

**PART III**  
**THE COASTAL VILLAGE OF ZVĚRNEC**



Figure III-0.1 – Zvërnec on the map of Albania.

## General overview

VILLAGES	ADMINISTRATIVE UNITS	ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICES	MUNICIPALITY	REGION
Zvërnec	Qendër Vlorë	Vlorë	Vlorë	Vlorë

The village of Zvërnec is located in the southern part of the Lagoon of Nartë, on a promontory over a small gulf (Gjiri i vogël) which looks like a miniature of the ‘great’ Gulf of Vlorë (Gjiri i Vlorës) (Figs. III-0.1 and III-0.2). Vlorë, which lies in a south-easterly direction, is the only city with which the village is directly linked by land.

Zvërnec consists of two different quarters: the oldest part of the settlement located on the hill and the more recent quarter of the Vlachs<sup>1</sup>, which occupies the part of the village next to the shore.

The inhabitants of both quarters speak Albanian and Greek and have dual citizenship (the Vlachs also speak a dialect that is related to Romanian).

The village gave its name to the Island of Zvërnec, made famous by the presence of the Byzantine Church of the Dormition of Mary (category I Cultural Monument), which every year attracts many faithful and tourists alike, both Albanian and foreign. The church was part of an old monastic complex, of which only a few buildings remain today.

In addition to the church, there is another category I Cultural Monument in the area of Zvërnec: the fortification surrounding a settlement from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., known as *Kështjella e Treportit* (Castle of Treporti). Fragments of the ancient walls are preserved today on the hill of Treporti and under the sea along the south-west coast of the village.

<sup>1</sup> See chap. III.2.



Figure III-0.2  
The evocative  
landscape of the  
Lagoon of Nartë.

Being part of the Protected Landscape of Vjosë-Nartë is undoubtedly an added value for Zvërnec. Within this protected area – one of the richest habitats in terms of biodiversity of the whole of Albania – there are five sites classified as Natural Monuments, including the Island of Zvërnec (Fig. III-0.3).

Also worth mentioning for their peculiarity are some military structures scattered throughout the area. Among these, the most significant are the four monumental bunkers located on the plain of Zhukë, which have a high tourism potential not only due to their historical value, but also and especially for the quality of the landscape in which they are located.

Zvërnec has a *kryeplak* (village headman) who serves as an intermediary between the inhabitants and public institutions.

The inhabitants of the village are Orthodox Christians and every year, on August 15<sup>th</sup>, they celebrate the Feast of the Dormition of Mary in the church on the island.

In 2018 the village had 1,332 registered residents; of these, 1,101 have emigrated abroad (mostly to Greece) and 24 have emigrated to Vlorë or Tirana. Emigrants thus are approximately 85% of the total population, and the average age of the people effectively living in the village (around 207 people) is around 62 years<sup>2</sup>. The migrant families return to the village almost exclusively during the summer months, while some of the domestic migrants also return for the Orthodox Easter.

The main driver of tourism development consists in beach and seaside activities, which have seen a constant growth in recent years, attracting mostly families in search of places that are more isolated and less crowded than the traditional destinations on the Southern Albanian coast. The houses used as accommodation are managed directly by their owners (usually migrants who return to the village in summer).

<sup>2</sup> These data were provided by the Civil Registry Office in Nartë.

