the north and east. It is necessary to intervene resolutely so as to completely eliminate a problem which could irreversibly damage the wall paintings, which are already affected by efflorescence. The assessment and management of surface waters should also be provided for.

#### RESTORATION OF WALL PAINTINGS

The restoration of wall paintings, already programmed, must be carried out after the completion of the works described above. In addition to addressing the various factors of decay that affect the wall paintings, it is necessary to intervene to remove the layers of paint and plaster that cover the original paintings.

#### RESTORATION OF THE ICONOSTASIS AND DECORATIONS

From the documentation obtained from the National Institute of Cultural Heritage (NICH), it appears that before the 2017 restoration campaign there was an iconostasis inside the church. There is no information today concerning the whereabouts of the iconostasis and its icons.

Through the collaboration with the religious authorities, an attempt may be made to return the icons to their original location and to rebuild the iconostasis. An assessment must be made, from both an operative and methodological point of view, whether to order the lost icons from iconographers specialised in the reproduction of ancient icons in accordance with ancient painting techniques and Byzantine iconographic regulations. In order to obtain the necessary resources for the restoration of the iconostasis and the possible remake of the icons, a crowd-funding operation could be undertaken, addressed especially to the villagers who have migrated abroad.

#### IMPROVING TECHNOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

Align the lighting system with European standards and implement solutions to render it suitable to the environment in which it is set.

Considering the location of the church (isolated and on the top of a hillock), it is important to provide for the placement of an efficient protection system against atmospheric discharges which, however, does not alter the appearance and architectural features of the building.

With the purpose of enhancing safety and security in the church fire protection, video surveillance, and intruder alarm systems should be installed.

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### S4 Enhancement Strategies

#### A.5 Establishing an efficient information and communication system

See A.5 sect. I.S.1

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*A.6 Drafting a project for the environmental regeneration of the area surrounding the church*

Through this Action we seek to bring more attention towards the landscape values of the area as an essential aspect of the proposed architectural works, which should therefore enhance the current landscape context. The materials used and the forms of the paths and of any specific equipment must have a low visual impact and fully respect natural materials and the natural features of the place.

The environmental regeneration project should provide for the following works:

**ASSESSMENT AND CRITICAL RECOVERY OF THE TRACES OF BUILDINGS DEMOLISHED AROUND THE CHURCH**

The traces of demolished structures must be assessed primarily from the point of view of their meaning and historical value. This will be followed by the selection of the most significant testimonials to be highlighted and integrated within the design process<sup>(b)</sup>.

**DESIGNING A PATHWAYS SYSTEM**

It will be necessary to set paved paths that, in addition to enhancing accessibility to the church and the surrounding area, connect the church to the school and to the bordering green area, so as to establish new paths and activate new opportunities for social interaction and leisure for both villagers and tourists.

**MAINTENANCE OF GREEN AREAS**

The project must intervene with care on the natural layout of the terrain, establishing green areas for carrying out social and cultural activities (see A.8), and planting autochthonous trees and shrubs species so as not to modify the natural appearance and configuration of the place.

**ENHANCEMENT OF THE NATURAL SCENIC VIEWPOINT OVER THE VJOSA VALLEY**

See A.11, chap. I.3.

**PLACEMENT OF STREET FURNITURE AND EQUIPMENT**

The project must provide for appropriate equipment such as benches, rest areas, rubbish bins, etc.

**INSTALLATION OF AN EXTERNAL LIGHTING SYSTEM**

The project should include an adequate illumination of the exterior areas in order to ensure a greater and safer usability at night. This will also allow to highlight the architectural features of the church fostering its visibility also during the night, both from the village and from the road to Përmet.

For a project based on the measures envisaged in this Action see Fig. I-5.2.8.

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*A.7 Enhancing the role of the church as both a community and tourist resource*

This Action aims to obtain the opening of the church at least some days per week<sup>(c)</sup>.

With the authorisation of the priest, the inhabitants of the village could, voluntarily and taking turns, offer to dedicate some hours per week to welcoming visitors and providing surveillance.

Tourists could be charged with an entrance fee in order to provide for cleaning and maintenance of the church, as well as to ensure a small wage for the custodians.

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*A.8 Promoting cultural and social activities in the area surrounding the church*

The aim of the Action is to use the vast green area surrounding the church (characterised by many virtues such as a dominant position overlooking the Vjosa Valley, the proximity to the road and to the village, etc.), for housing cultural and social activities in line with the sacredness of the place, such as concerts of iso-polyphonic music and theatre or traditional dance performances (see Fig. I.5.2.8).

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**S7 Management Strategies***A.9 Static Monitoring of the church*

See A.6, sect. I.5.1.

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*A.10 Drafting of a Maintenance Plan of the church and of the surrounding area*

See A.7, sect. I.5.1.

*Once established, the plan could be implemented by the villagers themselves, through voluntary work at the service of the community which would cover the simpler and less strenuous tasks.*

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**Notes**

- a) Venice Charter (1964), arts. 9, 11, and 12, and subsequently Conventions and Declarations.
- b) In the past, next to the church there was an enclosure consisting of a stone wall approximately 1 metre high. There are currently four trees on site, one at each corner of the former enclosure.
- c) Access currently depends on the availability of the priest, who personally opens the church and also keeps the keys.

