

PART II
THE MOUNTAIN VILLAGE OF RAZĚM



Figure II-0.1 – Razëm on the map of Albania.

General overview

VILLAGES	ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES	MUNICIPALITY	REGION
Vrith-Razëm	Shkrel	Koplik	Malësi e Madhe	Shkodër

Razëm is a hamlet of the mountain village of Vrith, which is only 4 km away (Fig. II-0.1). After the administrative reform in 2015, Vrith became part of Malësi e Madhe, the northernmost of the Albanian municipalities and as such, a border place. This peculiar geographic location – mountainous isolation on the one hand, and the constant threat from neighbouring nations on the other – also resulted in the creation and development of specific social and cultural phenomena. Two examples worth mentioning are the traditional rhapsodic chants based on the *Eposi i Kreshnikëve*¹ (a cultural heritage of inestimable value) and the celebrated collection of customary laws gathered in the *Kanun* code².

Razëm lies within the Regional Natural Park of Shkrel (established as a protected area in 2014) and is considered the ‘gateway’ to the Western Albanian Alps. Together with the villages of Reç e Bogë, Razëm forms a triad of great interest from the point of view of tourism (Figs. II-0.2 and II-0.3).

The Alpine area on which it stands is characterised by a vast network of trails and a series of high-altitude pastures (*bjeshkë*) with numerous mountain hut settlements

¹ The chants of the oral tradition collected in the Epos narrate stories inspired by the wars against the enemies who came from beyond the Serbian border. More on this topic in chap. II.2.

² See chap. II.2.



Figure II-0.2
The enchanting
landscape around
the village of
Razëm.

that appear today as true testimonies of the collective memory both in anthropological (linked to the shepherd culture and to transhumance) and technological terms.

The evocative landscape, the quality of the air and the proximity to the city of Shkodër soon transformed Razëm into a proper tourist resort, as confirmed by the complex of villas built by the rich bourgeoisie from Shkodër during the Twenties.

As in other Albanian villages, the civil institutions in Razëm are represented by the head of the village (*kryeplaku*), elected every four years among the candidates presented by the community. In Razëm the *kryeplaku* is a key figure for the inhabitants who look to him not only as an intermediate figure between the public administration and the village, but also as a ‘messenger of wisdom’ who is consulted for more personal questions or specific issues linked to the life of the community.

Catholicism is the major religion in the area, and was probably well-established during the first centuries A.D., as emphasised by the presence in the area of the cult of Christian martyrs³. Religious faith has always been and still is a peculiar feature in the sense of belonging to place and community, despite the harsh repression during the period of State atheism (1967-1991) imposed by Hoxha’s regime (see Tönnies, 1975; 1982).

According to data provided by the civil registry of the village of Dedaj for the year 2018, 763 inhabitants are registered in the village of Vrith (297 of whom have emigrated abroad and 60 to other municipalities in the Region of Shkodër). Of the current 406 inhabitants, only 70 live in Razëm. Most of the population belongs to the age segment between 15 and 60 years and the average age is only 38.11.

³ *Ibidem*.

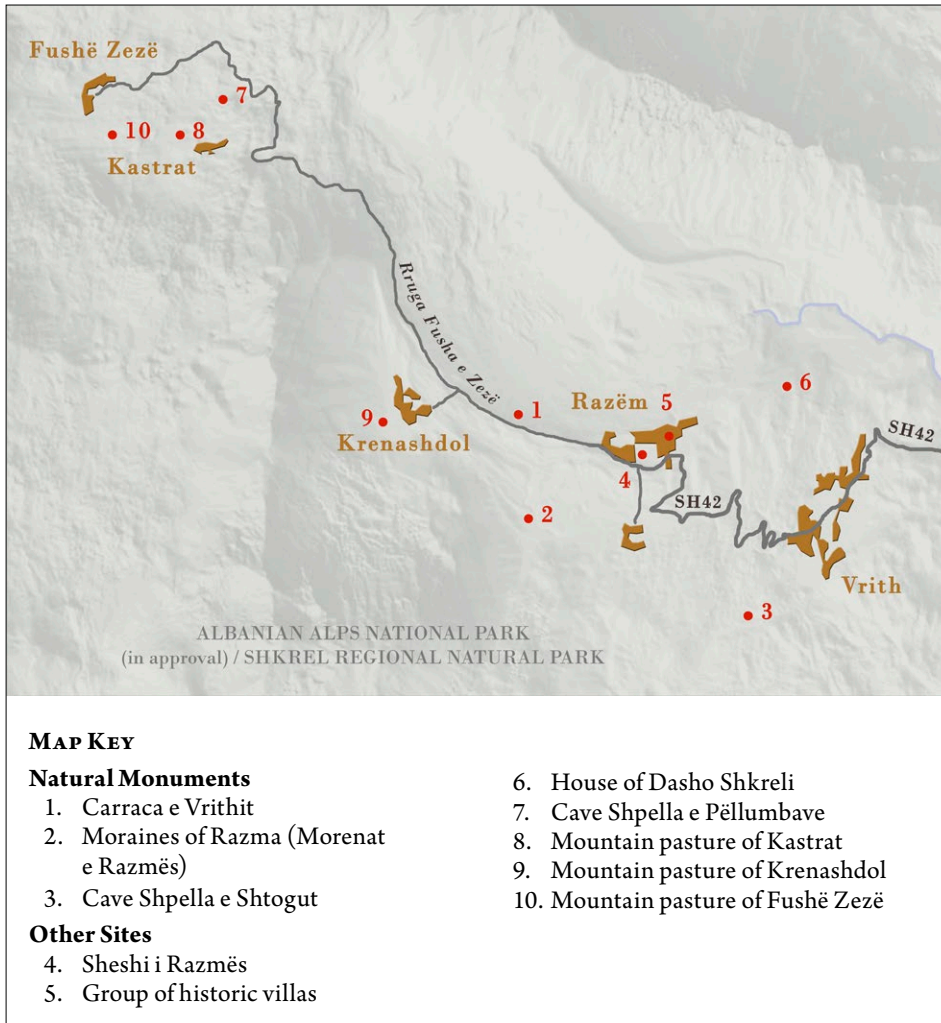


Figure II-0.3
Natural
Monuments and
other significant
sites around
Razëm. [Drawing
by Dritan Kapo]

This is important since one of the most problematic aspects of Albanian rural areas is precisely the elderly average age of the inhabitants.

For Vrith-Razëm – as for other rural areas in Albania – emigration is an issue quite difficult to manage. Currently, the village offers few job opportunities, which, moreover, are mostly limited to the summer, and the interviews carried out during the on-field analysis confirm the wish of the younger population to emigrate. Many of the people interviewed, however, consider emigration as a temporary experience, as an opportunity for economic and professional growth that ensures enhanced conditions for returning to their hometown with the purpose of starting an economic activity. There emerges, therefore, a strong link of the inhabitants to their village, and a remarkable sense of identity and belonging. This, together with the young average age of its inhabitants, is a source of hope for the future of the village.

Food heritage

The food heritage of the area of Malësi e Madhe is the result of the interaction between the severe climate conditions and the natural resources available (pastures and forests). The environmental features have favoured sylvo-pastoral activities and have enabled the development of a culinary tradition – based on meat, milk and seasonal dairy products – that is not very varied, yet is rich in flavours.

The agricultural activity is marginal to the alpine economy. In the limited agricultural surface available, the main crops are corn, beans and potatoes; as for cultivated fruits, the main varieties are cornel berries, plums, quinces, walnuts, hazelnuts and chestnuts. The latter represent one of the leading products of the area.

Typical products and culinary tradition

Home production of bread is still widespread in Malësi e Madhe, in particular the one made of corn (*bukë kollomoqi*, in the local dialect), which was originally prepared and stretched on a flat stone (*votër*) and then cooked over a high flame. The phasing out of this traditional cooking technique has altered the typical flavour of the bread¹.

Local features have favoured the transformation of products based on goat, lamb and pork meat, the reuse of leftovers and the perfecting of food preservation techniques.

Unlike other mostly Muslim regions in Albania, in the alpine areas where Christians are the majority of the population, the home breeding of pigs is widespread and the culinary culture related to pig meat has developed without hindrance. The use of dried (*mish i thatë*) and fried (*mish i skuqur*) pork is also very common.

¹ See <<https://www.fondazione Slow Food.com/it/arca-del-gusto-slow-food/pane-di-mais-di-kelmend/>>.



Figure II-1.1
Dried pork (*mish i thatë*) served with typical local cheeses. [Courtesy: VIS, Albania]

The drying of pork traditionally begins on December 6, on the day of the feast of Saint Nicholas² (Fig. II-1.1). The tradition of *mish i thatë* belongs especially to the area of Kelmend, where a prized variety of swine, which unfortunately is currently an endangered species, is bred. The drying involves the use of all the parts of the pig and includes a 5-6 day smoking process through the combustion of fruit or juniper trees.

The *mish i skuqur*, instead, is prepared with the lard and the fatter parts of the pig. It is commonly used for preparing *kaçimak* (a type of cornmeal mush) or eaten together with vegetables (Fig. II-1.2).

Among the traditional meat-based recipes it is worth mentioning the lamb stewed in sheep's milk (*mish qengji i zier në qumësht*) – which is eaten by the shepherds during the months of the transhumance so as to take advantage of the excess meat and milk³ – the skewered lamb and goat (*mish fërliku*), and the stewed meat (*mish i zier në kusi*) accompanied with roast potatoes, cheese, pickled vegetables or seasonal salads (this dish is common throughout the whole of Albania).

In the alpine land, forestry-pastoral practices have historically played a central role also in the production of dairy products (Fig. II-1.3). In addition to goat and sheep *feta* or to *kaçkavall*, which are widespread throughout Albania, other typical cheeses characterised by their ancient origin and traditional preparation methods are: the *jardun*, the *maza e çaprës* and the *mishavina*.

² See <<https://www.fondazioneSlowFood.com/it/arca-del-gusto-slow-food/carne-fritta-conservata-in-botte/>>.

³ “Since this typical dish of our pastoral tradition is in danger of disappearing – affirms the cook Nikolin Pacaj –, I have decided to include it in the menu of my restaurant. To recover the authentic cuisine of our ancestors is the best way to offer our guests a different and unique experience.” (Interview in Razëm on 16 June 2019).



Figure II-1.2
The *kaçimak* (a type
of cornmeal mush).
[Courtesy: Mrizi i
zanave]

Jardun is a creamy cheese similar to yoghurt typical of the Kelmend Mountains. It is prepared with sheep's milk produced between July 20 and August 20, when it is fatter and thus adequately creamy. *Jardun* is consumed entirely at a domestic level since it has a very brief preservation duration, no longer than one day after preparation.

Maza e çaprës has deep roots in the culture of Malësi e Madhe, which go back at least 400 years⁴. It is prepared with cow, goat or sheep's milk, or with a combination of them. The peculiarity of this cheese consists in its production process and in the use of animal hides (sheep or goat) for its maturing⁵. *Maza e çaprës* is esteemed delicacy; even today in the alpine villages of the region (Razëm included) it is served during feasts or for entertaining important guests. The increasing use of plastic containers during the aging process greatly alter its properties and taste.

Mishavinë is a crumbly cheese produced mostly in the alpine pastures of upper Kelmend and Razëm. A request has been made for its registration as a Protected Denomination of Origin - PDO (Tregues Gjeografik i Mbrojtur - TGJM). *Mishavinë*, originally from Montenegro, became widespread in the area of Malësi e Madhe over a century ago. It is traditionally prepared from August to November using cow's or sheep's milk (milked from June to September), and sometimes a mixture of them. This cheese is minced by hand, salted and fermented in wooden containers with holes in the bottom (*tinarë*). After this process is completed, it is hermetically sealed with a layer of fresh melted butter in order to allow the draining of excess whey through the container's holes⁶.

⁴ See <<https://www.fondazioneSlowFood.com/it/arca-del-gusto-slow-food/maza-e-capres/>>.

⁵ After milking is completed, the milk is boiled, then cooled and separated from the cream, which is preserved with a little bit of salt in a wooden barrel. Once the barrel is full, the cream is placed in an ageing container made with the hide of a lamb or goat, which is dried, cleaned and stitched.

⁶ See <<https://www.fondazioneSlowFood.com/it/presidi-slow-food/mishavin/>>.

The tradition of transhumance is also linked to the gathering of medicinal and aromatic herbs. Among the medicinal plants it is worth mentioning the scolopendrium (Hart's tongue fern), used in the preparation of tea, and the martagon lily, used for preparing digestive infusions. During the past decade many of these herbs have begun to be cultivated⁷, whereas those growing spontaneously are still gathered by families in the areas around the village of Reç (Fig. II-1.4).

This locality is known especially for the quality and variety of its chestnuts (*Castanea sativa*) (Skreli & Imami, 2019), which have been awarded certification as a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI). Thanks to the vast chestnut woods, Malësi e Madhe is the third greatest producer of chestnuts in Albania, after Kukës and Dibra (MBZR, 2014).

The presence of chestnuts is associated to that of white truffles, which are exported mainly to France. The wealth of forest resources has also favoured the presence of mushrooms, which are not highly used in the local culinary tradition, and of other wild forest foods, which, instead, are widely gathered and used (ALPIN, 2015).

It is also common in the area to distil liquors for domestic consumption. The most common are wild pomegranate juice (*lëngu i shegës së egër*) and a sour cherry liquor (*lëng vishnje o vishnjak*).

Critical issues and future prospects

The culinary culture of Malësi e Madhe is characterised by a small number of typical products and dishes. They, however, are remarkable in terms of their production, transformation and preservation methods and express an uncommon capacity to harmonise dietary needs with local features.



Figure II-1.3
The variety of local
cheeses. [Courtesy:
VIS, Albania]

⁷ The preparation and packing of cultivated medicinal and aromatic herbs takes place at the Agro-Reçi SH.B.B. incubator. The company supplies the national market and exports to the USA, France, Germany and Italy (VIS, 2019).

Most of the typical products are not yet legally recognised in accordance with the provisions of Articles 32 and 33 of Law no. 9863/2008 “Food”, also due to the small scale of the production (many products are destined exclusively for domestic consumption).

Added to these ‘local’ critical issues, there are other obstacles that concern the whole of Albania: the strict hygiene regulations adopted by the European Union, the weak marketing strategies, as well as the lack of studies and surveys on the local culinary history and tradition.

In the alpine area, the food heritage should be a driving force of economic development, which invests in the skills, sensibilities and competencies related to traditional knowledge. This heritage must be interpreted as a dynamic system that links the local contexts, the productive landscapes and the customs and behaviours of the community, as well as the intangible knowledge linked to the process of preparation and transformation of the local products.

During the past few years, thanks to the commitment of the Ministry of Agriculture, of the Italian Agency for Cooperation and Development (AICS), and of the Italian NGO VIS (Volontariato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo), progress has been made concerning the enhancement of local food products, thus giving an impulse to the economy and generating new job opportunities. This is the case, for example, with the agricultural cooperative Agro-Reçi SH.B.B., located in Reç, one of the major agricultural incubators in Albania.



Figure II-1.4
A collection of medicinal and aromatic herbs gathered in the forests of Malësi e Madhe. [Courtesy: VIS, Albania]

Intervention strategies

S1 Educational and Training Strategies

A.1 Generating awareness among students concerning the local culinary tradition

This Action aims at disseminating knowledge concerning agriculture, breeding and the local culinary tradition, through active educational activities to be carried out during the school year.