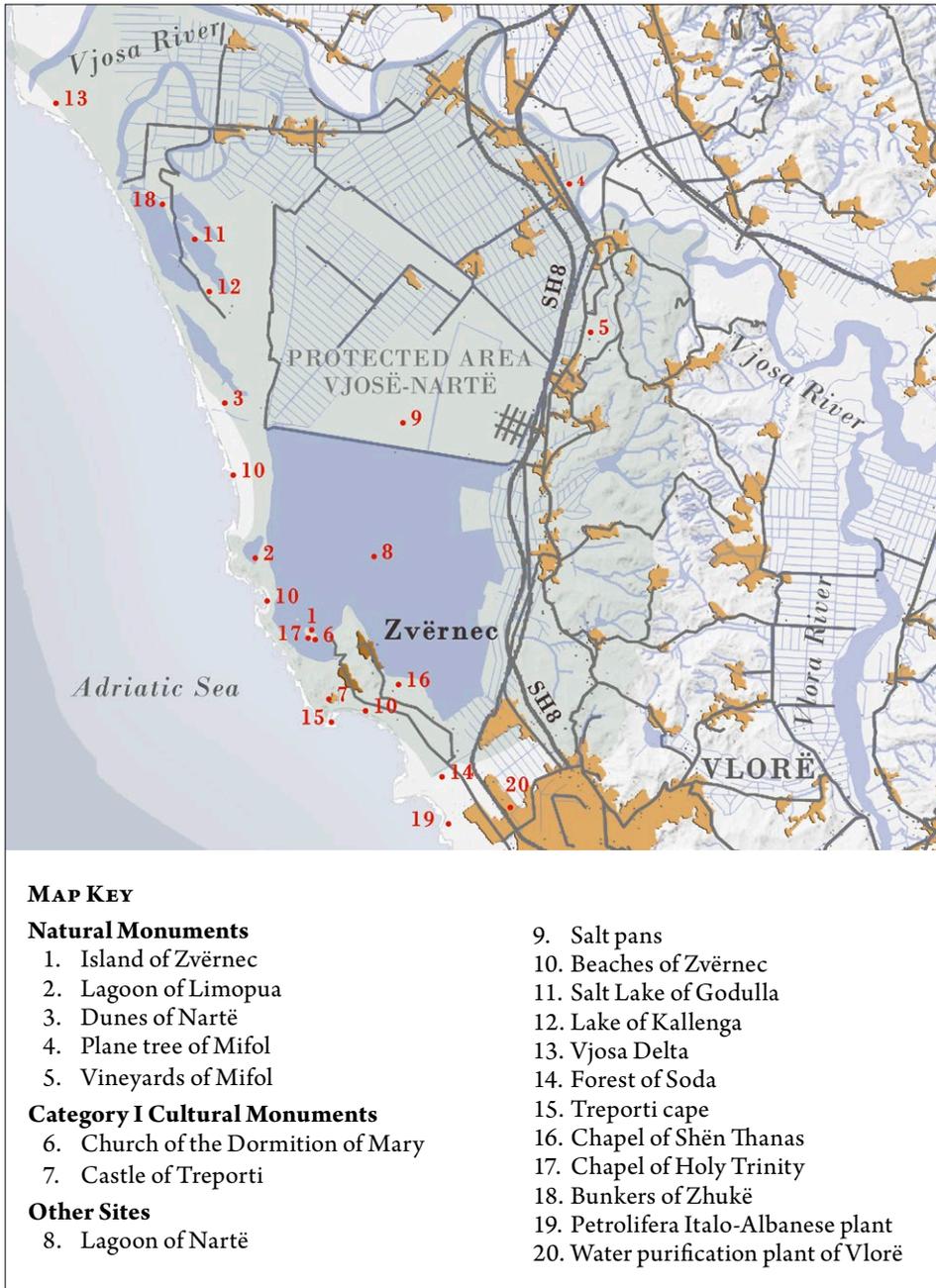


Figure III-0.3  
The Natural and Cultural Monuments and other significant sites around Zvërnec.

During the rest of the year, Zvërnec is left in the custody of the elderly members of the community, who eagerly look forward to seeing their children and grandchildren. Depopulation and emigration are here – perhaps more than in the other villages analysed in this book – a social wound that does not heal and also constitute factors that every local development strategic proposals must inevitably take into account. These proposals must necessarily rely on the beauty and variety of the landscape, which, however, still bears the marks of the industrial past of the area, and is under risk of new menaces that endanger its already fragile balance.



## Food heritage

Within the region of Labëria, Zvërnec has a distinct culinary tradition<sup>1</sup>. This is due to the peculiarity of the lagoon environment, to the fishing tradition, and to the presence of a population of Greek descent that has settled in the quarter on the hill since remote times (see chap. III.4).

### The typical products of the lagoon and the culinary tradition

Zvërnec is a fishing village that through time has developed a close link to the lagoon, a unique ecosystem including eels, crabs, bass, bream and four different types of mullet. The latter, due to their low cost, are the most widely eaten fish in the area (MedWetCoast, 2004).

The Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi had already mentioned this abundance of fish, by highlighting the presence of carps, mackerel, chubs, mullets and bass, as well as of fish roe (cit. in Dankoff & Elsie, 2000).

Fishing is mostly based on traditional artisan methods and ancient tools (see chap. III.2). Things have changed over the past years however, as a result of off-season fishing and the use of illegal fishing methods that alter the ecologic balance of the lagoon, such as poisoning, use of dynamite, trawling and night-fishing with torch lights (Papayannis, 2008)<sup>2</sup>. Fishing, in addition to providing subsistence for the families of the fishermen, is also a source of income for the inhabitants of the lagoon, since part of the catch is destined to the local market.

<sup>1</sup> The inhabitants of Labëria (*Lab*) were originally shepherds. This is reflected in a culinary culture based on meat and dairy products, olive oil, wine and citrus fruits, which is only partially found in the Nartë Lagoon.

<sup>2</sup> See <<https://tegraf.al/opinion-2/kush-po-e-shkaterron-faunen-e-lagunes-se-nartes/>>.

Fish is the main food source for the inhabitants of Zvërnec and the basis of a simple and not particularly varied culinary tradition (Fig. III-1.1). One of the reasons is that the few recipes originated spontaneously, with the few ingredients available to the fishermen on their return to the shore.

A historical fishermen's dish is boiled crab (*gaforre e zier në kusi*)<sup>3</sup>, cooked on a high flame with water and salt and usually eaten without seasoning or with lemon and olive oil. The crab (*carcinus aestuarii*), which is not very abundant, has some commercial value but is mostly used for family consumption.

The most representative dish of Zvërnec is surely stewed mullet (*tavë qefulli*). It is prepared using an old recipe that includes aromatic herbs typical of the area (such as dill), olive oil, onions and baby onions, pepper and fresh red bell peppers. These ingredients are fried together and then mixed with the shredded mullet and the water. The dish is then cooked in the oven for approximately 30 minutes<sup>4</sup>.