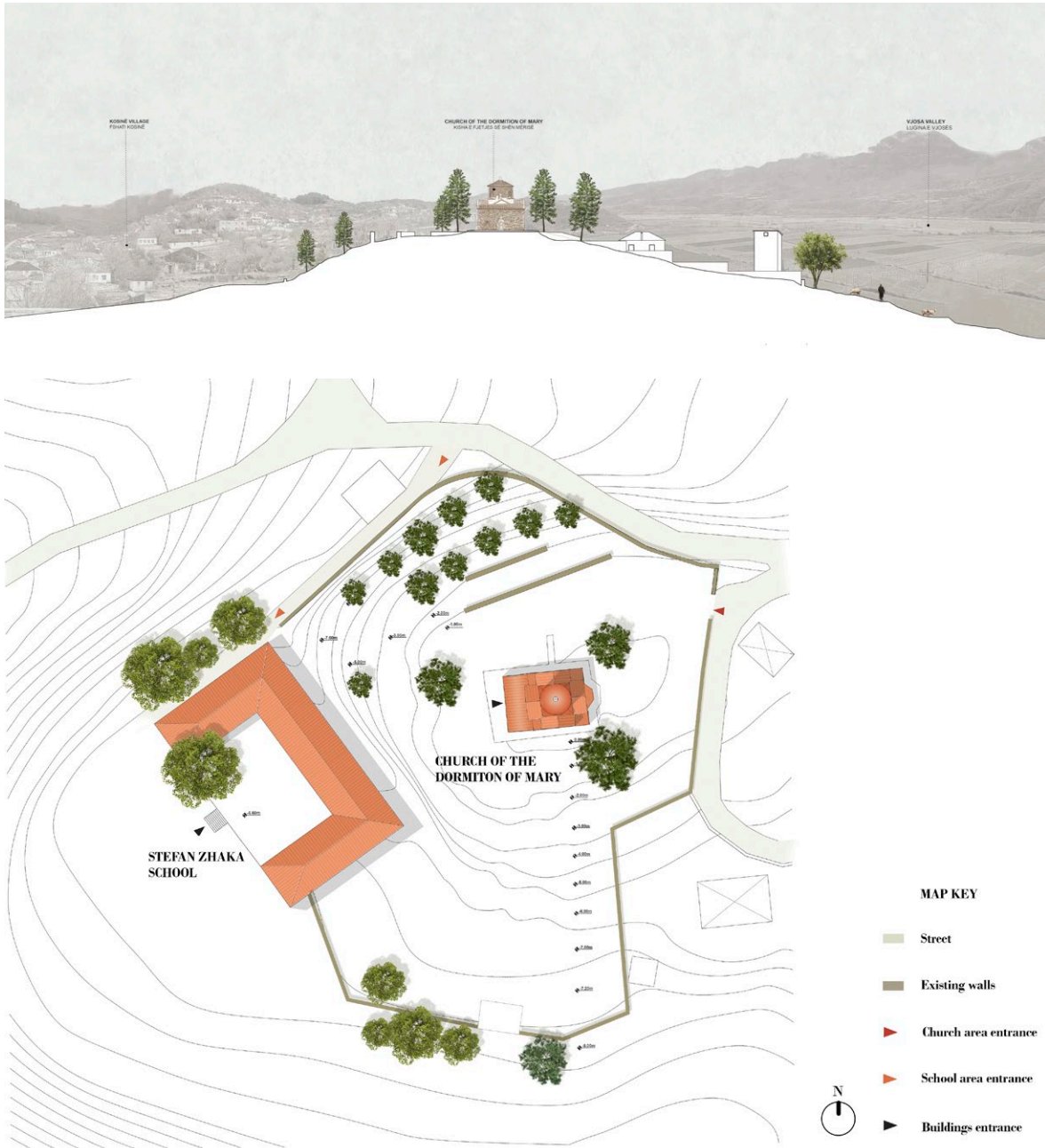
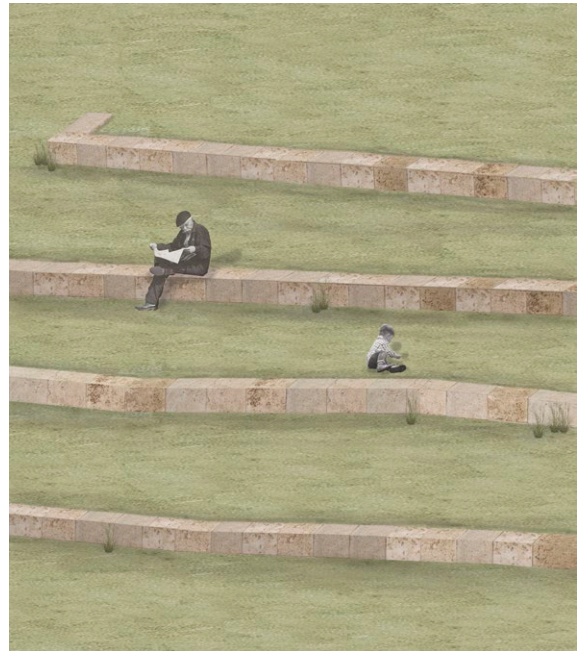
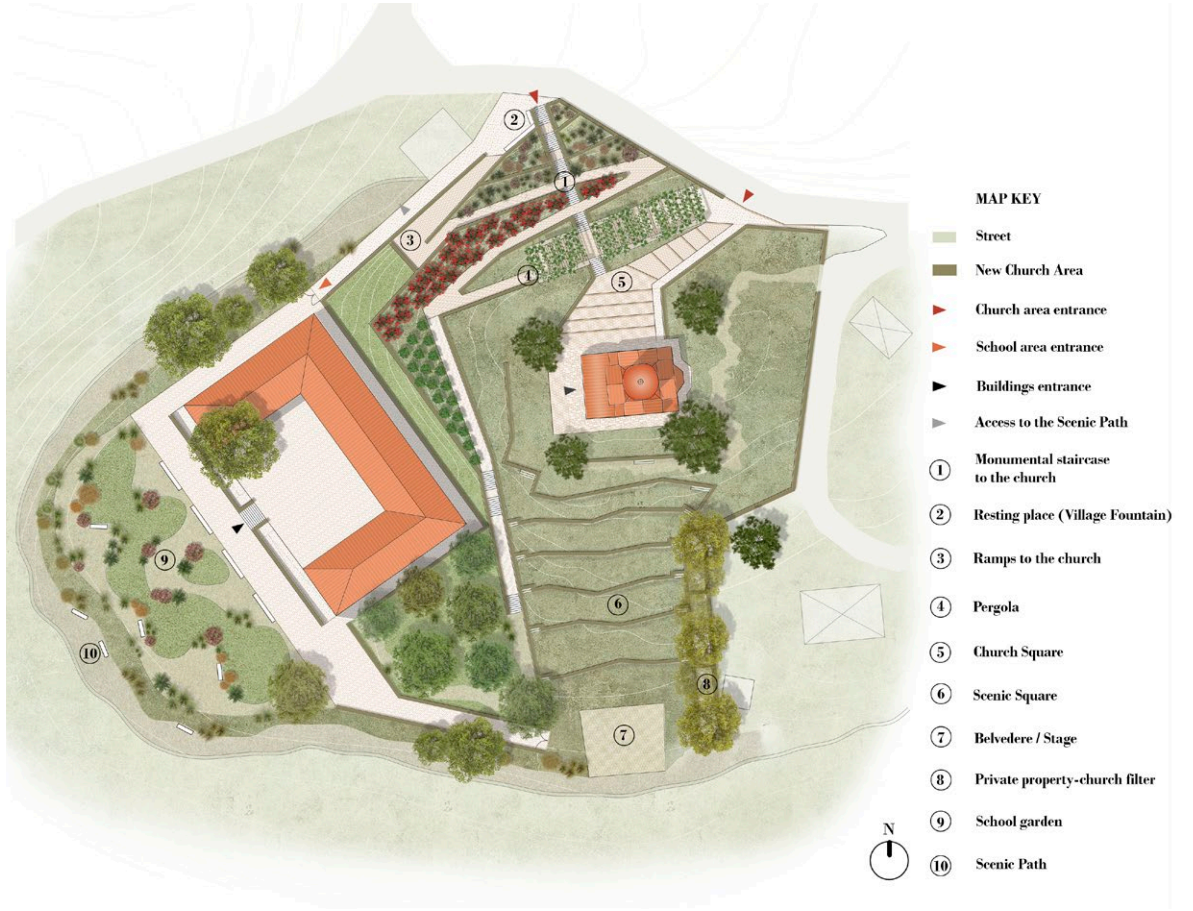


Figure I-5.2.8 – Redevelopment project of the area around the church of Kosinë. *Above:* Environmental section and plan of the current situation. *Opposite page. Above:* Masterplan of the project proposal. The project – designed by Samuela Hidri – aims to achieve the following goals: (1) guarantee a better accessibility for everyone to the area of the Church and the village school by introducing a new system of ramps and stairs; (2) enhance local materials and techniques; (3) recover the traditional gathering places in the village like the ‘village fountain’; (4) provide new functional opportunities (for instance a small open-air theatre); (5) enrich the vegetation through an educational garden made of local aromatic and medical plants, a small planting of local fruit trees and spontaneous shrubbery and a new garden in the school yard; (6) design new scenic paths and views on the Vjosa Valley. *Below:* Renderings of the Pergola (left) and the Scenic square (right).