The extra-curricular educational programme could be divided into two phases:

- Active and cooperative learning organised in class through seminars;
- Outdoor learning through workshops and direct experimentation activities, at specific times throughout the year. This phase can be carried out in the form of school trips that would include visits to the alpine pastures (so as to observe the production of dairy products by the shepherds) and in the natural parks.

The area of the parks is characterised by vast wooded zones that offer a precious wild food heritage (strawberries, blueberries, walnuts, mushrooms, chestnuts, etc.). In this case, foraging experiences could be organised during school trips, consisting in the conscious gathering of wild foods that also permits establishing a stronger relationship with the natural environment.

Both people who have professional knowledge of the natural context of Vrith-Razëm and the village elders could participate in the educational projects.

This Action could be promoted as a pilot project at the school of Vrith and subsequently replicated in other schools of Malësi e Madhe.

A.2 Organising training courses on the wild resources of the land

The wooded areas of Malësi e Madhe have a wealth of wild resources, such as spontaneous fruits and aromatic and medicinal herbs. Some of these resources (such as mushrooms and truffles) do not belong to the Albanian Alpine culinary tradition.

The Action proposes the organisation of theoretical-practical courses concerning phytoalimurgy. These courses should provide the basic elements of environmental and ethnobotanical education and should aim at the identification, gathering, preparation, preservation and packaging of wild foods (strawberries, mushrooms, truffles, scolopendrium, martagon lily, etc.) from the forests of Malësi e Madhe^(a).

The Regional Natural Park of Shkrel could promote this Action.

S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

A.3 Creating a Digital Inventory of the Typical Recipes and Memories of the Local Culinary Culture

See A.3, chap. I.1.

This Action could be promoted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and by the Regional Government of Shkodër and implemented on the ground by the Municipality of Malësi e Madhe with the participation of NGOs active in the area, food science experts, anthropologists and ethnologists.^(b)

A.4 Creating an Atlas of typical local products

See A.4, chap. I.1.

S6 Enhancement Strategies

A.5 Recognizing the typical products in accordance with Law no. 9863/2008

See A.5, chap. I.1.

The typical cheeses of the area of Malësi e Madhe (jardun, mishavinë, maza e çaprës, etc.) could reasonably aspire to a certification as “Tregues Gjeografik i Mbrojtur” (art. 32) and “Produkt ushqimor tradicional” (art. 33); their possible recognition would ensure their safeguarding and a greater food safety.

A.6 Promoting experiential tourism for enhancing the local culinary heritage

See A.7, chap. I.1.

In the area in question, this Action could be undertaken:

- At the mountain huts of Kastrat, Krenashdol and Fushë Zezë, and would concern both the everyday life of the shepherds and the processes of cheese production (see A.9, chap. II.3);

- In the forests of Razëm and of the Regional Natural Park of Shkrel through the foraging practice (see A.1), and concerning the gathering, preparation and consumption of wild foods from the woods. This experience could be promoted and implemented by the accommodation and restaurant owners of Razëm in order to increase the conventional tourist amenities and introduce visitors to ethnobotany, the biodiversity of the alpine region and to the discovery of new flavours ^(c).

A.7 Organising events linked to the enhancement of the alpine culinary heritage in Razëm

This Action aims at organising initiatives linked to the promotion of typical products and of the local culinary tradition.

In addition to the *Feast of the alpine pastures* (see A.9, chap. I.2) and the other Actions related to the alpine pastures (see A.6, chap. II.1 and A.10, chap. II.4), the following initiatives could be planned in the square of Razëm during the period of a greater influx of tourists:

- A *Farmers' Market*, in order to provide farmers, shepherds and the inhabitants of the villages of Malësi e Madhe an opportunity for offering tourists the typical local products. The Market could take place once or twice a week;
- A *Culinary feast of the alpine territory*, during which the cooks in the area, together with the village elders and the shepherds, could serve dishes belonging to the culinary tradition of the area of Malësi e Madhe;
- The *Alps Wild Food*, an event for fostering the knowledge and use of the wild foods from the alpine areas. During this initiative, local cooks could offer tourists dishes based on local spontaneous fruits and aromatic herbs.

A.8 Enhancing wild forest foods

This Action aims at taking advantage of the wealth of wild foods available in the forests of Malësi e Madhe so as to generate new occupational and productive prospects.

In order to achieve this, the creation of an incubator destined for products in the mountainous areas and, in particular, for wild foods available in forests, is proposed. The existing incubator in Reç could be expanded or, alternatively, serve as a reference point for the construction of the new one.

Notes

- a) See "Wood*ing – wild food lab Academy" (<<https://wood-ing.org/academy/>>).
- b) For a model of Inventory, see "Progetto E.CH.I. Etnografie italo-svizzere per la valorizzazione del patrimonio immateriale P.O. di Cooperazione Transfrontaliera Italia Svizzera 2007-2013" (<<http://www.echi-interreg.eu/pages/il-progetto-e.ch.i>>).
- c) See <<https://www.wildfoodsitaly.com/>>.

Traditions, social practices and local craftsmanship

Traditions and cultural heritage

Razëm belongs culturally to the vast area of Malësi e Madhe (literally, “the great mountains”).

When the theme of the mountains of Northern Albania is discussed, the association spontaneously arises with the *Kanun*, the celebrated customary law code that was set in writing from the 15th century onward. More particularly, the area of Malësi e Madhe has been under the influence of the *Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit* (Gjeçovi, 1933)¹, which for centuries regulated the lives of the inhabitants of the mountains and wavered only under pressure from Hoxha’s regime (Bardhoshi, 2012^a)². The founding element of the *Kanun* is the *fis* (literally “the lineage”), the enlarged family system that regulates both personal and social balances.

Some of the ‘positive’ aspects of the *Kanun* are still widely felt, such as the sacredness of the given word (*besa*) and the sense of honour and hospitality, particularly significant elements that still nowadays rank as founding structures of Albanian identity (Dingo, 2007; Schmitt, 2020). *Besa* indicates not only “the pact and alliance” with others in keeping the given word, but also honesty towards oneself, the respect for an interior “sacred code” which forms the basis of a process of self-regulation (Dingo, 2007).

¹ The first written collection of the *Kanun* is by Shtjefën Gjeçovi (1874-1929), an Albanian Catholic priest from Kosovo.

² Bardhoshi (2012^a) considers the social structure illustrated in the *Kanun* as a “semi or autonomous social field”, capable of self-preserving even when facing the pressure from the official legislative regulations of the State. This would have enabled the ‘latent’ survival of some social practices and provisions even during the regime, and therefore their partial rehabilitation after the collapse of the dictatorship.

In Malësi e Madhe (as also in the rest of Albania), hospitality plays a fundamental role: “the home of Albanians belongs to God and to the guest” (*shtëpia e shqiptarit është e Zotit dhe e mikut*), says the *Kanun*, and the guest, as a symbol of otherness, receives full attention and respect from the owner of the house. Even the greatest enemy loses his ‘negative’ connotation the moment he steps into the house (Dingo, 2007; Schmitt, 2020).

Among the unsolved issues inherited from the *Kanun* remain the patriarchal structure of the family and the subordinate position of women in society. Women’s only recognised activities are taking care of their husbands, bringing up their children and looking after the house, and are thus excluded from any possibility of social emancipation. Fortunately, the most controversial and debated aspect of the *Kanun* – blood vengeance (*gjakmarrja*) – seems instead to have long been eradicated from the territory of Malësi e Madhe.

Another feature that characterises the local culture worth mentioning is the rhapsodic tradition. The chants collected in the *Eposi i Kreshnikëve*³ (an anthology of the heroic exploits of the brothers Muji and Halili) have been orally transmitted thanks to the wandering rhapsodists who, accompanied by their *lahuta*⁴, kept alive the historical memory of the centuries-old resistance against the menace of Serbian expansionism.

While in neighbouring Kosovo rhapsodists are still singing with their *lahuta*, disseminating the epic word (their numbers seem to have in fact increased in the era of social media), in Albania the rhapsodic tradition has almost completely disappeared.

Traditional Festivities

Religion has always been an element of social cohesion in the area of Malësi e Madhe. In this land, the Catholic faith constitutes a strong identity factor and the inhabitants have maintained it throughout the centuries, also overcoming adversities and persecution due to the State atheism imposed by the Communist regime since 1967 (Fig. II-2.1).

In Razëm the inhabitants meet regularly at the church of Bzhetë (a small village in the Municipality of Shkrel), a place for religious but also social practices: the church periodically organises activities for children and teenagers. Furthermore, it is here that on May 9th the ceremony linked to the feast of St. Nicholas, the patron of Vrith, takes place. The feast is known as *Shën Nikolla i Pranverës* (Saint Nicholas of Spring), since it coincided historically with the departure of the shepherds toward the alpine pastures⁵.

The religious feast of Shën Prenja⁶ (July 26) takes place instead in the area surrounding the central square of Razëm where nine wells are located (see chap. II.4).

³ The *Eposi i Kreshnikëve* is officially listed as part of the Albanian Intangible Cultural Heritage, which was established only in 2010. To date (July 2020), in addition to the *Eposi i Kreshnikëve*, there are only six other items listed as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage safeguarded by the State: the iso-polyphonic music, the dialects *gheg* and *tosk*, the homophonic music from central Albania, the folk music from Shkodër (*ahengu shkodran*), the art of making musical instruments and the traditional dances of the women of Dropulli (a town in the South inhabited by a Greek minority).

⁴ One-stringed musical instrument that is widespread in the Balkans. From this instrument derives as well the title of *Lahuta e Malcis*, a famous epic poem by Gjergj Fishta, a Franciscan friar from Fishtë (a village near Scutari) and an illustrious representative of the Albanian Renaissance.

⁵ See <https://issuu.com/go2albania/docs/go2_albania_veriu_eshte_feste>.

⁶ Shën Prenja (dialectal version of Shën Premtja) – a 2nd century martyr who according to tradition was born on a Friday (*premtja* meaning Friday) – is venerated throughout Northern Albania, where the cult of early Christian martyrs is widespread. She is known as Saint Venera by the Western Church and as Agia Paraskevi by the Eastern Church.



Figure II-2.1
A period
photograph
shows the women
of Kelmend
(a village near
Razëm) wearing
a *xhubleta* during
a ceremony. [©
Muzeu Kombëtar
i Fotografisë
“Marubi”]

In the past, during the ceremony the young girls of the village celebrated water, in both its symbolic and substantive sense, and its important role in the life of the community⁷. The meaning of this rite can be understood considering the scarcity of surface water resources in the area of Razëm-Vrith (see chap. II.4). Unfortunately, there is no certain information regarding the reason for the construction of nine wells in such a small area, yet this confers an aura of mystery to the place.

Local craftsmanship

In Malësi e Madhe, as in the rest of the country, the artisan tradition suffered as a result of emigration (which interrupted the flow in the transmission of knowledge), and of the policies of the Communist regime which were oriented towards the collectivisation of production and the application of Soviet-style industrial models (Mëhilli, 2017). The effectiveness of these policies is confirmed by the surveys undertaken by the ethnologist Abaz Dojaka on peasant houses in the area of Dukagjin. He shows how in a period of only 6 years (between 1954 and 1960), there was a considerable decrease in the amount of homemade everyday items, together with a parallel increase in those produced by State-run cooperatives (Dojaka, 2017). Other local factors linked to the specific features of the mountain territories, such as poverty and social and economic isolation, may have contributed to the weakening of certain artisan practices.

Due to the elements described above, much of the knowledge and traditional techniques were lost, together with the people who held this know-how⁸. The scarce economic competitiveness of artisan products as compared to those which are industrially

⁷ See <votramagazine.com/razma-guri-shndrites-ne-gjerdanin-e-turizmit-malor/>. From the testimonies obtained during the on-field analysis it does not appear that the feast is currently celebrated.

⁸ From the on-field analysis undertaken in the area of Vrith/Razëm, no objects of particular interest were identified as part of the current artisan production.



Figure II-2.2
Traditional hand-
made garments.
[Courtesy: VIS,
Albania]

rently in danger of disappearing forever. The last representatives of this ancient craft are in fact very elderly women and it is difficult for them to find apprentices willing to learn and carry on the practice. Unfortunately, there is no type of State protection for the *xhubleta* and it is not included in the list of Albanian Intangible Cultural Assets.

Artifacts and work tools

Before the Communist regime, in the region of the North-Western Albanian Alps (where the village of Vrith-Razëm is located) everyday objects were made entirely of pine wood and produced in the context of the family or the *fis*¹¹ with the use of common tools such as the axe, chisel, knife, etc. (Dojaka, 2017). According to Shkurti (1985), even hoes were made completely of wood.

manufactured (often imported), drove most artisans to seek more profitable jobs or to emigrate. Some practices, however, have survived and are a vivid testimony of the collective memory, still capable of transmitting the values of tradition (Fig. II-2.2).

Traditional dress

Among the artisan practices inherited from the past, a central role is played by the production of the *xhubleta* – the female dress, which is widespread in the mountains of Northern Albania (Fig. II-2.3).

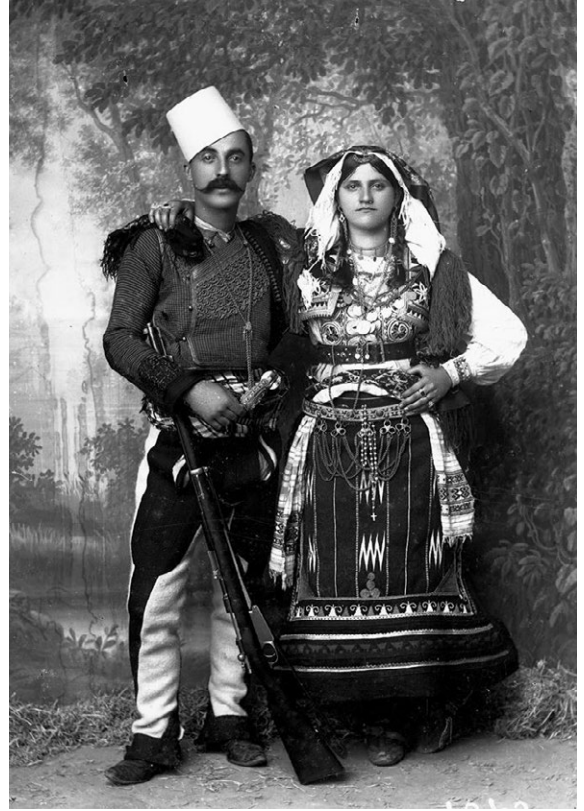
This garment, which seems to have very ancient roots (Bido, 1991), is made with yarn of the highest quality and, in the variety used in Malësi e Madhe, is ornamented with gold and silver jewels such as pins and chains, generally placed on the most exposed parts of the dress (sash, belt, pinafore). To the value of the raw materials must be added the value of the time necessary for its production, which can be estimated to be around 6 to 8, and sometimes even 12 months⁹.

The production of the *xhubleta* according to the strict traditional procedures came to an end towards the Sixties¹⁰ (Ulqini, 1997) and is cur-

⁹ According to a testimony obtained during the on-field investigation (the interview took place in Vrith on 16.06.2019). For a documentary entirely devoted to the *xhubleta* see <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0cdpBZBQuw&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR117-b5WvrnhgTCTbVWtiUYKmskXuNkOtiEb5BNdslRzsvFXhsdy6oJNkK>>.

¹⁰ The cause for this can be related to the programme of female emancipation determined by the regime, which contemplated the modernisation of the country and the collectivisation of labour and production; a second cause is related to the strategy for a Communist-style homogenisation that was reflected also in the way of dressing.