Eels are also stewed and cooked in the oven (*tavë ngjale*) following the same recipe as for the mullet (only replacing the fresh bell peppers with a bell pepper paste), or else grilled (*ngjala në hell*)<sup>5</sup>. Another typical dish of the lagoon is raw or fried roe (*vezë peshku*). It was once the everyday fare of fishermen and their families, yet today it is a sought-after and expensive product<sup>6</sup>.

The Lagoon of Nartë also has an old tradition of salt production. The use and preparation of salted fish is linked to the presence of the salt pans. The quality of the salted fish was renowned along the whole of the Adriatic coast (see Ducellier 1981). Unfortunately, this ancient technique of fish preservation has been entirely lost in Zvërnec.



Figure III-1.1  
Fish varieties of the  
Lagoon of Nartë.  
[Courtesy: Celim  
Albania]

<sup>3</sup> Interview in Zvërnec on 18.07.2019.

<sup>4</sup> Interview in Zvërnec on 20.07.2019.

<sup>5</sup> The village elders relate that in accordance with tradition, in addition to preparing their own trousseau, maidens were expected to learn how to cook eels.

<sup>6</sup> Interview in Zvërnec on 20.07.2019.

Due to the nature of the soil, which has a high salt content, agro-food production is limited and not exceptionally varied, and is therefore relatively marginal in terms of the local economy (MedWet-Coast, 2004).

Olive trees of the esteemed variety known as *kalinjot*<sup>7</sup> (some of which are centuries-old) are cultivated in Zvërnec (Fig. III-1.2). Thanks to their high lipid content, the olives are mostly used for the production of high-quality natural olive oil (NTA, 2017), mainly for domestic consumption and in small amounts for local trading.

Salads are widespread in the local culinary culture, as well as sheep and goat milk cheese produced by the Vlachs shepherds, enough for satisfying the needs of the local families and restaurants.

Traditional dishes use meat to a limited extent. A typical recipe is the *kavërma*, roasted lamb in a cream of flour and seasoned with onions, baby onions, parsley, oil and pepper<sup>8</sup>.

No autochthonous pastry-making tradition was identified, but rather, as expected, an assortment of products of Greek origin. Among the typical sweets and pastries, prepared for family or religious feasts, the following are worth mentioning: (1) *yslmer*, which comes from the region of Myzeqe and is prepared with several layers of *phyllo* dough, (2) *bugaçe* bread<sup>9</sup>, a variation of a typical Greek recipe, and, finally, (3) the *buka e Krishtlindjeve*, (in dialect, *kllore*) and the *buka e Pashkëve*, both based on a combination of flour, egg, milk, sugar and butter.

In Nartë, and in the few vineyards on the hills of Panaja, a good quality of wine is produced from a variety of local grape (*vlosh*)<sup>10</sup>. This grape is cultivated in soils with a low salt content, which give the *vlosh* wine a particular taste<sup>11</sup>. In order to safeguard this small yet esteemed production of wine in the lagoon area and to promote it, the “Feast of wine”, accompanied by typical culinary products and folk music, is held in Nartë on the last Saturday in September.



Figure III-1.2 – Centuries-old olive trees on the top of the hill where the older quarter of Zvërnec is situated.

<sup>7</sup> The *kalinjot* olive-tree is an autochthonous species, which lives over a hundred years and has been widespread in this region since antiquity (from Vlorë to the coasts of Himare and Borsh).

<sup>8</sup> Interview in Zvërnec on 18.07.2019.

<sup>9</sup> The *bugaçe* of Zvërnec is traditionally prepared for marriages. During the nuptial rite, the bride and groom eat it with some honey as an auspicious symbol and for fertility. Interview in Zvërnec on 20.01.2020.

<sup>10</sup> The wine from this area was mentioned by Çelebi, who speaks of a type of wine called *reyhania* (cit. in Dankoff & Elsie, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> The agronomist Nardi Gura has undertaken an initiative for recovering historical vineyards and the type of *vlosh* grape.

### Critical issues and future prospects

The lagoon fish-based culinary tradition is the main feature of the local diet. It should be promoted not as a set of 'typical products', since there is no great variety of products in the area, but rather as an engine of tourism development which invests in the skills that could thrive thanks to the recovery of the traditional knowledge, guarded particularly by the elderly, the fishermen and the wine-makers. In Zvërnec there are already some typical restaurants, some of which are well-known even outside the lagoon area, where the traditional fish-based cuisine can be tasted (see NTA, 2017: 33).

The food heritage is unfortunately endangered by the high levels of pollution (see chap. III.3). According to studies carried out by EDEN in 2012, many species of fish from the lagoon have levels of mercury that are above the European Union safety threshold (EDEN, CRCDD, 2018). This critical situation requires an in-depth knowledge and understanding of the water, air and soil pollution in the proximity of contaminated sites.

Moreover, it is urgent to address the problems related to pollution, inherited from the industrial past of the area and from a number of debatable choices, through environment-friendly policies and efficient environmental recovery actions (see chap. III.3). These actions are preparatory for any hypothesis of enhancement of the raw materials, of the wine and food typical products, as well as of the local catering sector.