### SECTION I.5.3 – THE CHURCH OF THE DORMITION OF MARY IN LEUSË

The Church of the Dormition of Mary in Leusë is a historical monument of exceptional beauty located in a remarkable landscape, which overlooks the Vjosa Valley (Fig. I-5.3.1). The church is situated to the east of the village, near the road that connects Leusë to Përmet. It stands on a slope that descends toward the river, taking advantage of the natural acclivity of the hill.

The church is located within an area enclosed by a stone wall, and stands in a lower position than the entrance by the road. A curved staircase paved with stone slabs overcomes this height difference. This area includes, in addition to the church, a small cemetery (located on the northern and western sides) and two specimens of *cupressus sempervirens*, listed as Natural Monuments and which, due to their height (20 m) and the regularity of their crown, are quite impressive.

What is striking about the cemetery is the evident disparity between the ancient tombs and the newer ones. Whereas the former are characterised by a uniformity and sobriety of materials and forms, in the latter the design, as well as the size and the type of materials, are used for exhibiting the affluence of the family, or else for depicting the tragic death of the deceased, thus generating a disquieting effect, in strong contrast with the ‘composed’ nature of the place<sup>13</sup>.

#### Historical and typological overview

The church of Leusë falls within the general category of post-Byzantine Albanian churches. As far as the construction year is concerned, the most certain evidence is found in the founding inscription (Rembeci, 2006) on the entrance gateway, which says: “It was built from its foundations and painted, this honoured and divine temple of our most holy and venerated Lady, the Mother of God from Eleusa<sup>14</sup> with the contribution in terms of effort and expenses of the devout Christians of this village<sup>15</sup>, known as Leusë which was saved by the Lord at the time when his grace monsignor Joasaf of Agraфа was bishop of the diocese of Korça and Përmet [two lines were cancelled]. By the hands of the painters Michael, George and George of Fjonjati, in the year of salvation 1812, April 18<sup>16</sup>”.

Two other dates were found, however, in two icons of the iconostasis (which today are probably kept at the Museum of Mediaeval Art in Korça). The first (1778) on the icon of John the Baptist, and the second (1764) on the silver frame of the icon of the Virgin (Popa, 1998). The two dates on the icons led some scholars (Thomo *et al.*, 1999; Thomo & Stratobërdha, 2005) to doubt the dating on the founding inscription and to consider that the church was built during the sixth decade of the 18<sup>th</sup> century instead. In truth, there are no valid motives for considering that the date of 1812 is incorrect. The comparisons with similar inscriptions in other churches of the area<sup>17</sup> demonstrate the will to leave behind a trustworthy historical testimony. The two 18<sup>th</sup> century dates

<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon is typical of the past few decades in other parts of Albania as well.

<sup>14</sup> Leusë takes its name from the Greek word “Eleusa”, which means “merciful”. “Virgin Eleusa” is also one of the names of Mary in the Orthodox tradition.

<sup>15</sup> In the Greek version the word “κώμης” is used, generally referring to a somewhat large settlement, equivalent to a small city.

<sup>16</sup> Free translation of the Albanian version in Popa (1998: 193). The original inscription is in Greek.

<sup>17</sup> Consider, for example, the Church of Saint Nicholas in Voskopojë, a village near Korça and Përmet, which specifies both the year of construction and the year in which the frescos were painted.





Figure I-5.3.1  
View of the church  
almost hidden by  
the vegetation.

on the icons might simply testify their belonging to the iconostasis of a previous building that existed where the present church now stands.

There are in fact traces of a previous church in the pavement of the current building, which were revealed during the last restoration work (1999). These consist of a base and of part of the shaft of a column, which is misaligned with the line of columns of the current church<sup>18</sup>.

The iconostasis has always represented an element of great worth for the church (Fig. I-5.3.2). The finely carved doors were presented at an exhibition in Paris during the Fifties and generated great interest. After the closure of the exhibition, it seems that they were taken to the National Museum in Tirana, but there is no proof of this. What is certain instead is that they never returned to Leusë (Mihali, 2018). Other wooden elements were violently torn off during the heyday of the Communist regime's declared atheism and, unfortunately later as a result of vandalism, which was widespread in rural areas. What can be seen today is an incomplete work of art waiting to be restored<sup>19</sup>. The icons were transferred to the Museum of Mediaeval Art of Korça (as is the case of a great many icons from orthodox churches in Albania), as a result of precise instructions issued by the government in the early Eighties (Mihali, 2018)<sup>20</sup>. There is no certainty, however, that all the icons are in Korça. It is possible that some may have been lost.

<sup>18</sup> Given the high degree of seismic hazard of the area, it cannot be excluded that the old church collapsed due to an earthquake, as the anti-seismic devices present in the current building would seem to confirm.

<sup>19</sup> Many fragments taken from the iconostasis are now piled up in the narthex of the church.

<sup>20</sup> Niko Mihali, who at the time worked for the Governmental Section for Education and Culture, affirms that most of the icons of the churches in Përmet's area were transferred to Korça, but does not specify the final destination of the icons taken from the Leusë iconostasis.



Figure I-5.3.2  
View of the carved wooden iconostasis of the church. Significant portions of it have been removed or seriously damaged.

We know from the founding inscription that the church was built thanks to the financial contribution of the families from the village. According to an oral testimony obtained during the field analysis<sup>21</sup>, the construction was supported also by contributions from migrants who at that time already represented a large part of the population. This is an important fact that calls a reflection on the role played by emigration in the development of Albanian society from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and throughout the whole 19<sup>th</sup> century (see Prifti, 2002). Remittances from emigrants were often invested in the construction of churches, used to demonstrate the strong link between the inhabitants and their homeland, finding in the religious building a symbolic representation of their sense of belonging.