¹¹ It is necessary to specify that in the mountain communities of the North there was no 'nuclear family' as such. As many as 20 to 30 people belonging to different nuclei within the same *fis* could live under the same roof. Production activities were therefore also extended to the enlarged family.



Domestic furniture such as tables (*sofra*), kneading trough (*magje*), chairs (*shkamb*) or cradles (*djep*), objects linked to food production, such as the butter churn (*dybek*), or those for knitting, such as knitting needles (*furka*) were characterised for the almost absolute absence of metal elements (Figs. II-2.4-II-2.6).

Even the cutlery, glasses and small containers used in the kitchen were mostly in wood (Papeka, 1985). The furniture of wealthier families were decorated with religious or natural motifs (such as plants and animals), and occasionally with astral and pagan motifs (Muka, 2007). The bedrooms were equipped with hides of sheep or goats (*postiqe*) which were used both for sitting and for sleeping (Muka *et al.*, 2004).

Metal utensils and tools were rare and were obtained often through barter or bought at the market of Shkodër or else from pedlars (Dojaka, 2017).

During the on-field analysis it was possible to visit the workshop of the last smith of Vrith, who still today, despite his old age, produces and repairs tools for agriculture and woodcutting, and when necessary is also a carpenter. He is the last bearer of a knowledge and of an ‘art of living’ that risks being lost forever under the pressure of industrial production (Fig. II-2.7).

Traditional building

No examples were found in Razëm of dwellings built earlier than the 20th century. Traditional building techniques survived mostly in the mountain huts of the alpine pastures and in some houses in Vrith that, however, do not present signs of artisan workmanship of particular value.

Figure II-2.3
Studio portrait
photographs of
families from
Shkodër wearing
traditional
garments. [©
Muzeu Kombëtar
i Fotografisë
“Marubi”]



4

Figure II-2.4
A traditional
wooden butter
churn (*dybek*).

[Courtesy: Franc
Vukaj]

Figure II-2.5
An old kneading
trough (*magje*).

[Courtesy: VIS,
Albania]

Figure II-2.6
A traditional
wooden table
(*sofra*): the family
gathered around
it to eat, sitting on
cushions placed
on the floor.

[Courtesy: Franc
Vukaj]



5



6

Until the second half of the 19th century, the population of the Western Albanian plateau lived in rudimentary and provisional-looking dwellings. The interior had no windows and usually consisted of a single room shared by the family and their animals (Dojaka, 2017). The buildings typically had dry stone walls or a timber frame, with the roof covering in straw or wooden shingles (Fig. II-2.8).

Only during the first decades of the 20th century did the use of stone masonry with lime mortar and alpine type roofs become widespread (Muka *et al.*, 2004) (Fig. II-2.9).

According to Muka (2007), the construction of peasant houses took place in two phases. The first phase – which consisted in the construction of the masonry and roof – was generally supervised by a professional (a master builder, often itinerant and seasonal), who directed the work carried out by the owners, who also had the task of finding the building materials. The second phase, which was usually carried out autonomously by the owners, consisted in the finishing work, as well as the construction of the interior furniture, the agricultural annexes, the beehives and the enclosure (cf. Dojaka, 2017).

Critical issues and future prospects

In order to initiate a lasting and conscious process of development it is necessary for the inhabitants of Malësi e Madhe, who are traditionally closed to external influences and stimuli, to begin a sincere dialogue with their past, recognising in it both its potentials and criticalities.



The issue of female emancipation must play a fundamental role in the development of these communities. The recovery of some artisan practices (for example the *xhubleta*) and their innovative development, could open new perspectives in terms of job opportunities for women, helping them to extend beyond the domestic dimension in which they are currently relegated.

This fundamental 'pact' with the past is also essential in terms of the development of a tourism which, drawing on criteria of social and environmental sustainability, may be capable of enhancing the 'positive' aspects of the identity of the places (see Bonesio, 2017). In this respect, the actions aimed at the reconstruction of memory through the recovery of the local crafts, the rhapsodic traditions and the rediscovery of traditional feasts are essential. Artisan products, in particular furniture and decorations, if supported by appropriate development projects and policies, could open a new market (for example the furnishing of the increasing numbers of new accommodation facilities and resorts), thus contributing to the economic development of the territory.

Research can play an important role in the processes of enhancement of the roots from the past, but also towards the generation of new perspectives among the inhabitants concerning the world that surrounds them. The territorial study must happen in direct contact with the places and their inhabitants, who in this way become main actors and not simple passive subjects observed from afar. Research can also offer a contribution in terms of the knowledge and preservation of the alpine building tradition, through the production of specific tools of cultural dissemination (Fig. II-2.10).

Figure II-2.7
A view of the workshop of the last smith of Vrith.



Figure II-2.8
Detail of a
mountain hut
roof, covered with
wooden shingles.



Figure II-2.9
Detail of a window
with stone
monolithic jambs
and lintel.



Figure II-2.10
Two expressions
of the local alpine
tradition. *Above:*
A dry stone wall
topped with broken
branches. *Below:*
Intertwined sticks
that enclose a
korita.

Intervention strategies

S1 Education and Training Strategies

A.1 Promoting educational projects related to the *xhubleta*

In order to make a *xhubleta* it is not only necessary to have great technical skills, but also plenty of time and remarkable economic resources. Today, the women who have inherited the ancient knowledge for producing this traditional dress are increasingly few and elderly, whereas the customer base for these products is very limited (museums or particularly wealthy collectors).

The Action proposes to initiate two coordinated educational processes for the safeguarding of this cultural asset. The first aims at recovering and formalising the technical knowledge required for producing the *xhubleta*; the second concerns new interpretative keys which, beginning from the traditional matrix, may result in more versatile and competitive products^(a). In this respect, the involvement of young designers interested in the artisan tradition, through art residencies or regional festivals could be envisaged. The Action could be implemented concurrently with Action A.3.

A.2 Promoting educational projects aimed at the creation of new skills and job opportunities in the craftsmanship sector

See A.1, chap. I.2.

S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

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

See Action A.3, chap. I.2.

In the context of the Albanian Alps, a useful reference can be the handbook devoted to the building tradition of Theth (Shkreli, 2018), a village in the Municipality of Shkodër which is also a well-known alpine tourist destination^(b).

A.4 Initiating ethnographic research projects in the alpine area

Ethnographic research in Albania has undergone a new development phase after the collapse of Hoxha's regime, thanks especially to the remarkable work carried out by the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Art Study (Instituti i Antropologjisë Kulturore dhe i Studimit të Artit - IAKSA).

The Action – to be entrusted to the scholars (anthropologists, sociologists, ethnographers) who collaborate with the Institute and/or teach at Albanian or foreign universities – should involve a critical assessment of the phenomena linked to local traditions and crafts, and avoid the patriotic/lauding style that characterised Albanian ethnographic and anthropological literature during the Communist regime. In the case of some topics, such as the *Kanun*, this process is already ongoing (see, *inter alia*, Voell, 2003, 2011, 2012, 2016; Bardhoshi, 2012^a, 2012^b, 2013, 2016,) and it would be desirable to extend it to other issues which characterise alpine culture.

Field research should be encouraged as the principal method of analysis in the process of gathering knowledge about the area. The direct contact with the inhabitants, the places of memory, and the artefacts and art of the artisan tradition, is pivotal, in particular for documenting the awkward passage from the Communist regime to the democratic State.

S6 Enhancement Strategies

A.5 Fostering the creation of a new craft business

See Action A.5, chap. I.2.

In the specific context of Vrith-Razëm, local artisans could be involved in the building-environmental recovery works proposed in chap. II.4 and in chap. II.5.

A.6 Promoting the rhapsodic tradition of Northern Albania

The aim of this Action is to organise events, concerts or festivals related to the epic singing tradition with the Kosovan rhapsodists and with those still present in the Albanian Alps.

This would generate moments of interaction and sharing between the inhabitants, the tourists and the scholars (ethnographers, musicologists, musicians, etc.) who dedicate their research activities to themes related to the oral tradition.

These initiatives – to be included in tourism promotion strategies – could be associated to local events, both existing (such as the Literary Festival of Razëm; see A.3, chap. II.5) or proposed in these Guidelines such as the Feast of Shën Prenja and the Feast of the Alpine Pastures (see A.8).

A.7 Proposing the inclusion of the *xhubleta* in the Intangible Heritage of Albania

This Action proposes to support the inclusion of the ancient art of making the *xhubleta* in the official list of intangible assets safeguarded by the State. The visibility that this recognition generates could contribute to its protection (see A.1). The *xhubleta* fully complies with the requirements established in article 55 of Law no. 27 of 17.05.2018, dedicated to the “Types of intangible cultural assets”, as an eligible asset. This would be a first step toward an eventual candidature of the *xhubleta* as an Intangible Asset protected by UNESCO^(c).

A.8 Promoting the area through feasts and events

With the purpose of promoting tourism, it could be useful to prepare a detailed calendar of the feasts specifically dedicated to Razëm-Vrith, hinged on religious feasts and other events significant to the historical memory of the village.

One of the aims of the Actions is surely the inclusion of the most significant of these feasts in the “Feasts of the North” (*Veriu është festë*) and subsequently in the *National Calendar of Local Feasts*^(d).

FEAST OF SHËN PRENJA, IN THE SQUARE OF RAZËM

The feast of Shën Prenja – which takes place in accordance with the Orthodox calendar on July 26th – has not been celebrated for quite some time and its recovery could be an interesting opportunity for social cohesion, as well as for the enhancement of the village in terms of tourism. Concerts of rhapsodic chants and folk dances could be organised for the occasion in the village square (see A.7).

FEAST OF THE ALPINE PASTURES

The event would offer tourists a unique opportunity for getting to know the alpine pastures and the production process of the dairy products made in the mountain huts. These huts could provide temporary accommodation in order to allow visitors a richer experience in contact with the shepherds, and also give them the opportunity to buy alpine cheeses (see A.11, chap. II.3).

LITERARY FESTIVAL OF RAZËM

The event is organised every year at the end of May and involves participants from all over Albania (see A.3 and note b), chap. II.5).

It is suggested that initiatives which are linked to the local traditional culture, such as events concerning the *Eposi i Kreshnikëve* and the rhapsodic culture (see A.7) be carried out during the festival.

Notes

- a) See the “Guri i Zi” project, named after the village of the same name to the South-East of Shkrodrë. The project, implemented since 2006 by the Italian association Idee Migranti Onlus, involves the women of the village in the production of artisan textile products, which are based on tradition, yet aim at innovative developments in terms of style and type of products. The project has been remarkably successful and includes a showroom and shop in Milan. See <http://www.guriizi.com/progetto_filosofia/chi_siamo/II_Progetto_Guri_I_Zi.aspx>.
- b) See <https://issuu.com/go2albania/docs/trashegimia_ndertimore_ne_theth_-_e>.
- c) Scholars and collectors (in particular Agim Bido and Luljeta Dano) have been promoting the candidature of the *xhubleta* as a UNESCO Intangible Heritage.
- d) For information on the calendar “The Feast of the North” see <https://issuu.com/go2albania/docs/vija_16> and <<http://infokult.al/botohet-kalendari-i-festave-te-veriut-te-shqiperise/>>. The Calendar of Local Feasts for 2019 can be consulted using the following link: <<http://www.mjedisi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Kalendari-2019.pdf>>.

Landscape

The area of Razëm is remarkable in terms of natural and landscape resources, as is confirmed by its location within the National Park of Shkrel (Parku Natyror Rajonal i Shkrelit) and the future National Park of the Albanian Alps (Parku Kombëtar i Alpeve Shqiptare), which will include 43% of the Albanian flora (INCA, 2015).

This chapter begins with the description of the natural habitat that surrounds and qualifies the territory and then focuses on the other landscape typologies.

Landscape features

Razëm is located on a karstic plateau at an altitude of approximately 900 metres above sea level, in an unspoiled natural environment. The area is composed of carbonate, limestone and dolomite formations of the Mesozoic era and Paleocene *flysch facies*. The topography of the area is characterised by an alternation of plateaus and remarkably steep mountain areas belonging to the Albanian Alps.

There is a prevalence of black pine, beech and white fir forests, low scrub and bushes that create a striking contrast with the bare slopes of Veleçik and Veleçiku i Vogël Mountains (Fig. II-3.1). Forest resources are mostly concentrated in the area of Fushë Zezë. It is here and in the areas of Bogë, Theth and Vermosh that the greatest forests of Albania were located. This heritage was impoverished especially during the massive deforestation which has taken place since the Nineties (Diku & Shuka, 2017), and is often the object of arson and of illegal exploitation practices (Bashkia Malësi e Madhe, 2017). In spite of this, the Municipality of Malësi e Madhe still possesses one of the largest forest extensions in Albania, including a primeval beech forest, *Livadhi i Harushës*, located in the area of Vermosh (Diku & Shuka, 2017).



Figure II-3.1 – The natural landscape around Razëm.

Two caves contribute to the richness of the natural landscape – *Shpella e Shtogut* and *Shpella e Pëllumbave* – as well as the *Morenat e Razmës*, formations of karst caves and deposits of glaciers of the Quaternary era (Fig. II-3.2). These moraines create a suggestive landscape of hills approximately 50-80 metres high throughout the area of Razëm, Koplík and Dedaj. The *Morenat e Razmës*, together with a 200 year-old specimen of *Celtis australis* in Vrith (*Carraca e Vrithit*), were listed as Natural Monuments by the Decree of the Council of Ministers no. 676 of 20.12.2002.

Another typical feature are the high-altitude pastures (generally over 1,000 metres above sea level) with a habitat dominated by plant associations such as *festucetum paniculatae*, *phleo-poetum alpinae*, *seslerietalia juncifoliae*, *stipo-festucetum* and *festuco-brometea* (Fig. II-3.3).

A dense network of routes (trails, paths, forest roads, mule tracks, dirt roads, etc.) with a rich history marks the mountain landscape. They wind along slopes, traverse forests and alpine pastures, offering those who travel on them unique and impressive views (Fig. II-3.4).

Part of this important heritage recently underwent a redevelopment project also involving signage¹. It is a first important step toward a more complete process of recovery, enhancement and management of the trail network provided for in the

Malësi e Madhe General Town Plan. An efficient trail network could in fact be a useful tool for responding to the growing tourism-trekking demand² and for promoting knowledge of the landscape and historical-cultural heritage of the area in accordance with the postulates of soft mobility³.

¹ The “Sinjalistika Turistike” project was promoted by the Municipality of Malësi e Madhe, and financed by the Austrian Development Cooperation and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. See <<https://bashkiamalesiemadhe.gov.al/2018/12/15/projekti-sinjalistika-turistike/>>.

² The National Sectoral Plan for Tourism in the Albanian Alps (Plani Kombëtar Sektorial i Turizmit për rajonin e Alpeve Shqiptare - PKSTA), foresees an increase of 29% in tourism between 2016 and 2031 (from 67,000 to 579,000 visitors) (MTM, 2017: 47).

³ For the region of Shkodër, the National Trail Map includes only some trails that extend throughout the territory of the region’s capital and reach as far as the village of Dedaj. The area of Razëm-Vrith and of other nearby villages are still not covered by this map. See <<http://tourism.albinfo.al/>>.