## Intervention strategies

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### S1 Educational and Training Strategies

#### A.1 Drafting an educational project concerning the lagoon fish

This Action aims at organising an educational project focusing on the lagoon fish and on the preparation of the traditional fish-based dishes at the school of Nartë and in the schools of the surrounding villages. The project could include lessons about the various species of fish of the Nartë Lagoon and their nutritional properties, as well as workshops on the methods and techniques for preparing the various typical dishes, led by fishermen, local restaurant chefs and village elders (see A.1, chap. III.3).

### S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

#### A.2 Creating a Digital Inventory of Traditional Recipes and Memories of Local Culinary Culture

See A.3, chap. I.1.

*The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development together with the Vlorë Regional Government could promote this Action. It could be implemented locally by the Municipality of Vlorë with the participation of NGOs active in the area, food science experts, anthropologists and ethnologists.*

### S6 Enhancement Strategies

#### A.3 Promoting forms of cooperation among the local food and wine producers

The typical products of the region are olives, olive oil, and *vlosh* wine. These are all of good quality but are produced in limited amounts and mostly for family consumption.

Forms of cooperation between farmers (for example, community enterprises) could be useful for promoting these products.

In addition to consolidating social cohesion, these initiatives should aim at achieving two main goals: (1) to initiate procedures for the recognition as “typical products” of the said foods (see A.5, chap. I.1), and (2) to develop their production and marketing, focusing especially on the restaurants in the area.

#### A.4 Transmitting culinary knowledge and experience through experiential tourism

The Action aims at disseminating the features of the lagoon area, the everyday life of the fishermen, the fishing tradition and the local fish-based culinary culture.

From this perspective, an initiative based on the concept of “fish and eat” (in Albanian *peshku n’det e tigani n’zjarr*) could be devised. This initiative should ‘directly’ involve the tourist who could participate in the fishing ritual, in the preparation and cooking of the fish (directly on site or in the homes of the fishermen), and would finally enjoy the finished product in accordance with the ancient culinary traditions. This would provide a small source of income for the families of the fishermen who use traditional fishing techniques that respect the lagoon ecosystem.

#### A.5 Enhancing the lagoon culinary heritage in Zvërnec

The Action aims at promoting the area of the lagoon through the organisation of the *Street food in the Lagoon*<sup>(a)</sup> culinary event. It could take place along the streets of Zvërnec during the summer, when there is a larger presence of tourists and many migrants return to the village.

This event could include a series of activities:

- Show cooking experiences, during which street chefs reinterpret traditional recipes from the lagoon area using local products;
- Tasting of typical fish-based dishes from the lagoon area;
- Tasting and purchasing local dairy products, typical sweets and *vlosh* wine;
- Cookery book launches and debates on the topic of food as a health choice and a factor in the prevention of many ailments.

In order to promote other peculiarities of the area, a series of side initiatives could be carried out during the event:

- Folk dances and concerts of traditional music;
- Day trips on the lagoon on the fishermen’s boats;
- Exhibitions involving the production techniques of artisan fishing tools (see chap. III.1).

### Notes

- a) See the “Pesce in collina” project, which takes place in Magliano (Tuscany) (<<https://www.grossetonotizie.com/progetto-pesce-in-collina-magliano/>>) and the “Festa del Pescatore” held in Santa Maria la Scala, near Acireale (Sicily) (<<http://www.festadelpescatore.it/index.php>>).



## Traditions, social practices and local craftsmanship

Due to its location in a lagoon environment, the village of Zvërnec is different from the other coastal villages in the South of Albania. The presence of the lagoon is a significant indicator, not only from a geographic and environmental perspective, but also in cultural terms. Thus, the focus of this chapter is Zvërnec within the cultural traditions of the Lagoon of Nartë. Given the lack of scientific literature, in order to address some topics it was necessary to expand the reference context (from a geographical and cultural point of view), with all the risks and uncertainties that this operation entails.

### Traditions and cultural heritage

The high rate of depopulation that characterises the village of Zvërnec inevitably affects the processes of transmission of traditions and social practices. The permanent population of Zvërnec consists mostly of elderly people, while migrant families return to the village only during the summer months. This discontinuity and fragmentary nature of the relationship between generations inevitably endangers the safeguarding of the collective memory.

Although the inhabitants of the two quarters of the village, have different ethnic roots (see General Overview)<sup>1</sup>, they share a strong common link with Greece. They possess dual citizenship, and those who live on the hill even consider themselves to be a Greek minority<sup>2</sup>. This is no trifling matter considering the distance of the village

<sup>1</sup> For a long time the Vlachs represented an extraneous element for the native population. Only recently have the inhabitants of both quarters begun to interact at the community level and to establish family links between them.