An evocative example of this link between the inhabitants of the village and the church is a pencil inscription near the main portal of the church, which says: “Leusa e bukur u dogj krejt nga ushtria naziste barbare, datë 12-6-1944, Kujtim nga [?] Vasil dhe [?]” (“Beautiful Leusë was burned to the ground by the barbarian Nazi army, dated 12-6-1944, Remembrance of [?] Vasil and [?]”). This shows the affection of the inhabitants for their village, their love for “beautiful Leusë”, as well as the wish to leave

<sup>21</sup> There are no documents to prove the economic contribution of emigrants in the construction of the church. Yet this information – provided by Mr. Aleks Todhe, local representative of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage – seems more than plausible, considering the extent of emigration from the rural areas of the south-east of Albania during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

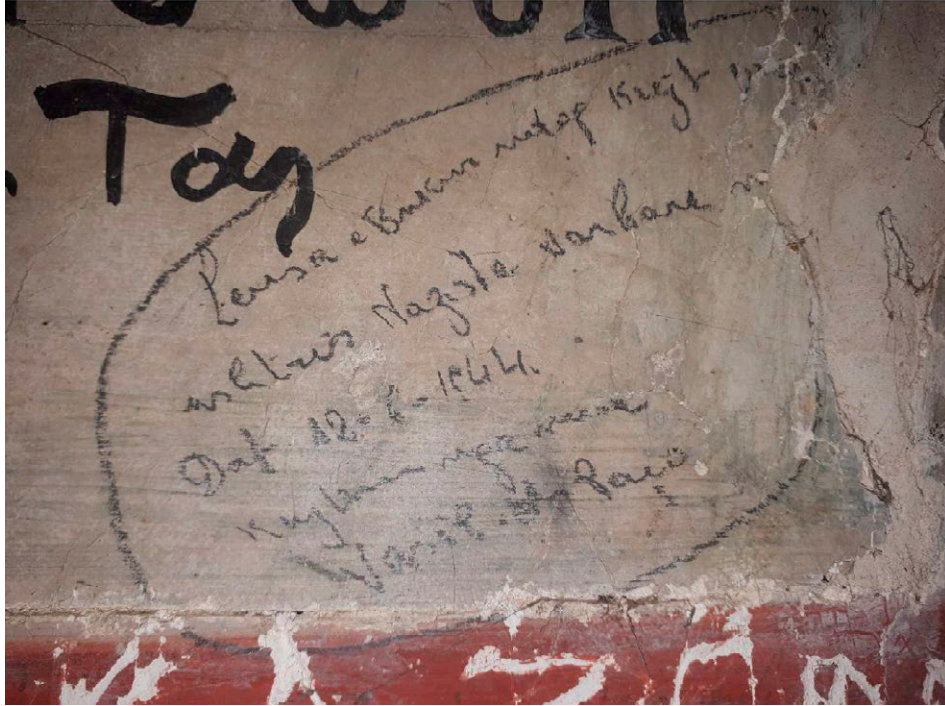


Figure I-5.3.3  
A pencil inscription that narrates a pivotal moment of the life of the church and its village during World War II.

a testimony for future generations of the dramatic event that took place during World War II (Fig. I-5.3.3).

The church of Leusë belongs to the three-naved basilica typology, with a barrel-vault on the main nave and cupolas on the lateral ones<sup>22</sup> (Figs. I-5.3.4 and I-5.3.5). The canonical architectural units are clearly evident: the naos, the bema, the narthex on the western side and the portico on the northern side. The narthex rises on two levels: the first level is a few steps higher than the pavement of the naos, whereas a timber staircase reaches the second. On the upper level of the narthex is the *matroneum* – the “*gyneconitis*” of the Orthodox tradition, a term usually used in the Vitruvian lexicon to identify spaces reserved for women in the Greek house. Another small structure that was also added to the south of the church, which serves as an ossuary.

The portico, with eight arches and stone columns, is located along the north side of the church (Fig. I-5.3.6). The lack of masonry continuity between the church and the portico – visible both in the assessments of the building and in the surveys illustrated in the restoration project report (Thomo *et al.*, 1999) – seem to suggest a subsequent addition<sup>23</sup>. The construction, however, must not have taken place much later, considering the stylistic coherence between the wall paintings on the facade (to which the portico is attached) and those on the inside.

<sup>22</sup> Thomo (1998) has extensively addressed the analysis of post-Byzantine church typologies in Albania.

<sup>23</sup> This hypothesis is furtherly supported by the comparison with the plans of other post-Byzantine churches made by Meksi & Thomo (1981, tab. V) where the portico, marked by a different tracing, is systematically indicated as a section added subsequently to the main building of the church. See, *inter alia*, the Church of Good Friday in Përmet, the Church of Saint Nicholas in Lipë (a village in Përmet), as well as some churches in Berat and Gjirokastrë.