The landscape of the alpine pastures

The landscape of Razëm is characterised by summer mountain grazing, carried out cyclically on the plateaus of Kastrat, Krenashdol and Fushë Zezë. Transhumance has an ancient tradition with solid roots in the culture of Malësi e Madhe (Muka, 2007), and is referred to in the norms of the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini* (Gjeçovi, 1933, art. 219). In Northern Albania, until 1955, the *madra*⁴, or community of shepherds, carried out the alpine pasture activities and dairy production. During the Communist regime, state-run dairy companies (*baxho*) gradually replaced them (Kurti, 1986).

The quality of the pastoral landscape of Razëm is the result of the combination of pastures, mountain huts and all the other elements that are useful to the alpine activity.

There are two types of mountain hut settlements. In the alpine pasture of Kastrat (the oldest), mountain huts form a compact block located near the forest of Mount Maja e Zezë. In the alpine pastures of Fushë Zezë and Krenashdol, instead, mountain huts are separated from each other, thus generating a spread out settlement pattern (Figs. II-3.5-II-3.7).

The alpine settlement model includes other components which, together with the natural features of the place (bare rock slopes, bushes, forests, etc.), contribute to making the landscape even more evocative and bucolic. Consider for example the trails and tracks, the enclosures, often made in dry-stone or with intertwined sticks or wooden boards, the wells with drinking troughs (*korita*) and the *gjollë me rrasë guri*, spaces paved with stone slabs for giving salt to the animals (Muka, 2007) (Figs. II-3.8 and II-3.9).

These alpine pastures have suffered for some time from a crisis that has weakened their economic and social role. The depopulation of the villages and other socio-economic

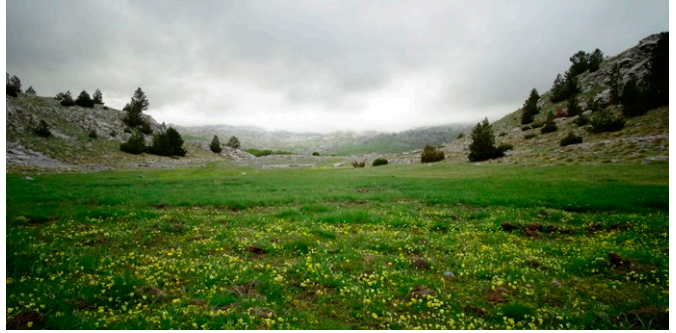


Fig. II-3.2. Above: The *Morenat e Razmës*. Below: The cave *Shpella e Shtogut*.



Figure II-3.3 – High-altitude pastures: a habitat where different vegetal species co-exist.

⁴ The *madra* had the task of collectively managing the herds of several villages and the dairy production during the period of transhumance and summer grazing (Kurti, 1986).



Figure II-3.4
A mule track
flanked by typical
stone walls.

causes have greatly reduced the number of shepherds working in the mountains, thus bringing about a process of abandonment and decay of the alpine landscape. The factor that most contributes to their isolation is the lack of vehicular access. There is no road connecting the alpine pasture of Kastrat to Vrith-Razëm.

There is also no specific policy regarding alpine pastures in Albania. The situation is worsened by the absence of regulations for safeguarding the authenticity of the existing settlements. In numerous mountain huts, works that have altered their original appearance acting as visual detractors of the landscape, can be observed. Mountain huts have never been the subject of a census and no scientific or educational publications that document their building features are known.

The agricultural landscape

Due to the climate and to the rough alpine morphology, Razëm has a limited availability of agricultural lands. The agricultural economy is linked to self-sustenance and the direct commerce of products in the surrounding villages. In addition to the vegetable gardens attached to the dwellings, the cultivated areas are mostly in Krenashdol, Shtogaj and in Fusha e Lugsit, due to the better characteristics of the soil and exposure to the sun (Fig. II-3.9).

The crops, mostly corn, beans and potatoes, are cultivated on the embankments of more sloping areas or in a series of minute arable spaces.

The local economy is linked more to sylvo-pastoral activities (Diku & Shuka, 2017) which, like agriculture, suffer from a lack of policies aimed at supporting small local producers and incentivising quality traditional production.



Figure II-3.5
An isolated mountain hut with the enclosure made of intertwined tree branches in the alpine pasture of Krenashdol.



Figure II-3.6
The alpine pastures of Kastrat.

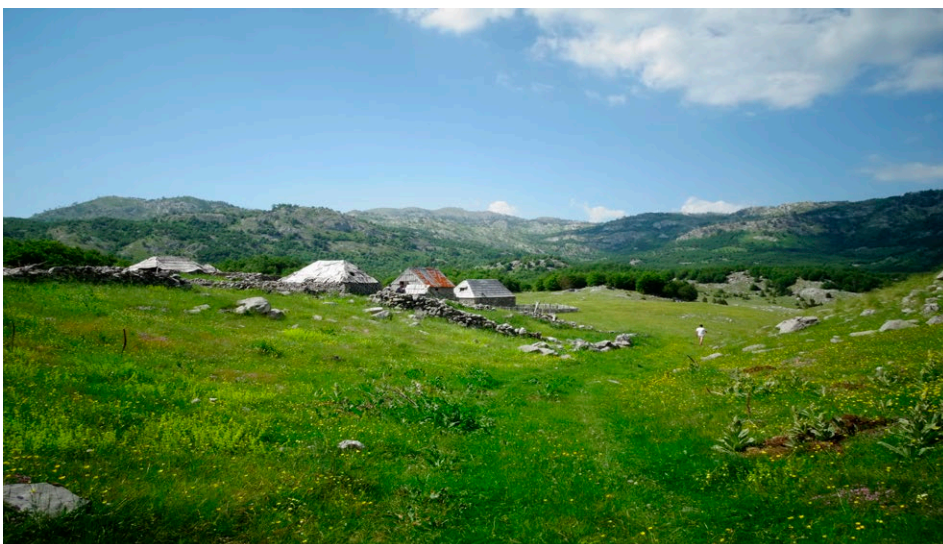


Figure II-3.7
The alpine pasture of Fushë Zezë.



Figure II-3.8
Landscape
components of
the alpine pasture
of Fushë Zezë.
Above: A drinking
trough (*korita*).
Below: Animal
stables built with
intertwined tree
branches.

Critical issues and future prospects

The landscape of Razëm and of its surroundings has been characterised throughout the centuries by the dynamic interaction between the local community and the mountain. Its beauty lies in its anthropological, physical, perceptive, aesthetic and ecological features, which together constitute the symbolic image of the alpine space and are fundamental resources for the development of tourism (Fig. II-3.10).

In the light of the analysis carried out, large-scale landscape planning that manages the territorial transformations, protects its cultural and environmental values, and enhances local resources, is currently lacking.

In the absence of a Landscape Plan, the only custodian of the landscape heritage is the Regional Natural Park of Shkrel (established in 2014). Its impact, however, is still limited since it lacks a Management Plan. The regulatory framework will soon be completed with the establishment of the National Park of the Albanian Alps.

Once this process has been perfected, it will be necessary to define new tools and projects for increasing the identity value of the alpine landscape. The safeguarding and enhancing efforts should be focused mainly on the alpine pastures. They are a actual territorial landmark and a productive micro-universe of great historical, socio-economic and environmental importance.



9



10

Figure II-3.9 – The agricultural landscape of Fusha e Lugsit.

Figure II-3.10 – A view of Veleçik Mountain.

Intervention strategies

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

See A.1, chap. I.3.

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

See A.2, chap. I.3.

In the Municipality of Malësi e Madhe, these projects can be carried out in the form of an outdoor educational workshop in the area of the Regional Park of Shkrel and, in particular, in the alpine pastures⁽⁶⁾. A deeper knowledge of the environment of the alpine pastures, of the knowledge connected to shepherding activities and of dairy production processes may increase the younger population's awareness of the importance of the natural resources and biodiversity of the Park.

The Action could be proposed experimentally in the school of Vrith, and possibly replicated in the schools of other villages in the Malësi e Madhe area.

S2 Planning Strategies

A.3 Drafting of the Landscape Plan for the Shkodër Region

See A.3, chap. I.3.

S.5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

A.4 Drafting of the Landscape Atlas of Malësi e Madhe

See A.4, chap. I.3.

The digital version of the Atlas could be included on the website of the Municipality of Malësi e Madhe or on that of the Regional Agency for the Protected Areas in Shkodër, also with the aim of offering the local population, visitors and scholars the possibility of suggesting improvements or changes.

A.5 Drafting of the Community Map of the villages of Malësi e Madhe

See A.5, chap. I.3.

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

See A.6, chap. I.3.

A.7 Creating a Digital Hiking Trail Inventory

See A.7, chap. I.3.

A.8 Documenting the cultural heritage of the alpine pastures of Razëm

The Action aims at activating interdisciplinary research projects that inquire into the culture of the alpine pastures from a historical and ethnographic perspective. The goal is to offer scientific contributions on a topic that has not been explored enough in Albania with the purpose of determining tools for its safeguarding and enhancement.

The exploration of different thematic fields (ethnography, history, architecture, botany, landscape, etc.) aims at:

- Analysing the context of the alpine pastures, thus reconstructing a key component of the history of the Malësi e Madhe area;
- Surveying the alpine settlements and recording them in a geodatabase using GIS technology;
- Documenting the architecture of the mountain huts and the traditional building techniques;
- Favouring the exchange and comparison of information concerning the subject with international networks and partners who have carried out similar research;
- Offering ideas and food for thought for the enhancement of the alpine pastures, both on the policy level and in practice.

S6 Enhancement Strategies

A.9 Drafting of an integrated project for the enhancement of the alpine pastures of Razëm

The enhancement of mountain huts requires a multi-sectoral and integrated project, which, from the point of view of touristic promotion, systematises a series of coordinated actions.

These actions should be aimed simultaneously at the following objectives: (1) redevelopment of mountain hut settlements and their road accesses, (2) development of pastoral/transhumant activities and pastures management, and (3) promotion of typical dairy products and of other products related to the pastoral tradition.

A.9.1 Recovering the identity-ascribing elements of the alpine mountain hut landscape

The Action proposes to:

- Recover the common wells of the alpine pastures of Kastrat, Krenashdol and Fushë Zezë and the drinking (*korita*) and feeding (*gjollë me rrasë guri*) troughs;
- Restore and/or preserve the dry-stone walls – biotopes for plants and animals – and the traditional timber enclosures;
- Preserve and redevelop the mountain huts;
- Maintain the pastures.

All these components, in addition to determining the landscape, ethnographic and cultural value of the place, together establish a ‘brand’ which can increase the commercial value of the dairy products and qualify the tourist image of the alpine pastures^(b). To this end the use of local materials and traditional building techniques is recommended.

In the case of works which do not require special skills (for example repairing the dry-stone walls, planting hedges, etc.), unemployed inhabitants could be recruited, after being adequately trained^(c); in all other cases, local qualified workmanship and artisans should be employed.

Works could be funded by non-governmental entities or by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development itself, and managed by the Municipality of Malësi e Madhe. This type of investment could also generate a stable income for the inhabitants of the village of Vrith-Razëm, thus also helping to maintain and pass on the tradition of working with the local stone and timber.

A.9.2 Improving connectivity between Razëm and the alpine pastures

In order to overcome the isolation of the alpine pastures of Razëm, better safeguard the landscape heritage and encourage tourist usage, it is necessary to improve their accessibility.

In particular, the following works are suggested:

- For the Alpine pasture of Kastrat, the recommendation is to build a new road, following the design criteria used for forest roads in protected areas;
- For the Alpine pastures of Krenashdol and Fushë Zezë it is necessary to repair the existing roads so as to ensure appropriate usability. We suggest maintaining them as a “dirt roads” and limiting vehicular access exclusively to the shepherds and other users of the mountain huts.

In both cases, it is necessary to provide the roads with appropriate signage and rest areas.

A.9.3 Enhancing the alpine pastures as a tourist resource

The Action aims at promoting the development of coordinated initiatives together with the shepherds and the local communities, in order to increase the usage of the mountain huts and the competitiveness of Razëm in terms of tourism.

In this regard the suggestion is to:

Carry out a survey and mapping of the existing mountain huts, both abandoned and still in use;

- Promote mountain hut settlements through integrated communication projects (Internet site, printed guides, publications, signage, etc.) that enhance the natural, landscape and ethno-cultural features of the area;
- Promote alpine dairy products through initiatives addressed to visitors (providing information on farms where it is possible to eat or buy dairy products and/or participate in their production; organising eco-touristic, educational-environmental and recreational events) (see Action A.6, chap. II.1);
- Enhance usage and enjoyment of alpine pastures while considering the needs of different groups of users (families, schools, hikers, etc.) through the establishment of guided thematic itineraries.

A.9.4 Promoting community management of alpine pastures and forms of support for developing tourism

The integrated project for the enhancement of the alpine pastures presented in the previous Actions requires a bottom-up participative approach centred on the shepherds and synergistically supported by the inhabitants of the village of Vrith-Razëm, the local entities and the NGOs operating in the area. To that end, a community management of the alpine pastures could be envisaged. By re-proposing the ancient tradition of the *madra*, albeit in new forms, the historical, cultural and economic value of mountain huts could be safeguarded^(d).

A.10 Enhancing the trail network

See A.13, chap. I.3.

A.11 Promoting the territorial knowledge through soft mobility

This Action proposes the establishment of a network of thematic tourist routes or experience-trails for enhancing the variety of landscapes in the area of Razëm and of the Regional Natural Park of Shkrel, as well as for favouring the knowledge and respect for nature and promoting forms of active, responsible and sustainable tourism. These routes should be explored on foot to foster the knowledge of landscape landmarks, as well as the connectivity and permeability of the area. Mixed-use trails (on foot, on horseback and by bicycle) can be identified on the basis of their features (width, slope, road surface, etc.) (see CAI, 2010).

The following routes are proposed:

- *The Alpine Pastures Route*, which winds at a high altitude among pastures and forests and allows the tourists to walk across the alpine pastures of Razëm and of the surrounding villages;
- *The Route of the Caves of the Park of Shkrel*, which traverses the *Shpella e Shtogut* in Razëm and the *Shpella e Pëllumbave* in Reç;
- *The Ancient Transhumance Trail*, which follows the ancient shepherd tracks and is connected to the *Feast of the Alpine pastures* (see A.9, chap. II.2) or other events related to sheep-rearing and to the tasting of typical products (see A.7, chap. II.1);
- *The Trails of Biodiversity*, which use the existing roads and are aimed at letting visitors interested in botany discover the natural habitats and high biodiversity of the Regional Natural Park of Shkrel, including a visit to the primeval forest of Vermosh as the main attraction.

In order for these routes to have an effective impact on the area, a strong marketing action is needed, together with the support of the local community, beginning with the shepherds and the trekking guides of the Regional Natural Park of Shkrel.

S7 Management Strategies

A.12 Entrusting the management of the hiking network of the Natural Regional Park of Shkrel to a single entity

See A.15, chap. I.3.

In the case under examination, the promotion and maintenance of the trail network of the Municipality of Malësi e Madhe could be entrusted to the Association of the Albanian Alps (Shoqata e Alpeve Shqipëtare).