<sup>2</sup> This status is not recognised by the Albanian State.

from the border. On the other hand, reluctance to fully identify with the ‘host’ culture<sup>3</sup>, seems to have always characterised ethnic minorities in Albania, as can be seen from the words of Ibrahim Manzour, a French officer in the service of Ali Pasha Tepelena between 1814-1817: “There are several villages in Albania that are inhabited by foreigners (...). Each of these villages is inhabited by only one ethnic group (...). Each of these colonies conserves its own language and even retains something of its native costumes and primitive customs. The men in these villages normally learn Albanian because they have contacts and need it for trade. But the women only speak their mother tongue according to the country from which the colony arrived”<sup>4</sup>.

#### Traditional festivities

The part of social life in which traditions are kept most alive is certainly religion. All the inhabitants of the village are Orthodox Christians and the church on the island is for them an undisputed point of reference. On August 15, when the Feast of the Dormition of Mary is celebrated, the faithful flock to the church on the island, not only from the surroundings, but also from other towns in the country. On the night preceding the feast, the inhabitants of the hill quarter descend in a procession toward the church (Figs. III-2.1 and III-2.2).

The island still maintains a halo of sacredness, which is felt in the testimonies of the villagers. During the years of state atheism, when access to the island was forbidden, the inhabitants would gather to pray in silence on the threshing floor (*lëma*) of the hill quarter, located in a privileged spot facing the island, so as to maintain, at least visually, the spiritual bond with their church<sup>5</sup>.

Also during the rituals related to Easter (which here coincides with the beginning of the Carnival<sup>6</sup>) there was a large participation. Young people, adults and elderly alike would take part in a series of ceremonies where the folkloric and religious dimensions are strictly bound, as is shown in the carnival masks, the traditional dishes or the role games. Zvërnec elders believe that the seed of the feasts is still alive among the younger generations, despite their physical distance from the village. In the nearby village of Nartë the tradition of Carnival is still experienced through a strong sense of community and has even become a tourist attraction (Papayannis, 2008).

#### Local craftsmanship

Zvërnec is mentioned since the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the writings of foreign travellers. A significant testimony arrives from Evliya Çelebi, who in 1670 undertook a journey across the South of Albania. He observed that the main activities in the village were the production of salt and fishing. It seems that the inhabitants of Zvërnec used to pay a tribute to the Sublime Porte consisting of large amounts of salt produced there, instead of undergoing the usual taxation system. The salt was then exported to the whole of Europe (cit. in Dankoff & Elsie, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> See Chapter III.4

<sup>4</sup> This quote is taken from the English translation by Robert Elsie of the travel diary that Manzour kept during his stay in Albania and Greece. See: <[http://www.albanianhistory.net/1827\\_Manzour/index.html](http://www.albanianhistory.net/1827_Manzour/index.html)>.

<sup>5</sup> From a testimony gathered in Zvërnec on July 20, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> In the area of Nartë the Carnival starts on the Easter Sunday and goes on for two more days.



Figure III-2.1  
Pilgrims  
celebrating the  
Feast of the  
Dormition of Mary  
on the night of 14<sup>th</sup>  
August. [Courtesy:  
CELIM, Albania]



Figure III-2.2  
Island of Zvërnec  
as a stage for  
community  
events. [Courtesy:  
CELIM, Albania]

Very few people today in the Lagoon of Nartë maintain the artisan knowledge of the past. In Zvërnec, in particular, with the exception of food products (oil, *vlosh* wine, and *raki*), there are no active artisans.

Some echoes of the past remain in the traditional clothing of the lagoon area. The local scholar Sejmen Gjokoli underlines the uniqueness of the female garments from Nartë and the quality of linen and silk fabrics with which they were produced<sup>7</sup>. These fabrics were widespread in all social classes since silkworms were commonly cultivated in the courtyards of the houses. The cultivation of the silkworm and the processing of silk were carried out by women and were a significant part of the family economy. This activity reached its greatest development during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and

<sup>7</sup> See <<https://erinadacineews.wordpress.com/2013/07/09/veshjet-popullore-vlonjate-resurs-per-zhvillimin-e-turizmit-kulturor/>>.

continued to be practiced until the Forties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in all villages of the Albanian Plain (Onuzi, 1984), including the Vjosa Delta's Plain. In fact, Venetian commercial records indicate that great quantities of manufactured silk and silkworms came precisely from the port of Vlorë (Ducellier, 1981).

#### Artifacts and work tools

Regarding everyday objects and work tools, since specific studies concerning the lagoon area are not known, it will be necessary to extend the attention to wider contexts: in the case of the former the whole region of Labëria (to which the Lagoon of Nartë belongs) will be considered; concerning the latter the wider Albanian context will be observed.

According to Dojaka (2017), before the establishment of the Communist regime, local artisans produced approximately two-thirds of domestic objects. Ceramic objects, widespread in the region of the lagoon<sup>8</sup>, were partly produced in the area and partly (especially larger ones) imported from Greece or else bought at the market of Vlorë. Among these it is worth mentioning the *saç prej dheu* (a sort of pot for the oven), the *shtama* (amphorae and vases, known in Nartë as *kotruve*) and the *kapasa* (jars) for preserving oil and dairy products.

Among the objects of everyday use, in addition to the most common ones also found throughout the region, Dojaka (2017) mentions the barrels and containers for stocking and transporting food products. They were made in oak, maple and larch and reinforced with iron hoops.