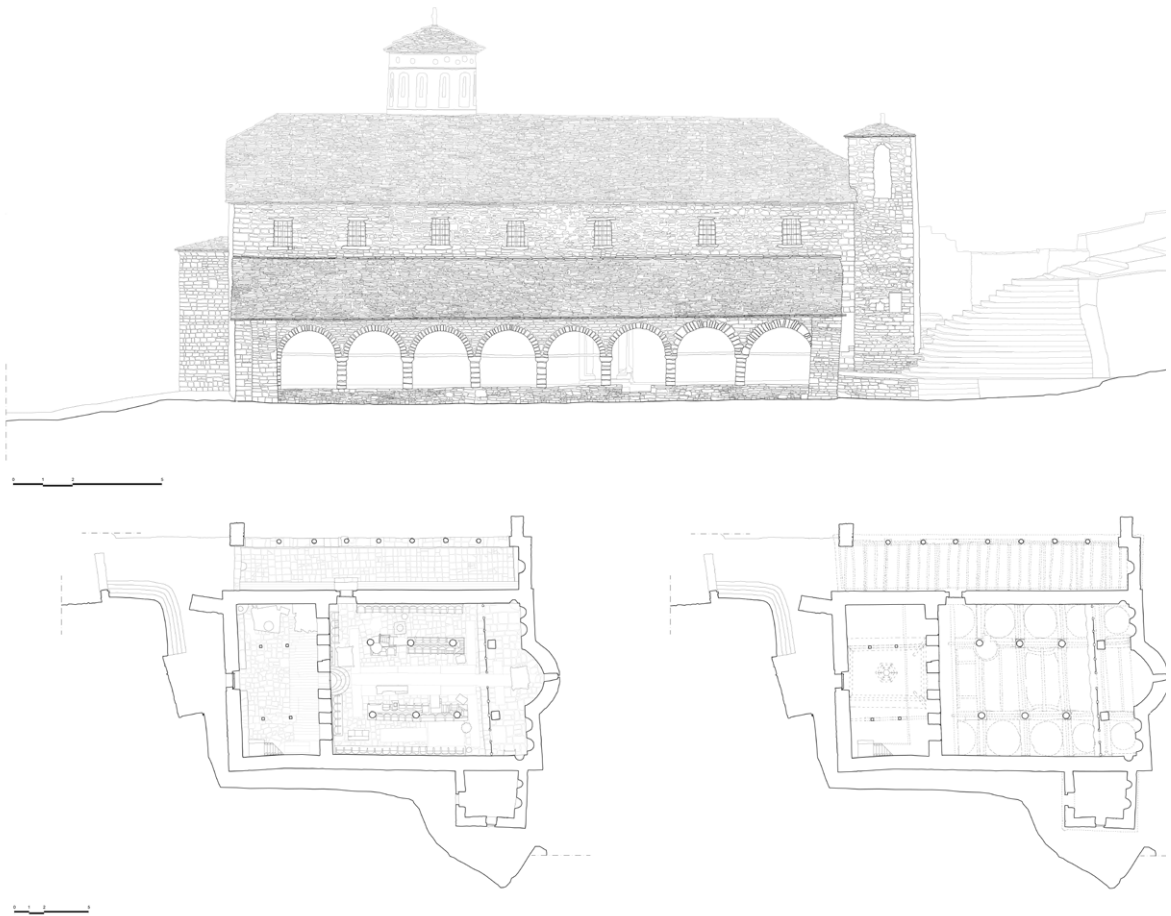


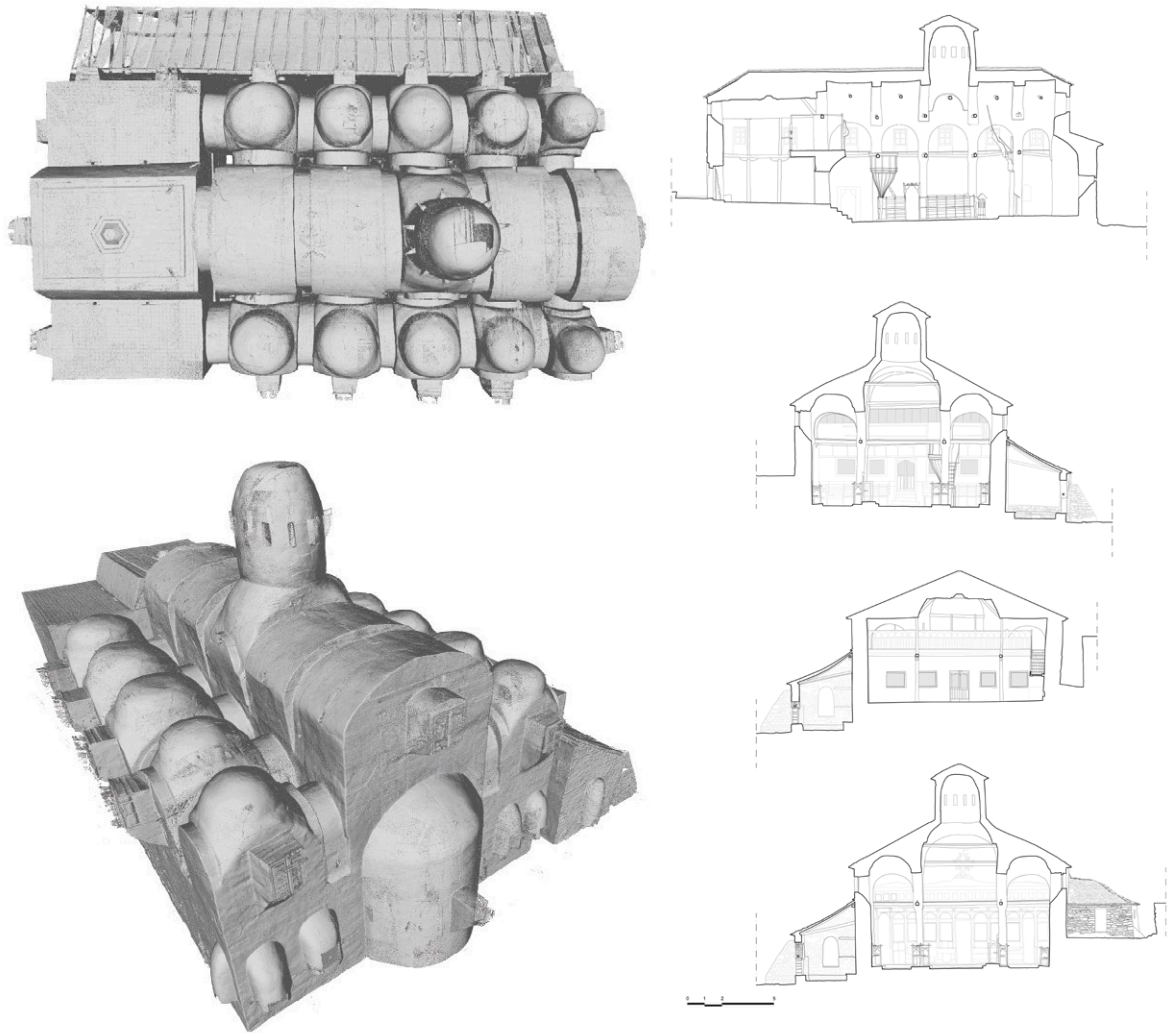
Figure I-5.3.4  
 Above: North  
 facade of the  
 church. Below:  
 Plans.

The main entrance to the church is through the portico, which opens directly onto the naos, the main and most representative space of the church. The entrance is off-centre with respect to the interior, as is typical in Orthodox churches in the South of Albania.

The church can also be entered from a secondary access on the western side, which opens onto the narthex. The stone portal of the main entrance is shaped as a trefoil arch, a very widespread element in Mediaeval architecture, both in the West and in the Byzantine area, and re-proposed here in a version which probably also has some Islamic influence. Its particularity lies in the use of a monolithic block rather than the usual voussoirs for the construction of the arch<sup>24</sup>; a solution that is also found in other religious buildings in the area, such as for example the Church of St. Mary in Bënjë. Above the trefoil arch, there are three blind arches, a typical decorative pattern of the Byzantine tradition (see Ćurčić, 2010 and chap. III.5), which in Leusë hosts the scene of the Dormition of Mary (Fig. I-5.3.7).

Wall paintings entirely cover the interior of the church (Fig. I-5.3.8). The subject matters come from both the Old and New Testament, as well as from the lives of the

<sup>24</sup> This structure actually works as a lintel. It is therefore, to all intents and purposes, a lintel shaped as a “three-lobed arch”. It was chosen to keep the term “arch” in the description because the solution reflects the evident will of the builders to show an arch rather than a lintel.



saints, of Jesus Christ and of the Virgin Mary. The latter two are usually represented larger than the former. The scenes are enhanced with vegetal motifs, cartouches and expressive and very dynamic narrative elements, which derive from the influence of Western Baroque art (Vocotopoulos, 2006)<sup>25</sup>. The paintings are also on the outside, on the portion of the facade covered by the portico. These paintings are more difficult to appreciate due to decay, but also and mainly to vandalism from people solely concerned with leaving a trace of their presence. Paradoxically, although these acts of vandalism caused serious damage to the paintings, they also turned into a proper narrative, a sort of ‘historical document’ with an anthropological value.

Figure I-5.3.5 –  
Left: 3D views of  
the church. Right:  
Sections.

<sup>25</sup> The apse and the small cupola of one of the bays next to it present paintings of poor quality, against a homogenous blue background and without the structure and richness of details that characterises the rest. It is a later intervention (the date 1896 is inscribed in the area of the apse), fortunately limited to a small section of the interior surface.



Figure I-5.3.6  
The portico of the church.

#### Constructional features

The building was constructed using local materials. The vertical load-bearing structure is in masonry with a three-leaf wall that is approximately 90 cm thick. The two external leaves (wythes) are made up in a coursed irregular stone masonry (Fig. I-5.3.9). The stone blocks (of sandstone and limestone) are held together with lime mortar. In order to ensure a better bonding/anchoring between orthogonal walls, stones used as quoins are considerably larger than those used on the rest of the wall. Inside the wall, there are timber elements, which probably have the function of enhancing the response of the building to seismic actions. Probably they are part of a traditional system consisting of a couple of longitudinal timber joists connected at regular intervals with smaller transversal elements<sup>26</sup>. This timber frame is repeated at regular intervals in height (approximately 80-100 cm).