Notes

- a) See “Il paesaggio dell’Alpe” educational project, promoted by the Fondo Ambiente Italiano-FAI: <<https://www.fondoambiente.it/il-fai/scuola/progetti-fai-scuola/educazione-ambientale/>>.
- b) See <http://www.paesaggiotrentino.it/documenti/Documentazione/Documenti%20dell%20Osservatorio/D02_Dieci%20azioni%20paesaggio%20rurale.pdf>.
- c) See the “DYNALP – Dynamic Rural Alpine Space” project and, in particular, the pilot project undertaken in the Municipality of Røthis (Austria) (See <<https://alpenallianz.org/it/progetti/dynalp/dynalp-relazione-finale>>). On this topic see also the “Valorizzazione multifunzionale degli alpeggi del Parco Naturale Adamello Brenta” (see <<https://www.pnab.it/info/area-download/>>).
- d) An example that can be referred to in this context is the Rete pastorale alpina in Italia. See <http://www.ruralpini.it/Rete_past_alp.html>.

Settlement and buildings

Historical overview

The earliest information about Razëm was recorded by Theodor Ippen, the Austro-Hungarian consul in Shkodër between 1884 and 1887, and also author of a series of texts devoted to the North of Albania. In his words, the plateau of Razëm is praised for the beauty of its pastures, which lie among the mountains Veleçik and Kunora, and for the abundance of high-elevation water springs (see Karaiskaj & Klosi, 2002). The name Razëm itself seems to be linked to the Austro-Hungarian presence in the territory, and was apparently given in commemoration of an officer called Rado or Rasko, who had fallen in battle.

Prior to this period there is some historical evidence that records the settlement of Vrith, referred to as “Verli” in the late 17th century maps drafted by Vincenzo Coronelli¹ and Giacomo Cantelli² (Armao, 1933). Since these maps are almost coeval and include the same toponymic errors (see Armao, 1933), it can be supposed that they were based on the same older maps.

The consolidation of Razëm as a tourist destination took place in the Twenties, when a complex of villas began to be built (see chap. II.5), a courageous and novel initiative that would change the aspect of the village and condition its history during the years of the Communist regime.

¹ Between 1688 and 1697, Coronelli (1650-1718) drafted an atlas entitled *Corso Geografico Universale* (Venice, 1692). It includes the map *Corso delli fiumi Drino e Boiana nella Dalmatia* (datable to 1688) in which Vrith appears as “Verli” (De Ferrari, 1983).

² Cantelli (1643-1695) mentions Vrith (“Verli”) on the map *Albania propria ovvero superiore detta anche Macedonia occidentale descritta con disegni fatti sul luogo*, included in his *Mercurio Geografico* (Rome, 1689).

The residential area

Razëm – a hamlet of the village of Vrith – is located 24 km from the nearest town (Koplik) and 40 km from Shkodër. The only existing road (provincial road SH42) has some winding and unsafe sections, which tend to slow down vehicular traffic (Fig. II-4.1).

Razëm presents the distinctive features of a pre-alpine settlement, with scattered groups of houses connected by paths and winding roads that climb the sloping landscape to reach dwellings at higher altitudes.

The area includes a residential nucleus (Shtogë) located to the west, near the slopes of Mount Veleçiku i Vogël, the tourist quarter (centre of Razëm), located on an elongated cavity surrounded by pine and beech woods, and three mountain hut settlements scattered in a vast surface and at a high altitude (Fig. II-4.2).



Figure II-4.1
A view of Vrith
from the winding
road that leads to
Razëm.

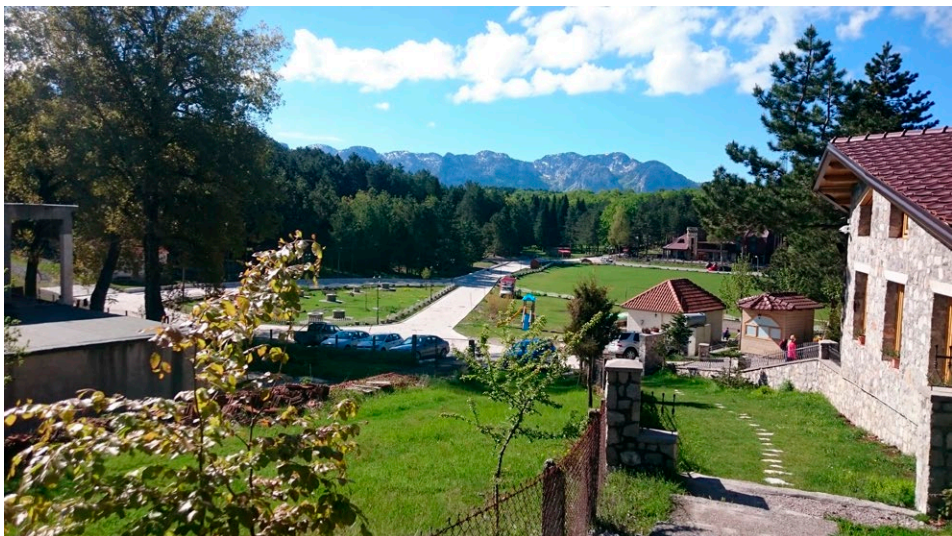


Figure II-4.2
A view of the centre
of Razëm.



The centre of Razëm consists of buildings linearly placed along the road and some accommodation facilities located in an equipped green area known as “Sheshi i Razmës” (Razëm Square), which serves as the centre of the settlement. The urban layout is scarcely structured. The buildings express an often-inconsistent architectural language compared to the identity features of the Albanian Alps building tradition. An exception to this are the historical villas that stand somewhat autonomously within the hamlet, creating a particularly valuable landscape micro-system (see chap. II.5).

Like Shtogë, also Vrith is a residential settlement with a fabric that is rhythmized by cultivated fields and scattered houses, enclosed among the slopes of the surrounding mountains.

The traditional dwellings of Vrith/Razëm

Typological features

The traditional dwellings were isolated buildings surrounded by a large enclosed courtyard³. In Vrith the dry-stone walls are still a distinctive sign of the landscape. The courtyard included the agricultural annexes and stables, the well (and/or cistern), the vegetable garden and, occasionally, the beehives. Outside the courtyard were the agricultural fields or the pastures belonging to the family (Fig. II-4.3).

During the on-field analysis, several dwellings were studied. Here follows the description of three houses that may be considered representative of the rural houses of the area;

³ Enclosures were usually not higher than the abdomen of an adult person; the most common were in dry-stone walls or in woven fence of branches, although some enclosures were made using a combination of these two techniques.

Figure II-4.3
A layout scheme of a traditional dwelling and its annexes in the village of Vrith. [Author: Dritan Kapo]

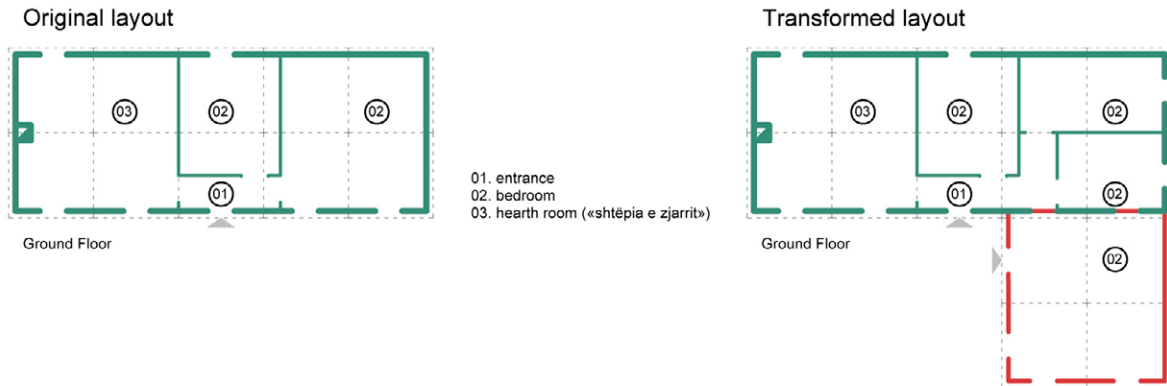


Figure II-4.4 Hypothesis on the original layout of the domestic space and further expansion of the first analysed dwelling. [Author: Dritan Kapo]

their original layout has been hypothetically reconstructed starting from the identification of the latest additions that were directly observed on-site.

The first is an isolated one-level house on flat ground; the second is an isolated two-storey house on a slope, together with annexes and surrounded by a wide enclosure⁴; the third is a two-storey house consisting of several units and also located on a slope. The three examples, although different in terms of ground slope, size and number of floors, all have in common the fact that they were built to accommodate a single-family nucleus. With the passage of time and the extension of the family through the marriage of sons⁵, the dwellings underwent a transformation process due to the increase of the family nuclei. They have been subjected to a subdivision of the interior space into several separate units, independently accessible from the outside, and/or to the addition of new volumes. This process can be deduced from the analysis of the doors, windows and stairs, which have been visibly added to the original buildings at later dates.

The first house to be analysed (currently in a state of ruin) has a rectangular plan with a 2:5 ratio to the sides. The original configuration consisted of three spaces: the first was the room of the hearth (*shtëpia e zjarrit*), which is the main space of domestic life, also used as a guest room (*oda e miqve*); the second was the bedroom of the sons; the third, of a larger size, was the master bedroom. The need to accommodate a second family nucleus led to the construction of a multi-use additional volume with an independent access that also included a hearth and a room with a double bed. This addition took place 'by rotation', thus resulting in the current L-shaped layout (Fig. II-4.4).

The second house dates back to the 19th century and belonged to Dasho Shkreli, a war hero of North Albania (Fig. II-4.5 and II-4.6 above).

It consisted of a single structure including two rooms at ground level and two other rooms on the first floor; also this building is currently in a state of ruin. Originally, one of the ground floor rooms was probably used as a stable while the other housed the hearth. On the first floor were located the bedrooms of the family members and the guest room with an independent access from the outside. An L-shaped interior staircase connected the two levels. When the need arose to accommodate an additional family nucleus, the house was divided in two along its vertical axis. The ground floor was used mostly for the bedrooms, the hearth was moved to the first floor and the guest room was sacrificed.

⁴ According to Muka *et al.* (2004), this house belongs to the most representative and valued typology in the Albanian Alps.

⁵ In the traditional Albanian family only the sons remained in the family house after marriage.



In its current configuration, the third house consists of a building aggregate made of different units. The original structure was a small square volume with two superimposed levels: the ground floor must have housed the hearth and the upper floor the bedroom. The staircase was exterior, on the upper side of the building. The building might have developed in three phases. The first two phases were probably characterised by the addition of new volumes ‘by translation’ on the short side of the building, doubling and then tripling the original house. The result was thus a tripartite building – with the entrance, hallway and staircase in a central position and two lateral rooms per floor – a dominant typology throughout the entire Albania. In the third phase, instead, the addition probably concerned single-storey facilities (kitchen, toilet, etc.), placed on the lower side of the building (Figs. II-4.6 *below* and II-4.7).

Figure II-4.5
A view of the house that once belonged to Dasho Shkreli.

Building features

Traditional buildings have foundations in stone made with large irregular blocks. The load-bearing walls are made of uncoursed rubble stone masonry (with an average thickness of 70 cm). Corners are carefully built with larger squared-off stones (50 to 70 cm long). Stone lintels (although some are made of reinforced concrete) are usually placed above the openings. In Dasho Shkreli’s house in Vrith an interesting tripartite lintel was found, as well as a mixed solution consisting of a stone lintel on the outside and a flat arch, also in stone, on the inside (Fig. II-4.8).

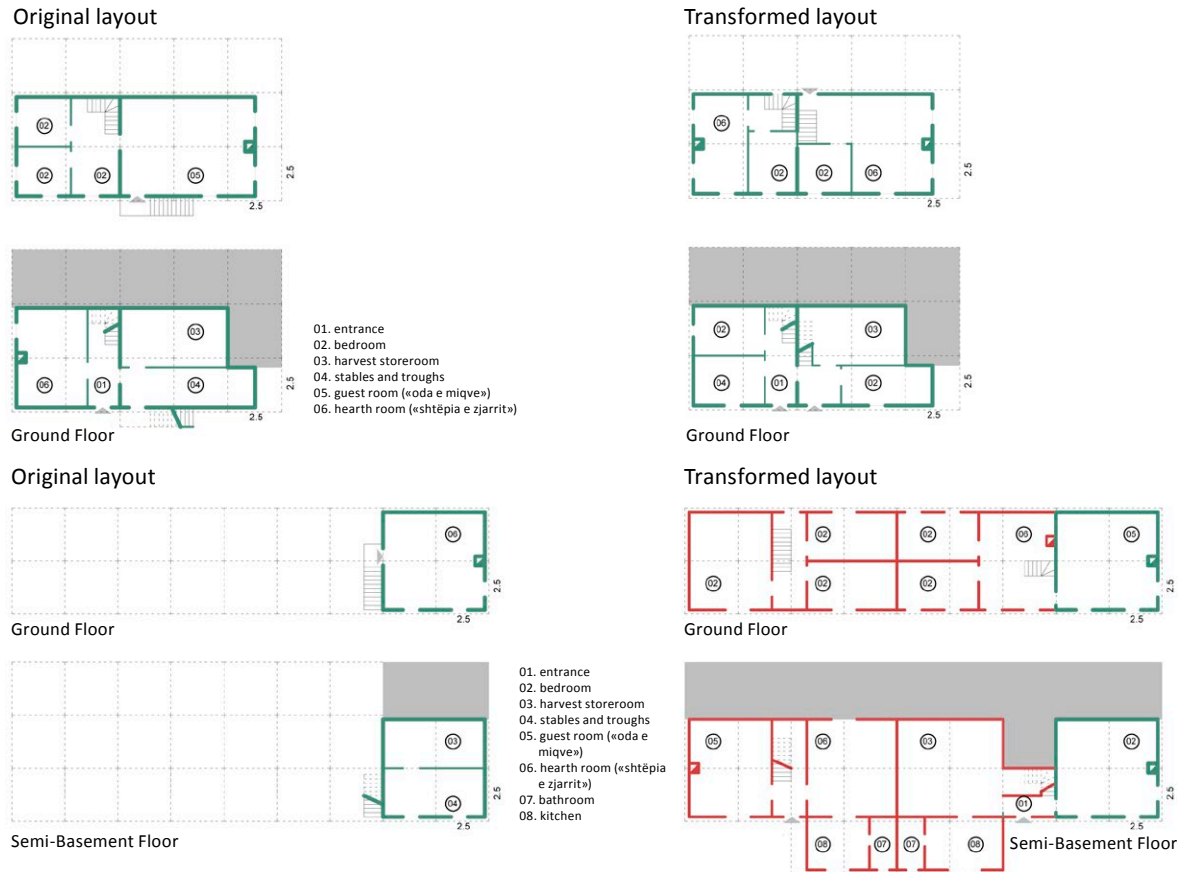


Figure II-4.6
Hypothesis on
the original
layout of the
domestic space and
transformations
that occurred
over time in the
second (*above*) and
the third (*below*)
analysed dwelling
in Razëm. [Author:
Dritan Kapo]

On the ground floors, the spaces used for dwelling are paved with stone slabs directly placed on the ground, or else in beaten concrete; the paving of storerooms and stables are usually made of rammed earth.

The intermediate floors are made of timber with bearers, joists and decking boards. In rooms used for residential purposes, the ceiling is often covered with wooden planks to create a false ceiling.

The roof is generally hipped, but there are also half-hipped roofs. The roof is trussed (with king post and struts) with purlins spanning between the trusses. The covering of the roof is usually made of Marseille tiles (Fig. II-4.9).

Partitions are made with a timber frame that includes studs (floor to ceiling) onto which are fixed crosspieces (small wooden boards or simple branches), while the remaining spaces are filled with mortar mixed with plant elements or small stone pieces. These walls (as well as all interior walls) are covered with a lime mortar plaster (Fig. II-4.10).