Typical elements from this area were the wood ovens inside the dwellings, one of which was found in the only traditional house in Zvërnec that is still inhabited. The wood ovens were built by the inhabitants themselves using cheap materials (small branches and mud), or else using bricks, depending on the needs and economic resources of the family (Dojaka, 2017).

The inhabitants generally scorned the work of the smith, and metal tools were bought from travelling craftsmen (*jevgjit*).

Regarding work tools, in the context of the lagoon those used for fishing are worth special attention<sup>9</sup>.

Among the most ancient techniques widely used by Albanian fishermen in the area of the lagoon, fishing with rods (*peshkimi me shkop*) and harpoons (*fuzhna*) are among the best known. Another tool was the *kosh e kovna*, a spherical or oval cage with an opening toward the inside, made by the fishermen themselves with willow branches. Also widely used were the nets, made (perhaps by women) from linen thread and occasionally fitted out with a wooden structure with plumb bobs (Fig. III-2.3).

Before the Nineties, approximately 200 fishermen worked in the area of the lagoon<sup>10</sup>. Today, instead, the few inhabitants who go fishing, do it for their own personal consumption or to obtain a small additional income. The most widely used methods for fishing in the lagoon today are the gillnetting and the weir (*njica*), a very ancient

<sup>8</sup> See photographic and documentary sources kept at the Central State Film Archive (Arkivi Qendror Shtetëror i Filmit -AQSHF) of Tirana.

<sup>9</sup> Since there are no specific studies concerning the Lagoon of Nartë, the information has been derived from ethnographic studies regarding the delta of the Buna (and the surrounding marshes) and the lake of Shkodër. The main sources are: Selhani & Cani (1985) and Dojaka (2017).

<sup>10</sup> See <<https://www.oranews.tv/article/peshkimi-i-paligjshem-ankohen-peshkataret-e-vlores-rrezikohet-zhdukja-e-rasatit>>.



Figure III-2.3  
Traditional fishing  
in the Lagoon of  
Nartë by using the  
*kosh e kovna*.

tool which uses the continuous flow of the incoming and outgoing tides to capture the fishes, which by reproductive instinct migrate in the direction of the sea (Selhani & Cani, 1985) (Fig. III-2.4).

Another artisan activity linked to the life in the lagoon involved the construction of rafts and boats. The inhabitants of the village recall how during the winter, communication between Nartë and Zvërnec was possible only through the use of small boats since the land routes, which were used during the summer, became impracticable. In the past, there were probably shipwrights in Nartë who built and repaired boats, but it cannot be excluded that many rafts and canoes were built by the fishermen themselves. During the surveys undertaken, no active craftsmen were found in this field.

For the extraction of salt, simple wooden tools, which were very common in the areas along the Adriatic coast, were used. A photograph taken in 1935, shows the presence of wheelbarrows for transporting salt as well as of wooden rakes for gathering it. The workers also wore wide wooden clogs to avoid sinking into the salt (Fig. III-2.5).

#### Traditional building

A very few traditional buildings have survived in the area of Nartë Lagoon. The information available on the materials and techniques used in traditional building is very scarce. It can be hypothesised that due to its geographical proximity, itinerant and seasonal master builders (*mjeshtrat shëtitës stinorë*) from Korça were active in the area (see Muka, 2007).

In addition to these 'external' builders - who very likely directed the work - the participation in building activities of local artisans (stone cutters and carpenters) is however plausible (Fig. III-2.6).

#### Critical aspects and future prospects

The lack of ethnographic studies on the Lagoon of Nartë certainly affects its already fragile socio-anthropological identity. In order to recover local traditions, scientific research is therefore called to provide its contribution.

In the specific sphere of the local crafts, the lack of artisans who have inherited the knowledge of the past, suggests a 'reinvention' of the local tradition rather than a focused 'enhancement' action (see chap. II.2). A contribution in this direction could come

not only from Albanian architecture, design and social sciences faculties, but also from local people who have emigrated abroad. The craft skills they have acquired could now be transmitted to the inhabitants of the lagoon through specific educational and training programmes. The village elders could be engaged in these activities. They could provide support for the process of investigation and research regarding traditional objects, especially as far as the reconstruction of their history is concerned. It would be important to recover the historical knowledge, both for fuelling specific ethnographic research projects and for enhancing possible exhibitions dedicated to the customs and traditions of the lagoon area (see A.12, chap. II.1).

The expected result of these educational and training activities consists in the creation of small artisan enterprises engaged in the production of building components, of furniture for domestic use or for the beach establishments of the area, as well as work tools (for example those used for fishing in the lagoon).

In this way, the artisan sector could contribute not only to the creation of job opportunities, but also to the safeguarding and transmission of the historical identity of the lagoon area.



Figure III-2.4  
Two traditional  
fishing methods  
in the Lagoon  
of Nartë. Above:  
The gillnetting.  
Below: The weir  
(*njica*). [Courtesy:  
CELIM, Albania]



Figure III-2.5  
The salt pans of Nartë in a period picture (1935). [© MARKA Photo Agency]



Figure III-2.6  
An interesting roof cornice with support struts made of nailed branches in a traditional building in Nartë.