The perimeter walls continue underground to a depth of approximately 130 cm with stone foundations that have the same thickness as the wall. The columns originally stood on the ground at the same level as the perimeter walls and were supported by a masonry base.

The church has a half hipped roof, a result of the combination between a gable roof and a truncated hip roof. This solution, unlike the classic hip roof, allows for the creation of high windows in order to better illuminate the bema on the eastern side and the matroneum to the west (Fig. I-5.3.10).

<sup>26</sup> The distribution of timber elements is a hypothesis developed based on comparisons with other similar structures involving field observations as well as on information provided by prof. Pirro Thomo, designer of the restoration work carried out in 1999.



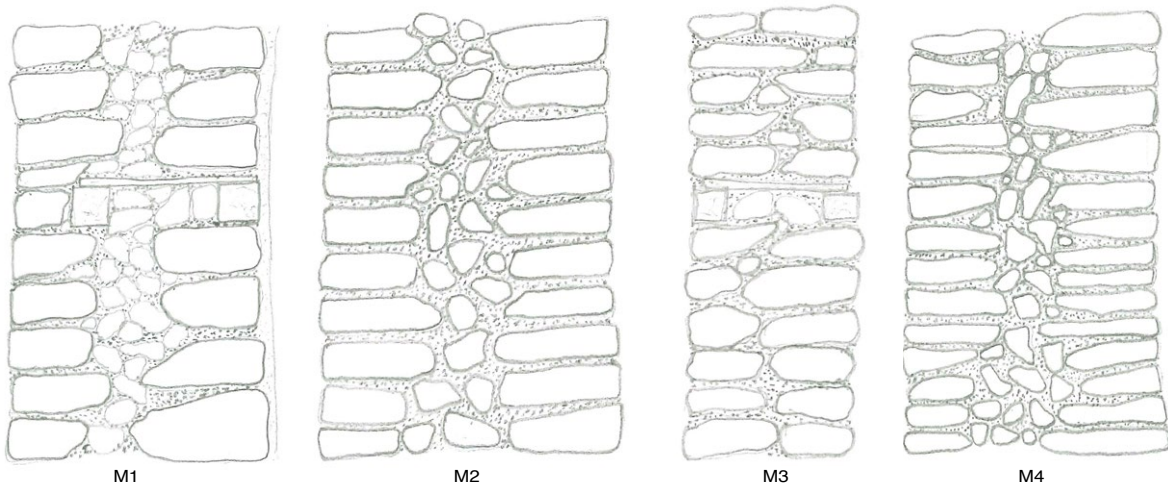
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Figure I-5.3.7 – *Left*: The trefoil arch of the entrance. *Right*: The representation of the Dormition of Mary, which surmount the arch.

Figure I-5.3.8 – *Left*: The outstanding wall paintings of the interior of the church. *Right*: Graffiti on the wall paintings on the portion of the facade under the portico.



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Figure I-5.3.9 – Purely indicative sketches of plausible masonry arrangements exhibiting a mechanical behaviour comparable to that of the real masonry typologies.

*From left to right:* M1: perimeter walls of the church, three-leaf masonry with inner core and timber laces. M2: masonry of the footing system of the church, three-leaf masonry (with inner core but without reinforcement) made of more regular and better accommodated stone blocks. M3: masonry of the charnel house, two-leaf stone masonry with smaller blocks than the M1 typology and with timber reinforcement elements. M4: masonry of the lower part of the bell tower, three-leaf stone masonry with rather big blocks but no timber elements. [Drawings by Giulia Misseri]

Figure I-5.3.10 – View of the roof of the church and its stone slabs covering.



A similar roof is found in the church of Bënjë (also from the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and in other churches in the area of Voskopojë (a town near Korça), where the most significant examples of post-Byzantine religious architecture in the region can be found.

The area where the church and the small cemetery are located is surrounded by a dry stone retaining wall; during the 1999 restoration work, upstream and downstream the church, some sections of reinforced concrete retain wall, camouflaged by stone cladding, were built.

Beyond the wall on the southern side, there is a system for the collection and channelling of rainwater, consisting in small canals, made with stones, whose purpose is to conduct the water that washes away along the slope of the church into the two streams located to the east and west. This hydraulic system, essential to the preservation of the church, is not currently working.

### State of conservation

As mentioned earlier, in 1999 the church underwent a general restoration/consolidation work that concerned all the structural elements of the building, from the foundations to the roof. Before the restoration, the building was in a very poor state of conservation, and without the said work, it is probable that the church would have been irreparably lost.

As shown in the restoration project report (Thomo *et al.*, 1999), the consolidation work of the foundations consisted in the creation of a grid of reinforced concrete beams that connects the base of the columns with portions, also reinforced, of the foundations of the perimeter walls. This work was necessary because from the crack pattern analysis prior to the consolidation works, the building was seen to be affected by a series of fractures extending along the entire longitudinal axis (from the narthex to the apse). These fractures had produced visible rotations of the column bases and the slippage from the walls of the wooden tie rods of the arches.

The damage phenomenon described is due to the particular geological conformation of the soil on which the building stands. From the geological analyses carried out before the restoration work, it emerged that the church is located above two formations – flysch and breccia – that overlap almost on the longitudinal axis of the building. In particular, the flysch formation has shown a marked vulnerability towards the suffusion phenomenon that induces a very evident settlement.

Other consolidation works concerned the straightening of the columns, the construction of new steel tie rods above those in timber that were no longer efficient and crack repairing in the vaulted structures and walls.

From a site survey carried out in June 2019 by a team of the University of Florence, it appears that the restoration work concentrating on the foundations did not completely solve the problems caused by the settlement of the ground. Some settlement effects can be still detected analysing the crack pattern of the church floor as well as in the detachments of the walls of the buttresses next to the portico and in the reopening of the lesions in the arches of the portico itself.

This analysis, as well as the interviews with experts, have highlighted the necessity to carry out additional investigations and monitoring activities to deepen available knowledge on the geological setting of the site and the related geotechnical hazards, and thus to identify the possible actions to be undertaken in order to preserve the building (see Misseri *et al.*, 2020).



Figure I-5.3.11  
Severe damage on  
the south wall of  
the church due to  
the rising damp.

Key among these actions is repairing the hydraulic system in the southern part of the building, in order to make it fully operational<sup>27</sup>. The lack of maintenance caused vegetation to obstruct the canals, thus impeding them from carrying out their important function of containing and channelling toward the stream to the east of the church the great amount of water that flows down the slope. This water has also caused serious damage to the wall paintings on the southern wall of the church, especially before the restoration in 1999. Rising damp has brought about the swelling of the longitudinal timber elements present in the masonry, thus causing the detachment of plaster and consequently of the paintings<sup>28</sup> (Fig. I-5.3.11).