Interior stairs, generally L-shaped, have a timber structure consisting of two lateral stringers that support rectangular and triangular steps.

In most cases, there is a fireplace in precast concrete⁶, located in the middle of the wall (Fig. II-4.11).

⁶ According to Muka (2007), the new precast concrete fireplaces (known as *alla franga*, meaning “new”, “of a modern type”), started to become widespread throughout Albania since the Twenties and Thirties.



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Figure II-4.7 – A view of the third analysed dwelling.

Figure II-4.8 – The tripartite lintel of the Shkreli house.



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Figure II-4.9. – Trusses in a house of Vrith.

Figure II-4.10 – A detail of a timber partition.



Figure II-4-11
The interior of a traditional dwelling with a wooden false ceiling and a widespread type of fireplace.

The mountain huts of the alpine pastures of Razëm

There are three alpine pastures in the area of Razëm: (1) Kastrat, is the oldest, (2) Krenashdol, established during the Communist era on an ex-agricultural terrain, and (3) Fushë Zezë, established after the Nineties following the abandonment of a military building and a lumbering factory that deforested the area, thus creating pastures for the shepherds.

Whereas Kastrat has a compact layout, the other are more widespread, with the mountain huts placed around the grazing areas and separate from each other.

Typological features

The alpine settlements consist of mountain huts that present the same morphological and dimensional features. They are compact, one-storey, rectangular constructions with a hipped roof (Fig. II-4.12).

The mountain huts are divided into two sections: the shepherd's hut (*kasollja e barinjve*), where the shepherd lives and the cheese is produced through the processing of raw materials, and the enclosed space (*vatha e bagëtime*), used for sheltering and milking the animals. The shepherd's hut is usually divided into two different spaces, but it is not unusual to find examples with a single multi-purpose room in which the shepherds' living quarters and the dairy production share the same space. Some mountain huts have a mezzanine that is used as a storeroom or for maturing cheese.

The analysis of the existing structures revealed that several mountain huts, having lost their original function, were converted into private vacation dwellings.



Figure II-4.12
A mountain hut in
the alpine pasture
of Kastrot.



Figure II-4.13
A timber mountain
hut in the alpine
pasture of Fushë
Zezë.

Building features

The mountain huts are characterised by the extensive use of calcareous stone for the masonry and of timber for the structure and covering of the roofs. There are also some structures built entirely with timber, mostly abandoned (Fig. II-4.13).

The walls are built in dry rubble stone masonry; the use of mortar is limited to buildings that are more recent. The openings, with stone lintels, are generally small.

The traditional roof consists of a timber structure formed by trusses on which joists are placed, at a distance of 50-55 cm from each other. Wooden shingles, approximately 60 cm long, cover this structure. In many cases the original roof covering has been replaced with metal sheets.

The enclosures of the *vatha e bagëtime* consist of wooden picket fences or of dry-stone walls built of erratic boulders. Many buildings have been renovated without consid-



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ering the typical features of the local architecture. The most discordant elements are undoubtedly the metal roofing sheets.

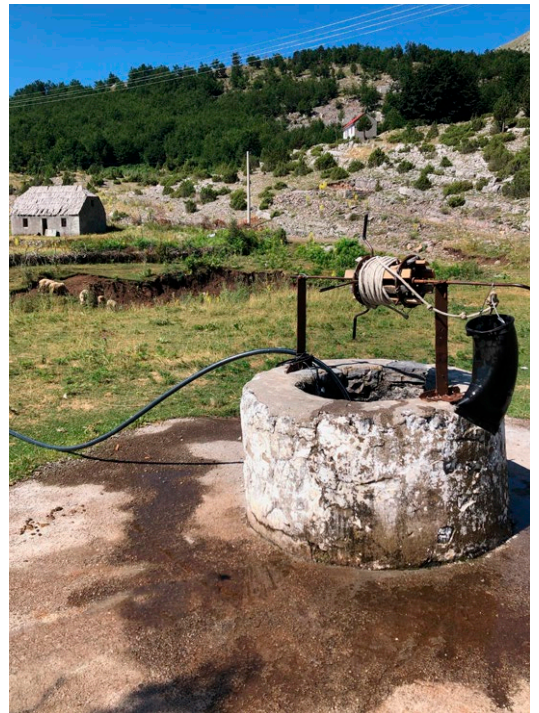
State of conservation of traditional buildings

Both in the villages and in the alpine pastures, the analysed buildings have revealed the same problems. Years of neglect and abandonment have erased some of the typical features of the built landscape. Many buildings are in a state of ruin; in some instances, it is difficult even to read their original configuration.

The introduction of alien materials and components and the demolition of traditional buildings in order to replace them with modern ones (in particular in the centre of Razëm which is under greater speculative pressure) are two expressions of the inhabitants' poor awareness of the need to safeguard their roots and also the proof of a lack of general policies towards the preservation of the cultural heritage.

As for the state of conservation, two different groups can be identified: inhabited and uninhabited buildings. The former present elements of decay and failure (cracks, out-of-plumb walls, loss of materials, bulging, etc.) which are limited, all things considered. The latter, on the other hand, when not in ruins, are in serious structural conditions, including collapsed floors and roofs.

Paradoxically, however, it is precisely the uninhabited buildings, which together with those that are more difficult to access with vehicles (e.g. the alpine pasture of Kastrat), that better preserve the features of traditional building and are useful for reconstructing a history of local traditional building.



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Figure II-4.14 – The Sheshi i Razmës.

Figure II.4.15 – A well in the alpine pasture of Krenashdol.

Regarding the mountain huts, we can add that the processes of failure and decay have been accelerated by the severity of the climate and by the temporary and technologically poor conception of the buildings.

Public space

The *Kanun* has influenced both individual and collective social life and behaviour for centuries in the area of Malësi e Madhe. The society regulated by the *Kanun* is rooted in a patriarchal social system and in the concept of *fis* (the lineage) (Kasteleti *et al.*, 2009). “Social space – writes Collina (2011) – lies within the house, and is reserved to the extended family unit”. For this reason, here more than in other rural Albanian contexts, the concept of public space – understood as a system of living places that ensure and offer the values of sociality, of interaction, as well as of social cohesion and individual development (see Belfiore, 2014) – does not belong to the culture of the place. In Vrith, for example, there is no square, no parks, and no recreational areas for children⁷.

In the centre of Razëm, instead, there is a green area (Sheshi i Razmës) used for collective activities and for grazing. It houses nine wells distributed in an apparently random pattern on an almond-shape surface (Fig. II-4.14). There is no historical knowledge about their origin. According to the locals, the wells were built during the 19th century. What is certain is that the community recognises the ‘wells square’ as a place of memory (see chap. I.2). The curbs of some of the wells were recently restored (2014) with less than ideal materials and techniques.

The wells, in addition to being a vital source of drinking water, are a unique component of the Malësi e Madhe landscape (Nopcsa, 2013). They were placed in the courtyards of houses, as well as in public spaces, usually next to drinking troughs (*korita*). Similar works can be found along the road from Vrith to Razëm (*Pusi i Befcës*) and in the alpine pastures (Fig. II-4.15).

To the south-west of the Sheshi i Razmës lie the historical villas, immersed in an impressive landscape characterised by centuries-old trees and dry-stone walls (see chap. II.5). This area shows features similar to those of a park, and tourists (especially on summer weekends) use it as a picnic area. Unfortunately, it is not well maintained (also due to the disrespectful behaviour of the tourists) and is not equipped as a rest area for visitors.

Infrastructure network

Due to the scarce availability of surface water resources (rivers and streams), water has always been a problem for the inhabitants of Vrith/Razëm. In order to address this, they have developed two main water supply methods: (1) wells, and (2) underground cisterns for collecting rainwater. Since an obsolete water supply network currently supplies the village, for non-drinking purposes the inhabitants still use the wells and cisterns, whereas bottled water is used for drinking. In periods of drought, tank trucks supply water.

A similar problem concerns the supply of electricity, whose distribution network was installed in 1969 and never renovated. According to the villagers, power blackouts

⁷ The absence of recreational spaces was also highlighted by the school headmaster of Vrith – Gasper Purashaj – who, in order to overcome this issue, often allows the students to use the schoolyard after the school hours. (Interview given in Vrith on 15.06.2019).

are common. To make up for this, accommodation facilities and some residences use fossil-fuel electric generators that are both polluting and noisy.

Razëm and Vrith do not have a sewage system. The disposal of blackwaters takes place mainly through leaching cesspools buried in the courtyards, whereas greywater are simply dispersed on the ground without any filtering.

Another critical aspect (which concerns the entire area of Malësi e Madhe) is the absence of a public rubbish disposal and treatment system. In Razëm and in Vrith domestic waste is thrown in a dump located just outside the village and periodically burnt by the inhabitants themselves, with consequences for both public health and the environment. In both locations there is a limited number of rubbish bins for mixed garbage that are emptied now and then. The problems described here are obviously worsened during the summer due to the tourists' presence.

The enhancement and renovation of infrastructure networks is included as part of the territorial development contemplated by the Malësi e Madhe Town Plan (Plani i Përgjithshëm Vendor Bashkia Malësi e Madhe – PPV) and the Guidelines of the Sectorial National Plan for Tourism in the Region of Albanian Alps (Plani Kombëtar Sektorial i Turizmit për Rajonin e Alpeve Shqiptare). Concerning tourist locations, such as Razëm, the former addresses the problem of upgrading the electric network the renovation of the water supply network, and the installation of public lighting in open public spaces and along the main roads (Bashkia Malësi e Madhe – Strategjia Territoriale, 2017: 106-107); the latter recommends the optimisation of a waste collection and disposal system and the construction of a sewage network and of a waste water treatment plant (MTM - Strategjia Sektoriale, 2017: 228-229, 231).

As for mountain hut settlements, the state of infrastructures is equally critical. The electric network supplies only the alpine pastures of Fushë Zezë and Krenashdol, whereas the water supply depends exclusively on communal wells. Waste is dumped in the open and periodically burnt.

The centre of Razëm has a good Internet connection; the quality of the signal diminishes in the mountainous areas and becomes very weak in the alpine pastures (for example in the pasture of Fushë Zezë)⁸. An upgrading of the signal is envisaged by the Malësi e Madhe General Town Plan, which is aimed at enhancing coverage through the installation of new antennas and of a fibre-optic Internet cable (Bashkia Malësi e Madhe – Strategjia Territoriale, 2017: 108).

Public services, shops and tourist facilities

Razëm lacks the public services that are usual in mountain tourist destinations. The only exception is a first-aid medical office that is open, however, only during the summer months⁹. The recent closing of the tourism information point in the nearby village of Dedaj has worsened this situation.

Public transport depends entirely on private agencies, which in summer organise daily tours or else on a village driver who offers daily trips from Razëm to Koplík in his minivan.

⁸ See <<https://pcworld.al/operatore-t-celulare-publikojne-hartat-e-mbulimit-me-rrjet-2g-3g-dhe-4g/>>.

⁹ From June to September, the medical office is open 24 hours a day from Friday to Sunday and from 8:00 to 15:00 from Monday to Thursday. The rest of the year, a nurse from the village is on hand only in case of an emergency. For cases that are more serious it is necessary to go to the first-aid medical office in Koplík.

As far as shops and tourism facilities are concerned, in Razëm there are 1 resort, 2 hotels, 2 guest houses (that also serve as restaurants), 1 hostel and 2 bars. In Vrith there are 2 small general stores and 2 bars (July, 2020).

Critical issues and future prospects

Razëm has a high tourism vocation thanks to the scenic alpine landscape, the high-altitude pastures and the presence of numerous other meaningful places. Tourism struggles to take off due to problems with accessibility, the lack of infrastructure, services and planned attractions, its very high dependence on the season and a still inadequate territorial marketing.

Another serious obstacle to the development of tourism is the lack of ownership titles for houses and land, which often generates conflicts and greatly limits investments in the region.

The Sectorial National Plan for Tourism in the Region of Albanian Alps envisages an increase in accommodation facilities by 2031, which includes the diversification of accommodation structures (MTM – Plani i Zhvillimit të Sektorit, 2017: 79). In order to obtain lasting results that are compatible with the fragile environmental balances, the offer in terms of tourism should be oriented towards the recovery and enhancement of the existing built heritage and of all the resources capable of evoking the memory, identity and typical features of the place.

In order to mitigate dependency on the season, it is necessary to diversify the touristic amenities (sports, ecology, culinary, natural, etc.), and encourage winter tourism, which is currently marginal.

An important contribution could be offered through the redevelopment of the complex of villas and, especially, by the enhancement of the mountain hut settlements, which provide a great socio-economic opportunity. They can contribute to forms of experiential tourism, as well as to the continuity and enhancement of the traditional dairy production and to landscape preservation.

Intervention strategies

S2 Planning Strategies

A.1 Registering of real estate

The absence of ownership titles is common in the Municipality of Malësi e Madhe (see Law no. 7501 of 1991).

In order to correctly plan the territorial development of the area, it is of foremost importance to recognise and file all real estate property titles in the land registry office. This measure regards especially the owners of abandoned buildings and those interested in promoting real estate investment, since the recognition of ownership is the basis for obtaining bank loans.

To fulfil this aim, strong support is needed from the public administration, which should appoint competent personnel to provide guidance and support for the owners during the procedure of registration in the land registry office.

S3 Social Cohesion Strategies

A.2 Creating a Community and Artisan Centre

See A.2, sect. I.4.2

The NGO VIS Albania – member of the ANRD and operating in the area of Malësi e Madhe since 2009 – is already working in this direction through the organisation of events linked in particular with the emancipation of women from the social and work points of view, such as the "Pro donne rurali"^(a) and "Zana e maleve"^(b) projects.. This Centre could be located in the former school of Vrith.

S4 Living Quality Strategies

A.3 Upgrading of the technological systems in the houses of the village

As part of the priority phase for the years 2017-2031, the Sectorial National Plan for Tourism in the Region of Albanian Alps recommends a series of works for completing the water supply network and for the *ex novo* construction of the sewage system in all the tourist locations in the region^(c). The renovation of the electricity network and the installation of a public lighting plant, instead, are priority works envisaged by the Malësi e Madhe General Town Plan.

Meanwhile, and in accordance with the provisions of the above-mentioned Plans, it would be advisable to intervene on the buildings (accommodation structures and dwellings), carrying out the following adaptation works:

- Renovate obsolete plumbing including the replacement of ducts for avoiding waste due to loss or malfunctions;
- Promote the installation of systems for collecting rainwater^(d) and repair/replace the existing cisterns (to be used for non-drinking purposes, such as irrigation of green areas, flushing toilets, etc.);
- Promote systems for generating electricity from renewable sources^(e);
- Replace the current leaching cesspools with adequate bio septic tanks and adopt depuration systems;
- Separate black and grey water effluent streams to optimise the recycling of greywater for alternative use.

These works would help to complete the system of infrastructure networks provided for by the Plans; if conceived in accordance with the criteria of environmental sustainability they would also ensure energy savings and the protection of the environment.

In order to support the works on the buildings it is necessary to ensure adequate funding solutions (e.g. micro-credit)^(f).

A.4 Upgrading of some sections of the existing vehicular roads and construction of a public parking area

With the purpose of enhancing the tourism development of the village it would be necessary to repair some sections of the road between Razëm and Koplik and build a public parking area with 70-80 parking spaces (as envisaged by the Sectorial National Plan for Tourism in the Region of Albanian Alps), to be located in an appropriate area in the proximity of the centre of Razëm.