## Intervention strategies

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### S1 Educational and training strategies

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

See A.1, chap. I.2.

*In the specific case of the area of the Lagoon of Nartë, special attention could be devoted to the furnishing of beach establishments and to the tools connected to fishing activities in the lagoon.*

*A.2 Promoting educational and training projects related to fishing activities in the lagoon*

Fishing in the lagoon is increasingly less practised. Today in Zvërnec, for example, there are fewer than ten active fishermen.

A possible way for recovering the fishing tradition could be the inclusion of extra-curricular activities in the school programmes, involving education and training related to fishing. Through field experiences, the students would have the opportunity to learn from the fishermen the tricks of the trade, concerning both traditional tools and techniques.

This Action could be carried out at the school in Nartë and in the schools of the other villages in the lagoon area; it could be included in the educational project for the recovery of the fish-based culinary tradition described in Action A.1, chap. III.1.

### S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

*A.3 Favouring the study of traditions and social practices in the area of the lagoon*

There are no known specifically historical and socio-economic studies concerning the Lagoon of Nartë. It would be advisable to investigate especially the peculiar features of the villages belonging to the lagoon area in relation to the context of the southern coast of Albania.

This Action requires the contribution of the village elders (so as to reconstruct the historical memory of the place together with craft techniques for creating everyday objects and furniture, as well as traditional work tools), and the starting of research projects that involve the Albanian faculty of History and Philology and Social Sciences, in addition to the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and the Study of Art (Instituti i Antropologjisë Kulturore dhe i Studim të Artit – IAKSA).

### S6 Enhancement Strategies

*A.4 Fostering the creation of a new craft business*

See A.5, chap. I.2.

*In the specific case of the Lagoon of Nartë, special attention could be devoted to supporting new artisan enterprises involved in the production of furniture for the beach establishments in the area and of tools connected to fishing activities in the lagoon.*

*A.5 Promoting the area through local feasts and festivals*

The Action is aimed at organising a *Feast of Biodiversity* in Zvërnec, on the occasion of the *World Biodiversity Day*. This event, established by the General Assembly of the United Nations through the 1992 Nairobi Convention, is celebrated every year on May 22<sup>nd</sup> in many places throughout the world<sup>(a)</sup>.

Guided visits could be organised for discovering the beauty and diversity of the landscape, in combination with activities aimed at tasting the local products<sup>(b)</sup>.

The event could provide an important opportunity for Zvërnec and for the villages located on the lagoon, to promote the natural habitats of the Vjosë-Nartë Protected Landscape. Indeed, it would be the first area in Albania to celebrate the *World Biodiversity Day*.

The *Feast of Biodiversity* could take place on the Island of Zvërnec. Following the example of the Carnival of Nartë, its inclusion in the *National Calendar of Local Feasts* could be proposed<sup>(c)</sup>.

### S7 Management Strategies

*A.6 Establishing forms of support for artisan enterprises*

See A.9, chap. I.2.

*NGOs active in the area of Vlorë could profitably contribute to implementing this Action.*

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**Notes**

- a) See <<https://www.nutritrento.it/content/view/full/8400>>.
- b) This event could be advertised through the websites of the Ministry of Tourism and the Environment and the Agjencia Kombëtare e Bregdetit, an entity operating at the national level with the aim of promoting the tourist potential of the Albanian coast. At the local scale, instead, dissemination could take place through the information channels of the Municipality of Vlorë and of the NGOs active in the area in the field of environmental safeguarding and enhancement.
- c) See <<http://www.mjedisi.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Kalendari-2019.pdf>>.



## Landscape

The area of Zvërnec belongs to the Protected Landscape of Vjosë-Nartë, established in 2004 by the Council of Ministers. It has been classified as a category V Protected Area (Protected Landscape/Seascape) by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (see INCA, 2018) and has been included in the candidate sites list of the Council of Europe's Emerald Network.

Five Natural Monuments are included in the Protected Landscape: (1) the *Rrapi i Mifolit* (Plane tree of Mifol), (2) the *Vidhat e Mifolit* (Elms of Mifol), (3) the *Laguna Limopua* (Lagoon of Limopua), (4) the *Dunat e Nartës* (Dunes of Nartë), and (5) the *Ishulli i Zvërnecit* (Island of Zvërnec).

Within this area is the Lagoon of Nartë, which meets the criteria of the Convention of Ramsar as far as the total number of wintering aquatic birds is concerned. In fact, this area is home to more than 1% of the bird population in the region of Vlorë, for a total of over 34,000 specimens (Kashta *et al.*, 2010). For this reason, it was declared an "Important Bird and Biodiversity Area" by BirdLife International and proposed for obtaining the European Union "Natura 2000" status (Mladenov *et al.*, 2017).

There are two islands in the lagoon: the largest is the above-mentioned Island of Zvërnec, on which stands the Byzantine Church of the Dormition of Mary that dates back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century (see chap. III.5). To the south-east of the village, on a strip of land surrounded on all sides by the lagoon is a place of worship very dear to the villagers: the Chapel of Saint Athanasius.