<sup>27</sup> This is also the opinion of Professor Luljeta Bozo, author of the geological report annexed to the restoration project of January 1999 (see Thomo *et al.*, 1999) (Interview given on February 2020). See also Bozo (2002).

<sup>28</sup> During the 1999 restoration campaign, a work was carried out on the wall paintings that was somewhat questionable from the point of view of their conservation, but perhaps the only possible one at the time to safeguard them.

## Intervention strategies

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### S3 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

#### A.1 Historical research

See A.1, sect. I.5.1.

*Of specific importance in the case of Leusë is the reconstruction of the seismic history of the area, together with an in-depth analysis of the iconographic themes present in the wall paintings that completely cover the interior walls of the church and the northern wall under the portico.*

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#### A.2 Scientific survey of the building

See A.2, sect. I.5.1.

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#### A.3 Preliminary analysis of the building

See A.3, sect. I.5.1.

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#### A.4 Extremely urgent works

Through this Action we seek to bring the attention towards several urgent issues regarding the church. Specifically, the following works are proposed:

##### MONITORING OF THE SOIL AND THE BUILDING

The church stands on the border between two geological formations: breccia and flysch; the latter is particularly vulnerable to deformation phenomena. The border between these two formations also coincides with the longitudinal axis of the church. The geological study carried out prior to the restoration work in 1999 highlighted that the formation of the flysch shows a strong tendency to suffusion and presents extremely weak mechanical parameters, i.e. cohesion and internal friction angle.

Furthermore, crack pattern analysis shows, in addition to the effects due to the thrusts of the arches and the vaults, also a picture of the damage attributable to a particularly serious differential failure. Besides, some lesions, for example those located near the dome drum, although they have been mended, are unequivocally attributable to the effects of a seismic event.

Due to all of these reasons, it is considered urgent to start a monitoring plan for the church and the soil. In particular, it is deemed necessary to carry out further geological investigations (collection of any existing documentation and specific studies on the area) to evaluate the presence or absence of phenomena in progress and their speed in evolution, as well as the effects, both static and dynamic, on vertical structures and vaulted elements, so as to define which works to carry out.

A first step in this direction has been made by our team, as is shown in the Figs. I-5.3.12 and I-5.3.13.

##### WORKS FOR OPPOSING WATER-RELATED DECAY OF THE BUILDING

The drainage canals above the building are completely obstructed by vegetation and earth and are therefore completely ineffective for channelling water that flows along the slope toward the stream that runs on the south-eastern side of the church. This situation probably contributes to the rinsing of the terrain speeding the suffusion phenomena. Furthermore, it allows rainwater to become stagnant at the base of the masonry, in particular on the southern wall, generating a great amount of rising damp that damages the wall paintings.

It is crucial to prepare a plan for regulating the flow of surface water involving both the areas above and around the church, as well as an efficient system for the collection and disposal of rainwater that flows down from the roof.

It is also important to assess the possible role of the road that passes above the church, in cases of heavy rainfall. The long section of wall that protects and separates the church from the adjacent stream, which continues upward until reaching the road, must be cleaned of all shrub vegetation. The same should be done for stream banks.

In order to reduce the rising damp phenomenon it is necessary to check the drainage of the retaining wall on the southern side of the church and to build a drain channel along the southern, eastern and western walls.

These works are to be considered preparatory for the restoration of the wall paintings (see A.5).

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### A.5 Restoration works

The aim here is to propose the restoration of the decayed, damaged or incongruous sections of the building, and specifically:

#### RESTORATION OF THE WALL PAINTINGS

Once the drying of the wall has been completed, work can begin on the restoration of the wall paintings. First of all, it will be necessary to repair those sections of the interior walls which show swellings of the plaster due to humidity. From this point of view, the cartouche with the founding inscription above the entrance, which is of great importance in terms of the history of this church, is in a very critical condition. These swellings are often related to the timber elements present in the masonry. It is evident that the repair of the adhesion between plaster and wall must be treated in different ways depending on the conditions of the support. These restoration works require highly qualified personnel, both during the diagnosis and restoration phases.

Another issue that must be addressed is connected to the works on wall paintings carried out during the restoration of 1999. As a result of the removal and subsequent recomposition of some sections of painting damaged by humidity, several cuts are visible, which cause a fragmentation of the painted images and the loss of visual unity.

An assessment is also needed on how to intervene on the paintings on the wall under the portico, which have been severely damaged over the years by vandalism and by exposure to the weather.

Finally, it is necessary to remove the plaster (probably made with a cement-based binder) on the section of the wall behind the wood benches along the lateral naves, substituting it with a breathable and compatible lime-based plaster.

#### RESTORATION WORKS ON THE PORTICO

The wooden beams of the portico are excessively deformed. Their dimensions are clearly inadequate to support the weight of a covering roof made of stone slabs and the accidental overloads due to snow. The roof beams must therefore be replaced with others of adequate size for the load to be borne.

Since the masonry of the portico is not correctly clamped to that of the church itself, it is necessary to provide for a local dismantling and reconstruction (*scuci-cuci*, i.e. unstitch-stitch) for subsequent portions or the insertion of metal or composite connectors. In the first case, the removed stones must be cleaned, numbered and then re-installed. In the second case, bars that work by friction or jointly with the walls by means of injections of compatible grout should be inserted inside the masonry.

#### WORKS CONCERNING THE RESTORATION, SUBSTITUTION AND CLEANING OF FURNITURE AND DECORATION

Within the church, there are some furnishings of fine workmanship (iconostasis, pulpit, stacidia, candlesticks, lamps, jalousies, etc.). Some of these elements, especially stacidia along the lateral walls, are in a terrible state of conservation. It is therefore necessary to clean and restore the damaged parts of all furniture and decorations, including the replacement of any missing parts.

The wooden carved iconostasis deserves a separate discussion.

Over time, the iconostasis has been severely damaged; its icons and some wooden fragments are missing as a result of vandalism, neglect and probably theft. The first thing to do, therefore, is to recover the parts of the iconostasis from the pieces of wood found in the narthex<sup>(a)</sup>, afterwards restoration work can begin on the iconostasis, including the replacement of the missing parts. This work is to be entrusted to wood restoration specialists. As for the icons, if it is not possible to return to Leusë the icons moved to the Museum of Korça, an option that could be considered is to commission iconographers to make copies of them, in accordance with the classical canons of traditional Byzantine painting.

In order to obtain the necessary funding for the restoration of the iconostasis and the possible remaking of the icons, a crowd-funding operation could be undertaken, addressed especially to the villagers who have migrated abroad<sup>(b)</sup>.

#### IMPROVING TECHNOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

- Align the lighting system with European standards while respecting the architectural and artistic features of the church;
  - Assess the efficiency of the existing video-surveillance system;
  - Install a protection system against atmospheric discharges that is consistent with the features of the building.
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## S4 Enhancement Strategies

### A.6 Ensuring accessibility to the church from Përmet

See A.2, chap. I.4.

### A.7 Establishing an efficient information and communication system

See A.5, sect. I.5.1.