For the recommendations about the parking area see A.7, sect. I.4.1.

A.5 Establishing a public transport line

This Action aims at enhancing both the quality of life of the inhabitants and the development of tourism, it is necessary to provide a public transportation service that connects Vrith/Razëm to Koplik and Shkodër. This service could vary depending on the season depending on the mobility requirements of both inhabitants and visitors.

A.6 Providing services for the cultural and tourist usage and enjoyment of the area

For the undertaking of activities related to tourism, in Razëm there are currently some accommodation facilities, the public green area (Sheshi i Razmës) that is often used for recreational activities, and the green areas connected to the historical villas, a part of which is used by tourists as a picnic site.

The lack of essential tourism services makes of Razëm a weak tourist destination.

In order to fill this gap, this Action proposes the establishment of:

- A tourism information centre, including an ATM;
 - A shop for tasting and purchasing typical products, in particular dairy products from the mountain huts of the Alpine pastures of Kastrat, Krenashdol and Fushë Zezë.
-

A.7 Ensuring water and electricity supply in the alpine pastures

In the three alpine pastures of Razëm, the water available to the mountain huts is supplied by common wells. This water serves both as drinking water for the shepherds and the animals and for the dairy production activities.

In view of enhancing the dwelling quality of the mountain huts and boosting forms of eco-sustainable tourism, we suggest a better usage of the available water resources through: (1) the creation of watering holes, (2) the collection of rainwater from roofs and its storage in underground cisterns and, if necessary, and (3) the construction of new wells for supplying drinking water.

The water supply through wells can offer tourists the experience of the authentic life of the mountain huts, a Spartan lifestyle and far-removed from the usual comforts. It is however necessary to verify the quality of the water from the wells; if it were not drinkable it would be necessary to install an appropriate purification system.

As for electricity, it must be remembered that only the alpine pastures of Krenashdol and Fushë Zezë are supplied by the electricity network (which shares the same problems concerning supply as the village). In the case of the alpine pasture of Kastrat, in order to fulfill the needs of the shepherds and in view of a possible development of tourism (equipment for processing and keeping milk, pumps for the water from wells, small appliances, etc.), photovoltaic energy could be the best solution. Of course, it is necessary to establish specific usage parameters and criteria to limit as much as possible the impact of this equipment on the mountain landscape.

A.8 Waste water treatment in the alpine pastures

Treatment of wastewater in the alpine pastures is a particularly complex issue. The question lies in finding a solution for overcoming the difficulty of connecting this wastewater to the sewage network (which, for that matter, is still absent in Vrith-Razëm) and for safeguarding the water tables in view of the development of tourism. Tourism, although sustainable, will nonetheless have an impact on the environment. In these contexts, it is necessary to add a secondary filtering treatment to the usual septic tanks. Considering that the mountain huts are used in the summer and with the hope of preserving the current balance between the built and natural environments, a possible solution for treating secondary wastewater could be a phytodepuration system⁽⁸⁾.

S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

A.9 Investigating and cataloguing the built heritage in Razëm/Vrith and in the alpine pastures

See Phase 1, A.2, sect. I.4.1

A.10 Carrying out a feasibility study for the creation of a cross-country skiing trail

There are no skiing facilities in the Albanian Alps. The Malësi e Madhe General Town Plan proposes the establishment of skiing trails (and connected sport activities) in the village of Lepushë (Bashkia Malësi e Madhe - Strategjia territoriale, 2017: 254).

The land of Razëm is dominated by the majestic peaks of Mount Veleçik (1,724 m) and Mount Kunora (1,713 m) to the north, and of Mount Kunora of Zagora (1,862 m) to the east, all of which are partially covered by forests of pine and beech. The slopes and plateaus are covered in snow from December to March-April.

This Action aims at proposing a feasibility study for the creation of a cross-country skiing trail and its supporting structures in the area of Razëm. It could greatly contribute to a seasonal adjustment of tourism flows, liberating the tourism industry from its dependency on the summer season and thus becoming a fostering factor for economic and tourism development in the whole region of Shkodër.

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

See A.11, sect. I.4.1.

A.12 Safeguarding of the mountain hut settlements in Razëm(h).

This Action is an integral part of the activities envisaged in the *integrated project*, described in Action A.9 of chap. II.3., that combines building, economic, landscape and tourism development aspects. It aims at:

- Protecting the mountain hut settlements and the activities which are carried out in them;
- Determining the appropriate approach for safeguarding the morphological, dimensional and technological features of the building tradition.

In the Malësi e Madhe General Town Plan, the alpine pasture of Kastrat is marked as “N2- Pasture” zone (Zoning: SH-08_N21_01), characterised by a ban on building. In this pasture, which presents the oldest settlement type, the huts may only require restoration and conservation works.

The alpine pasture of Krenashdol, identified in the Zoning Plan as “N2- Pasture” zone (Zoning: SH-08_N22_05), has a coefficient of land usage of 3% (Bashkia Malësi e Madhe, Regullore Vendore, art. 95-96). Here, new buildings and refurbishment with a maximum height of two storeys, are allowed.

The Alpine pasture of Fushë Zezë, finally, is identified as an “A3- Rural mountain area” in which new buildings are permitted (Zoning: SH-08_A33_01), with a coefficient of land usage of 20% and a designated use as residential-accommodation. Also here, the maximum height contemplated for the buildings is two storeys (Bashkia Malësi e Madhe, Regullore Vendore, art. 50).

If these measures were applied, the alpine pasture of Fushë Zezë would become a tourist settlement and the shepherds together with the activities of the mountain huts would gradually disappear.

It would therefore be appropriate to extend to the Alpine pastures of Fushë Zezë and Krenashdol the measures envisaged for Kastrat, or, failing that, to contemplate for both a coefficient of land usage less than or equal to 3% and limiting the height of new buildings to a single storey.

For the three alpine pastures our recommendation is also to:

- Preserve the double function (as temporary residence and production facility) of the mountain huts that are still active;
- Promote the conversion and reuse of abandoned huts as tourist accommodation.

In the case of the construction of new buildings or expansions of existing buildings it is advisable to:

- Ensure their insertion in the landscape through solutions that are consistent with the existing buildings and construction typologies, paying special attention to the facades (including doors and windows), and roofs;
 - Favour the use of local and/or eco-compatible materials;
 - Encourage technological solutions based on environmental sustainability and promote the construction of buildings that autonomously provide for their energetic needs by renewable sources.
-

S6 Enhancement Strategies

A.13 Redevelopment of the Sheshi i Razmës and functional recovery of the nine historical wells

This Action proposes the redevelopment of the Sheshi i Razmës, in accordance with the idea of a flexible space linked to everyday life and/or community events.

For a successful outcome of the Action our suggestion is to:

- Apply the principles of inclusive design;
- Use paving patterns and materials that are coherent with the local context;
- Restore the well curbs;
- Design furniture made out of local materials and techniques and preferably built by local artists/artisans;
- Introduce autochthonous plant species;
- Provide for a low-energy and high-efficiency lighting system (see A.3).

Together with the redevelopment of the square it is necessary to carry out a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the water from the wells (that are used by the adjacent accommodation facilities) in order to verify whether it is potable or else suitable for other uses.

A.14 Recovery and conversion of uninhabited buildings into traditional accommodation facilities⁶⁰.

See A.7, sect. I.4.2.

A.15 Improving the spaces used in the mountain huts for preparing and preserving dairy products

In their current state, the spaces used for the preparation of dairy products in the mountain huts in the alpine pastures of Kastrat, Krenashdol and Fushë Zezë do not have adequate sanitary conditions. In order to ensure food safety, as well as the quality and the image of the product, it is necessary to establish a clear separation between the living quarters and the spaces for preparing and preserving dairy products. In those cases where there is no available space in the existing huts, small additions could be made for housing the different production phases, for storing the cheese and selling the finished products. The tasting and sale of cheese could also take place in a communal space managed by the shepherds. Also important is the maintenance of the enclosed spaces (*vatha e bagëtime*) surrounding the pastures, which, with minimal works could become attractive places for visitors to stop for a rest, taste the dairy products and contemplate the beauty of the landscape.

A.16 Creating an eco-campground for promoting the principles of ecological tourism

The Sectorial National Plan for Tourism in the Region of Albanian Alps recommends for the area of Razëm an increase and diversification of accommodation facilities to be undertaken as the main strategy for the development of tourism (MTM, 2017: 79). This includes the creation of a campground for 200 guests.

In accordance with this aim, we propose the construction of an eco-campground, based on the following design strategies:

- Construction of reversible structures, dry-assembled and with a low environmental impact;
- Use of sustainable building techniques, that envisage the use of local materials and traditional construction techniques (for example, uncoursed rubble stone walls, roofs covered in wooden shingles, dry-stone boundary walls, etc.);
- Use of renewable energy (solar thermal, heat pump, photovoltaic, micro wind turbines, etc.).

The recommendation is to locate the campground in the north-east area of the village, classified by the Malësi e Madhe General Town Plan as a “Wood” zone (Natural system-zone N1: Wood-SH-08_N11_05) – where building operations are prohibited (Bashkia Malësi e Madhe, Regullore Vendore, art. 92) –and also partially in the “Pasture” zone (N2- Pasture-SH-08_N22_07). The latter area has a coefficient of land usage (*koeficienti i shfrytëzimit të tokës*) equal to 3 % and allows only buildings with a maximum height of two storeys (Bashkia Malësi e Madhe, Regullore Vendore, art. 96).

Our suggestion is to build only one-storey buildings and to locate the following spaces and services within the greenery:

- Reception and common areas;
- Spaces for campers and/or caravans;
- Spaces for tents;
- Bungalows and mobile homes;
- Picnic area;
- Playground;
- Toilets.

Considering the quality of the landscape, the aforementioned works should respect the landscape continuity of the pre-alpine context. Our specific recommendation is 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.

Notes

- a) See <<https://www.facebook.com/VISnordAlb/posts/2510052219076753>>.
- b) See <<http://www.volint.it/vis/avviato-ilprogetto-%E2%80%9CZana-e-maleve-giovani-e-territorio%E2%80%9D>>.
- c) The Plan provides the general guidelines concerning the way of carrying out works, size of the ducts, hydrogeological pre-feasibility studies and other technical aspects, as well as principles for management and awareness raising among the locals regarding energy savings, reuse and recovery of water sources, environmental protection and disposal of wastewaters.
- d) Concerning the re-use of rainwater see <<http://www.idro.net/images/pdf/Il-riutilizzo-delle-acque.pdf>>.
- e) The Sectorial National Plan for Tourism in the Region of Albanian Alps suggests the use of centralised systems for domestic hot water and heating (MTM, 2017: 151-153).
- f) See, for instance, “Zana e maleve” project (<https://openaid.aics.gov.it/it/iati-activity/XM-DAC-6-4-011523-01-3>).

- g) See the UE Life+Bioaqua project: <http://www.bioaqua.eu/attachments/Fitodepurazione_Volume-Tecnico_PNGP_BIOAQUAE.pdf>.
- h) See Architettura e territorio alpino. Scenari di sviluppo e di riqualificazione energetico-edilizia del patrimonio costruito, <https://www.montagneinrete.it/uploads/tx_gorillary/berta_m-_dini_r-_de_rossi_a_corrado_f-_architettura_e_territorio_alpino_1482244343.pdf>.
- i) Regarding actions for enhancing the mountain huts see: Manuale per gli alpeggi - Uno strumento operativo per le malghe delle montagne di Valgrigna, <<https://www.ersaf.lombardia.it/it/file/3070/50805231/ManualeAlpeggi-Ver13b-09aprile2018.pdf>> and Buone pratiche gestionali delle malghe tra Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia e Carinzia (<http://www.ersa.fvg.it/export/sites/ersa/aziende/sperimentazione/Alpicoltura_friulana/Allegati-Alpeggio/buonepratichegestionalimalgheit.pdf>). Concerning redevelopment projects see: Valorizzazione multifunzionale degli alpeggi del Parco Naturale Adamello Brenta (TN) (<<https://www.pnab.it/info/area-download/?upf=dl&id=7897>>) and Valorizzazione multifunzionale degli alpeggi di Gemenega e Siniciaga. Val Genova – Comune di Spiazzo (TN) (<<https://www.pnab.it/info/area-download/?upf=dl&id=7900>>).

Historical residential complex in Razëm

The complex of the historical villas in Razëm is located near the centre of the village, within a small wooded area that, also due to the fact that lies on a slope, serves as a transition point between the road and the buildings.

Approaching through the beech trees and pines and a series of steps, the buildings – eight overall – are gradually revealed (Figs. II-5.1 and II-5.2).

Although every villa has its own characteristics, a clear unitary logic links the buildings, not only visually, but also through a well-designed network of pathways. This is additionally strengthened by the orientation of the villas: the main facades are all facing an ideal centre of the ring path around which they are distributed.

The consistence of the architectural language and the presence of an interior network of pathways connecting the buildings seem to indicate a project designed by a single architect (unfortunately unknown), or at least the presence of a specific architectural ‘school’.

Historical and typological framework

There is little historical information concerning the villas, all of which derives from the testimony of the inhabitants of the village and from some articles published on on-line local newspapers and magazines¹. Since it is not possible to reconstruct with documentary evidence the history of their construction, an analysis of the cultural context in which they are situated is proposed, in alternative.

¹ See: <<https://www.votramagazine.com/razma-guri-shndrites-ne-gjerdanin-e-turizmit-malor/> and <http://revista.mapo.al/razma-qyteza-e-zanave/>>.



Figure II-5.1 – Paths leading to the villas surrounded by beech trees and pines.



There is a widespread opinion that the villas were commissioned by some businessmen from the rich bourgeoisie of Shkodër during the Twenties and Thirties, a decision which may seem surprising for an outlying location such as Razëm. In fact, it must be considered that the discovery of the village as a holiday destination had occurred a few decades earlier, thanks to the presence of Austro-Hungarian garrisons in the region (Prifti K., 2002)².

One of the villas belonged to the family of the famous actress Tinka Kurti³ (see Fig. II-5.7). Tinka's father, who was from Shkodër, due to his political affiliation to the opposition against Ahmet Zogu led by Fan Noli, had been condemned to death and forced into exile⁴. It is thus presumed that the villa in Razëm was built before 1925, the year of the fall of Noli's brief government and the return to power of Zogu, who in 1928 became King of Albania under the name of Zog I (Prifti K. & Shpuza, 2007).

In the solutions adopted in the complex, it is easy to identify the influence of the architectural patterns used in Shkodër in the early 20th century. Shkodër had undergone significant transformations since the second half of the 19th century. Despite the Ottoman presence, the city showed clear signs of aperture to the West, confirmed also by the presence of French, English, Austrian, Russian, Greek and Montenegrin consulates (Luzati, 2012^a). After the catastrophic earthquake of 1905, a new 'Venetian' dwelling type, with compact volumes and a main facade on the street, began to become widespread thanks especially to the work of Kol Idromeno (1860-1939), a painter and architect from Shkodër who during his long career built approximately 100 buildings

Figure II-5.2
The location of the eight villas and their relationship with the road, the square and the church of Razëm.

² For reasons regarding specific geopolitical interests, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was present in the North of Albania since the second half of the 19th century, thanks to the right of protectorate over the Catholic institutions present in the territories of the Ottoman Empire. Of the 240 ecclesiastic institutions under Austro-Hungarian protection, 220 were in Albania.

³ See <<http://revista.mapo.al/razma-qyteza-e-zanave/>>.

⁴ On the house of the Kurti family in Razëm see: <<http://lajmetshqip.com/tinka-kurti-ju-rrefej-orijjininen-time-hungareze/>> and <<https://revista.gazetamapo.al/razma-qyteza-e-zanave/>>.

(Luzati, 2012^b)⁵. This dwelling type – implemented, above all, on the so-called Shëtitorja Popullore) – distances itself from the traditional Albanian house⁶ (Riza, 1991; 2010; Prifti Sh., 1976; 1979; 2001) and became established toward the late Twenties under the reign of Zog I, who was known for his aperture toward other European nations, especially Italy.

From the information gathered on-site it appears that during the Communist regime, the villas of Razëm were expropriated and converted into summer camps for workers (*kamp pushimi*). The process of restitution of the villas to their legitimate owners, which began with the arrival of democracy, has proven difficult. Because of the inheritance transfers from generation to generation, the owners of each building, in fact, are numerous and not always known. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the state of disrepair that most of the villas are currently in⁷.

From the point of view of the architectural language, the villas share some common traits.

First of all, they express a simplified version of the residential typology designed by Idromeno for Shkodër and an attempt towards a local interpretation of the ‘holi-



Figure II-5.3
The Red Villa,
one of the most
representative
buildings of
the complex, as
example of a “house
with krevet”.

⁵ Kol Idromeno studied at the Venice Academy of Fine Arts between 1875 and 1878 (Luzati², 2012).

⁶ The traditional Albanian house was isolated, with a courtyard all around it, a portico on the ground floor (*hajati*) and a loggia on the uppermost storey (*çardak*). Open spaces (porticos, loggias and courtyard) were often used for the artisan production of silk and fabrics. With the consolidation of industrial production, this function was progressively abandoned and new housing patterns have become established. The authors wish to thank Ar. Eltjana Shkreli, a native of Shkodër, for her precious suggestions concerning Shkodër’s residential architecture.

⁷ The question of the ownership of the buildings is a complex issue in Albania. Attempts have been made since the Nineties to remedy the expropriations that took place during the Communist regime with a series of laws concerning real estate property, yet without entirely satisfactory results (see chap. II.4).

day home', a type of residence which was already widespread throughout the rest of the continent.

The villas of Razëm belong to the building type known to Idromeno's architectural production as "house with *krevet*", which is assonant with *krevat* (in Albanian, "bed"). The term seems to derive from the jargon of the itinerant master builders of the area of Dibra (in North-East Albania, near the border with Macedonia) and refers to those dwellings that present a stoop with a few steps (which in this case are low in height, comparable to that of a bed), leading up to the front door of a house (Luzati, 2012^b) (Fig. II-5.3). The purpose is to separate the building from the ground for aesthetic reasons, but also for technological ones (protection from rising damp and enhancement of transverse ventilation of the living quarters and therefore also of summer comfort). In Razëm the separation from the ground is emphasised by a recurring element: a base with the same height as the *krevet* which occasionally juts out a few centimetres from the facade.

Some villas have a half hipped roof, a type of roofing that is typical of alpine architecture in Albania, but also in the North of Europe (Muka *et al.*, 2004; Muka, 2007; Shkreli, 2018) (Fig. II-5.4). This typology of roof, when compared to the traditional hip roof, permits the inclusion of a window on the short side of the building for ventilating and illuminating the attic more efficiently. In some cases, they include dormers, an evident contamination with the Mitteleuropean architectural culture with which Razëm was in contact, as mentioned, since the 19th century.

The roof covering is made of clay tiles, rather than of wood shingles (as is typical instead in the Albanian alpine tradition), thus confirming once again the influences of the urban residential model. During the analysis of the roof of one of the villas, some Marseille tiles with the trademark "V. Anastasiadhi Durrës, Prodhim tullash" (Brothers Anastasiadhi Durrës, Producers of Bricks) were found. The reference to the brick factory – which was active in Durrës since the beginning of the Thirties⁸ – provides confirmation both of the period of construction of the building and of the authenticity of the roof.

The complex of the villas of Razëm is therefore evidence of a refined architectural and urban planning operation that managed to combine the most innovative developments of city architecture – in line with the upper-bourgeois nature of the owners – with elements related to the identity of the Alpine building tradition.

Of the eight villas of the complex, only one was built in a later period. According to the owner (it is the only currently inhabited villa), the first two storeys of the building were constructed in the Forties, while the third floor was added during the years of the Communist regime. It is also larger than the others. Although an attempt was made to use the same architectural language that characterises the other villas, it is still evident that it responds to a different design logic.

Analysis of the building system

The walls of the buildings are made of uncoursed rubble stone masonry, except for the corners, which are made of squared off stones, often left exposed. The various walls stand on the base upon which the first floor is built. The facades are plastered and

⁸ It was possible to retrace the existence of the building using the following link: <<https://durrreslajm.al/speciale/durr%C3%ABsi-n%C3%AB-vitet-1930-mbi-15-p%C3%ABrqind-t%C3%AB-bizneseve-t%C3%AB-vendit-foto>>.



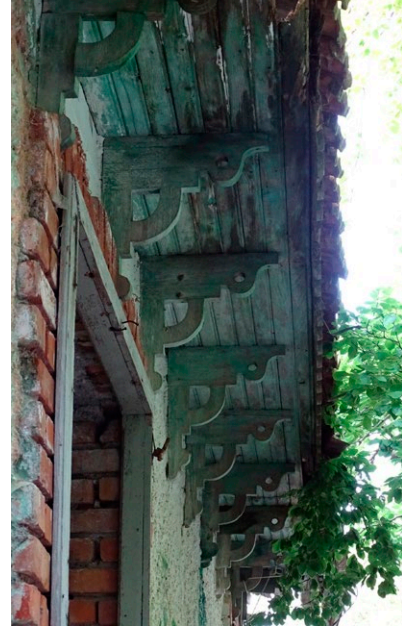
Figure II-5.4
Above: A one-storey villa with a half-hipped roof. *Below:* A two-storey villa with a hipped roof.

often feature cornices in relief (often made with plastered bricks) around doors and windows. The lintels are generally in reinforced concrete. In only one case, the bricks that compose the corners, the flat arches, as well as the jambs of windows and doors, are left exposed (Fig. II.5.5).

The floor structure consists of joists that rest on bearers, which in turn support wooden planks that constitute the paving. Sometimes the boarding is covered with decorated grit tiles (perhaps imported from Italy) or with terracotta tiles.



5



6

The load bearing structure of the roofs is in timber. The only roof structure that could be observed presents a queen post truss. Roof covering is in clay roof tiles (usually Marseilles tiles) (Fig. II-5.6); one villa has a roof covering of corrugated asbestos cement sheets.

In the two-storey villas, the staircases were originally internal; in some cases there are also exterior staircases which clearly seem to have been added at a later date.

The *krevet* is made with elements of reinforced concrete, some of which pre-fabricated and others cast-in-place.

Partition walls are mostly in hollow bricks.

Doors and windows are in wood with small metal parts; one of the villas still has Italian made metal roller shutters⁹.

State of conservation

With the exception of the only inhabited villa, the buildings are in a condition of total abandonment. The state of conservation, however, varies: some villas are greatly at risk from a structural point of view, with collapsed parts of the load-bearing walls, the roof and the floors (as in the case of the villa of the Kurti family) (Fig. II-5.7); others instead are in better condition and preserve most of their structural and non-structural parts, although greatly damaged. Damage of the roofs, water infiltration, absence of windows and doors, deterioration of the finishes (plasters and pavings) and invasive weeds are widespread.

Incorrect works carried out throughout the years can also be observed (for example, exterior staircases placed on the rear of some buildings) which have altered the original morphology of the villas and accelerated structural failure processes and decay phenomena (Fig. II-5.8).

Figure II-5.5
A view of a villa with exposed decorative bricks. It should be noted the base, with the same height as the entrance steps, which slightly juts out from the facade.

Figure II-5.6
A detail of a roof cornice with timber corbels.

⁹ It is the company "Costruttore Corsaro Nicola – Bari". The Corsaro company is still active and in the Twenties was exporting to some countries in the Balkans. See <<http://corsaronicola.com/it/azienda/>>.

Critical issues and future prospects

What has been presented above is evidence of the historical, cultural and landscape value of the complex of the villas of Razëm. As pointed out, the first obstacle to overcome is certainly represented by the difficult situation concerning their ownership (Fig. II-5.9).

For the safeguarding of the villas it is necessary to act simultaneously on three levels: (1) urgently implement safety measures for securing load-bearing structures and roofs, (2) determine a specific instrument (Recovery plan) that regulates the transformation processes, and (3) initiate the procedure for the recognition of the complex as a “Cultural Asset” and, in particular, as a “Historical Urban Complex” (Ansambël Historik Urban), in accordance with Law no. 27 of 17.05.2018.

The application of protection measures appears as a priority in light of the provisions of the Malësi e Madhe General Town Plan, which envisages for the area of the villas (“A3- Rural Mountain Area” zone) a coefficient of land usage of 20% and a designated use as residential, accommodation and services area (Bashkia Malësi e Madhe, 2017: 55).



Figure II-5.7
The current state of
ruin of the villa that
once belonged to
the Kurti family.



Figure II-5.8
An example of the additions and transformations that occurred over time on the rear facade of a villa.



Figure II-5.9
A sign located in the proximity of the complex of villas that says: "The land is not for sale, there are problems".

Intervention strategies

S2 Planning Strategies

A.1 Drafting of a Recovery Plan for the complex of the historical villas of Razëm

The Action proposes to draft a *Recovery Plan* (Plani i Detajuar Vendor) aimed at the preservation and redevelopment of the complex of historical villas and the use of the built heritage in full respect of its identity-ascribing features.

The *Recovery Plan* may be organised in three separate phases: (1) Preliminary knowledge analysis, (2) Drafting, and (3) Implementation.

PHASE 1: PRELIMINARY KNOWLEDGE ANALYSIS

This phase has three main goals: (1) identify the owners of the buildings and of the open-air spaces, (2) reconstruct a reliable historiographic framework based on documentary research and on the analysis of archival sources (property deeds, original projects, period photographs, reports, etc.) kept by public entities and institutions as well as the analysis of photographic sources kept at the “Marubi” National Photography Museum in Shkodër, and finally (3) carry out a more thorough on-field analysis of the buildings and of the context in which they stand.

Our suggestion is to organise the on-field analysis according to the following steps:

- Environmental overview, paying special attention to the system of pathways, accesses and local vegetation;
- Typological analysis of the buildings in order to identify the particular traits of the architecture of the villas in relation to the coeval architecture of Shkodër;
- Geometrical, photographic and technological survey of the buildings, including the necessary thematic charts for defining the proposals for action;
- Identification of additions and alterations to the original configuration of the buildings;
- Survey of crack patterns;
- Analysis of the general state of conservation of the buildings so as to understand causes and mechanisms of structural failures and decay phenomena.

PHASE 2: DRAFTING OF THE RECOVERY PLAN

The Plan should achieve the objectives detailed below.

RECOVERY OF THE BUILDINGS

- Safety works on the buildings in a critical state of conservation;
- Structural consolidation and removal of any causes of decay;
- Restoration of the buildings so as to preserve and enhance as much as possible their original layout;
- Energy retrofitting and redevelopment of technological systems;
- Replacement of those parts of the buildings that were built with harmful materials (such as the corrugated asbestos cement sheets), in accordance with European provisions and regulations concerning the procedures for the removal and disposal of asbestos and of building materials which present a health hazard.

REUSE WITH THE ORIGINAL FUNCTIONS OR INTRODUCTION OF NEW DESIGNATED USES COMPATIBLE WITH THE IDENTITY OF THE BUILDINGS

With the aim of preserving the idea underlying the original project for the villas, our recommendation is to limit the designated use to residential or tourist accommodation functions (*bujtina*). Only in the case of the villa that belonged to the family of Tinka Kurti we suggest converting it into a Documentation Centre, as described in Action A.3.

LANDSCAPE REGENERATION OF OPEN SPACES

It is advisable to envisage a series of measures aimed at the preservation and care of the open spaces. In particular, our suggestion is to:

- Enhance accessibility and safety of the exterior paths and staircases, envisaging support and fall protection elements where necessary;
- Fix the fences around some of the villas in accordance with homogeneity and low visual and environmental impact criteria;
- Design a lighting system for the open spaces, using devices that are consistent with the architectural context and energy saving lamps;
- Redesign the green areas, including the planting of autochthonous plant species and preservation of the original plant specimens.

PHASE 3: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOVERY PLAN

The *Recovery Plan* should be promoted through public or private initiative. In the case of implementation through private initiative, it would be desirable for the owners of the buildings to obtain support from public entities.

S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies*A.2 Proposal for establishing heritage protection regulations for the complex of the historical villas of Razëm*

This Action aims at initiating the procedures for the assessment of cultural interest (Verifikimi i Interesit Kulturor) for the entire complex of the historical villas of Razëm (buildings and open-air spaces). This initiative is considered as urgent due to the state of decay in which these buildings are at present, especially in light of the provisions of the Malësi e Madhe General Town Plan that, if applied, would lead to the serious alteration of the environmental context and of the buildings themselves.

According to the recent provisions of Law no. 27 of 17.05.2018 “Për trashëgiminë kulturore dhe muzetë” (About cultural heritage and museums), arts. 57-70 (regarding the architectural heritage) and arts. 249-250 (regarding the landscape value), the complex of the villas could be found to have the necessary requirements for aspiring to recognition as a “Cultural Asset” (Pasuri Kulturore).

In particular, in light of the architectural and urban features of the residential complex, it may be recognised as a “Historical Urban Context” (Ansambël Historik Urban), as defined in accordance with the provisions of art. 5, section 2 and art. 53, section 3, subsection ii, of the said Law as a “structure identified by urban/architectural features, part of the real estate cultural assets, whose elements are linked together and with the surrounding environment by significant spatial and aesthetic relationships”.

S6 Enhancement Strategies*A.3 Proposal for creating the “Tinka Kurti Documentation Centre”*

The villa, which belonged to the family of the famous actress Tinka Kurti, is currently in a state of ruin. The roof, the floors and part of the load-bearing walls have collapsed.

The Action is aimed at the restoration of the building and its conversion into a Documentation Centre focused on the actress herself and on her era^(a). The life of the actress and the history of the villas are expressions of Albanian culture during the 20th century. They are both particularly linked to the years of the Communist regime and it is considered that this initiative could prove to be an attraction for tourists, but also an opportunity for the inhabitants of the region of Shkodër to know and come to terms with their own history. As is well known, Hoxha’s dictatorship modified the anthropological and productive structure of Albania, profoundly altering artistic, artisan and social practices of the country. During the summer, the Centre could organise in the Square of Razëm – in collaboration with the organisers of the Literary Festival of Razëm^(b), the “Marubi” Museum and the local public entities – a festival of 20th century Albanian film and theatre, as well as events concerning the photography, visual arts, rhapsodic tradition and artisan production of that period (see chap. II.2).

Notes

- a) A reference worth mentioning is the Kadare House Studio (Kadare Shtëpia Studio), located in the centre of Tirana. See Baxhaku (2019).
- b) The Literary Festival of Razëm (Ditët Letrare të Razmës) has been organised since 2015 by the Instituti Europian Pashko in collaboration with the Universiteti Europian i Tiranës. The event takes place during the last weekend of May. The purpose of the activity is the promotion of Albanian literature through prizes awarded to the best writers.