### A.8 Drafting a project for the environmental regeneration of the area surrounding the church

The Action aims at drafting a regeneration project which should provide for the following works:

#### REPAIR OF THE AREA SURROUNDING THE CHURCH.

Mowing and cutting of invasive vegetation and repairing those parts of the enclosure wall that have been damaged by roots.

In the case of the tombstones, it would be advisable to determine their features together with the inhabitants of the village. The understandable wish to honour the dead according to subjective taste should however take into consideration the sacred nature of the place and the value of the monuments and should therefore tend toward a greater sobriety in terms of size, shape and materials used.

#### REPAIR OF PATHWAYS.

The stepped path that leads to the church from the road is very slippery, especially when wet and also presents some irregularities that may cause stumbling.

In addition to repairing the damaged sections of the pavement, it could be useful to equip the access to the church with a railing to provide support and protection especially for the elderly and for people with mobility difficulties. This railing should be made in such a way as to reduce visual impact as much as possible. Furthermore, on the terrace that looks out toward the north, in the direction of the Vjosa Valley, paved paths could be built (using the local stone) in order to improve walking around the area in front of the church and to enhance accessibility to the tombs present there.

#### INSTALLATION OF AN EXTERNAL LIGHTING SYSTEM

We suggest installing a sober exterior illumination system that enhances the church, improving its visibility from a distance and strengthening its role as a territorial landmark also at night. A more efficient exterior illumination would also make the usage and enjoyment of the area on which the church stands safer, considering that it contains a series of differences in level, steps, walls, etc.

### A.9 Enhancing the role of the church as a community resource and in terms of tourism

The Action aims at strengthening the role of the church as a tourism-related resource. Access to the church currently depends on the presence and availability of a family from the village, which, occasionally and at their full discretion, opens the doors of the church to those who request it.

As in Kosinë (see A.7, sect. I.5.2), we suggest establishing weekly opening hours associated to a welcoming and surveillance service managed by the inhabitants of the village and with an entrance fee for tourists.

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## S5 Management Strategies

### A.10 Monitoring of the building

See A.6, sect. I.5.1.

### A.11 Drafting of a Maintenance Plan of the church and of the surrounding area

See A.7, sect. I.5.1.

*Once established, the plan could be implemented by the villagers themselves, through voluntary work at the service of the community that would cover the simpler and less strenuous tasks.*

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## Notes

- a) There are many abandoned fragments in the narthex, mostly in wood, probably left there after the last restoration work, some of which certainly belong to the iconostasis. These objects should be accurately analysed and catalogued; those that are not significant or too decayed, and therefore not apt for restoration, should be removed and properly disposed of.
- b) If it is true that it was also thanks to money sent by emigrants that the church of Leusë was built (see General description), this would retrace, albeit in a modern key, a story that is two centuries old.

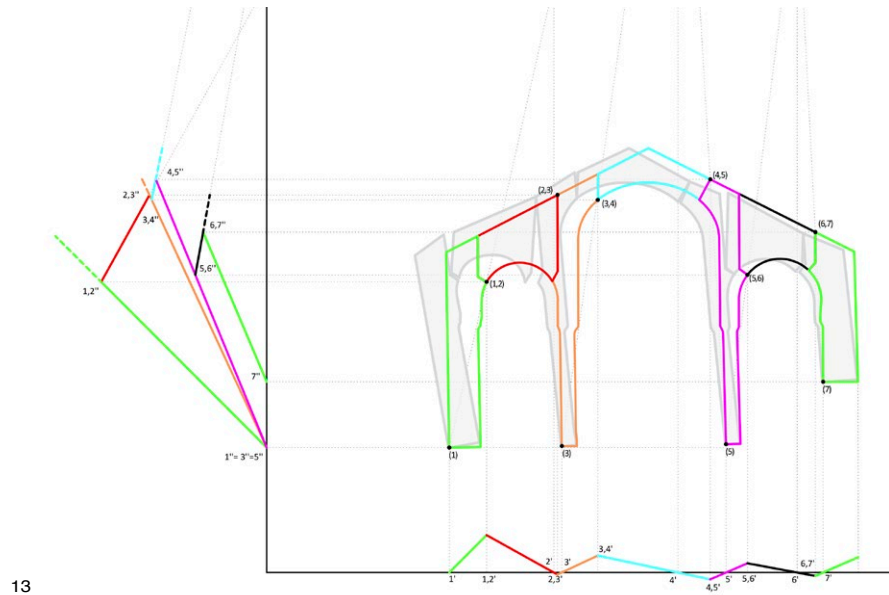
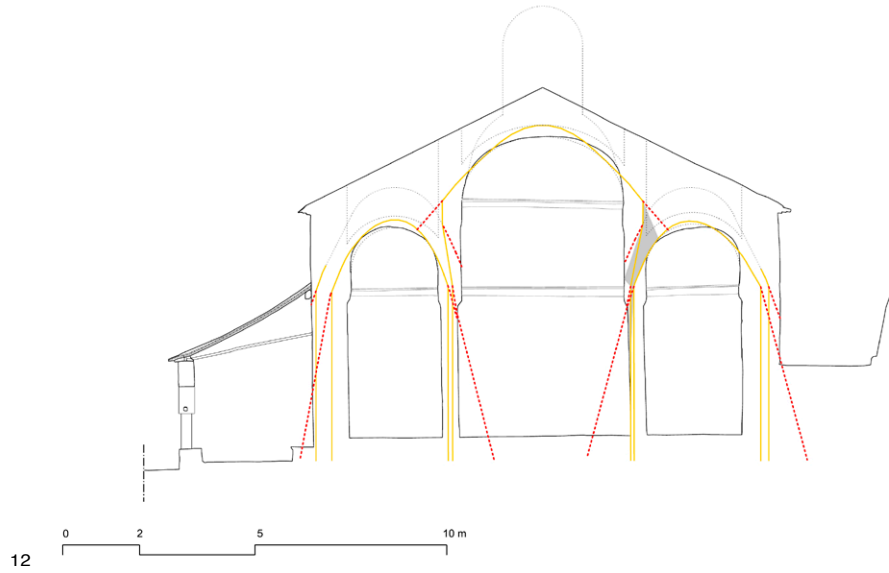


Figure I-5.3.12 – A thrust line for the transverse arcade. The thick lines in yellow highlight the condition of perfect functioning of the wood tying systems; through the dashed lines in red the condition of tying system failure is shown; the grey shaded area highlights the possible positions of the thrust lines corresponding to a partial functioning of the tying system. [Drawing by Giulia Misseri from Misseri *et al.*, 2020]

Figure I-5.3.13 – Limit analysis with kinematic approach. Local collapse mechanism of the transverse arcade induced by an earthquake action imagined as a set of forces in the horizontal direction, placed at the macro-elements centres of gravity and proportional to vertical loads by means of a common coefficient. Coloured lines highlight boundaries of each macro element, black dots mark the position of cylindrical hinges and inner parts of crack mouth; background grey shapes are evocative of the movement the transverse arcade is undergoing (enhancement of movements are owed to the sake of visibility). [Drawing by Giulia Misseri from Misseri *et al.*, 2020]