The protected landscape occupies a total area of 19,738 hectares (68% of which belong to the State) and extends into the municipalities of Novoselë and Qendër Vlorë where a total of 24,000 people live overall. Its western border is Adriatic Sea and its coast is characterised by an alternation of sandy beaches and cliffs. The altitude varies between 0 and 246 metres above sea level (MedWetCoast, 2004).

The protected landscape includes a vast variety of habitats which constitute one of the most significant assets in terms of biodiversity at a national level: (1) the Mediterranean scrub in the hilly areas, (2) the alluvial forests of the Vjosa River, (3) the freshwater wetlands of Zvërnec, (4) the sandy dunes of Pishë Poro, (5) the hills of Panajasa, (6) the coastal lagoons of Nartë and Kallengë, (7) the salt pans of Nartë and, finally, (8) the agricultural lands of Akërni.

Although the natural landscape dominates, the protected area coexists in a precarious balance with the industrial sites (both active and dismantled) and with a considerable abandoned military heritage.

The protected landscape includes a dense and not entirely surveyed trail network that develops across captivating places and natural scenic viewpoints of undisputed interest and serves at the same time as a link between various habitats. Once redeveloped, this trail network could become a pivotal component of tourism development, enhancing the accessibility and usability of the territory in accordance with the principles of soft mobility.

The focus of the following description is the landscape of Zvërnec's area and of Nartë's Lagoon, due to their contiguity and belonging to the same ecosystem. However, some references to the surrounding areas will be made.

#### The landscape of the lagoon

The Lagoon of Nartë is internationally known for its biodiversity, and is the second largest in Albania (approximately 42 km<sup>2</sup>, with an average depth of 1.20 m). Like any other lagoon, the water regime depends on the tides and the waves that raise or lower the level of the water by 15-25 cm. The salinity of the water varies between 36 ‰ in winter to 78 ‰ in summer (Mladenov *et al.*, 2018).

The Lagoon of Nartë is a unique habitat in Albania for its avifauna. The most characteristic bird species are *Pelicanus crispus* and *Phoenicopterus ruber roseus*. Other important species are *Actitis hypoleucos*, *Falco tinunculus*, *Oenanthe oenanthe*, *Charadrius alexandrinus*, and *Glareola pratincol* (UNDP, 2018) (Fig. III-3.1).

The lagoon is separated from the sea by a strip of land known as "Pishë Poro", a habitat composed of sandy dunes and pine groves, which maintained the status of Natural Reserve until 2004. These are the only remaining dunes on the Albanian coast; some of them reach a height of 6-8 metres. The habitat of the dunes is colonised by psam-



Figure III-3.1  
The *pelicanus crispus*: one of the most representative bird species of the Lagoon of Nartë.



Figure III-3.2  
A view of the Dunes  
of Pishë Poro.

mophyte, hygrophyte and halophyte vegetation which includes species such as *cahile maritima*, *xanthium strumarium subsp. italicum*, *salsola kali* together with other typical species such as *ammophila arenaria subsp arundinaceae*, *elymus farctus*, *echinophora spinosa*, etc. (Kashta *et al.*, 2010) (Fig. III-3.2).

Parallel to the dunes runs a pine grove that extends over approximately 1,200 hectares. The pines were planted between 1980 and 1990 in order to oppose erosion. There are various species, among which *pinus maritima*, *pinus pinea* and *pinus pinaster*. These trees coexist with brush vegetation of the type *quercetea ilicis* (*pistacia lentiscus*, *erica manipuliflora*, *myrtus communis*, etc.) which cover about 40-50% of the total area.

The part of the pine grove located near the old riverbed of the Vjosa has been set on fire on several occasions. The last fire dates back to 2016. Illegal fires and deforesting, often caused by shepherds in order to obtain grazing lands, are a recurring phenomenon also in the Panajasë hills, which are known for their olive groves.

The lagoon borders to the north with the salt pans, which cover a total area of approximately 14 km<sup>2</sup>. There is no certain information concerning the origin of the salt pans, yet their existence since at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century is proven thanks to the testimony of the renowned Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi who visited Southern Albania in 1670. Çelebi speaks highly of the quality of the salt extracted in the bay of Vlorë and notes the existence of commercial sea-routes to the rest of Europe (cit. in Dankoff & Elsie, 2000). In an Italian Military Geographical Institute (IGM) map (1939), the historical salt pans are shown next to the railway, near the village of Nartë. With the industrial development of Vlorë, they were abandoned and in 1958, the current production area to the north of the lagoon was established in a place called Skrofotinë. The area of the salt pans consists of shallow stagnant water surfaces, small dykes and islands that show clear signs of erosion caused by the wind and by storms. The erosion is causing economic issues (since it has an effect on the production of salt), and is also damaging the breeding areas of numerous endangered species of birds.

Two artificial canals (often blocked by sediments) link the lagoon to the sea. The canals supply seawater to the lagoon, and often also to the salt pans through a complex hydraulic system.

The salt pans use the water of the lagoon consuming every year approximately 15% of its volume. When the fresh water level of the lagoon is very low due to excessive usage, the phenomenon of eutrophication occurs (MedWetCoast, 2004). The resulting increase of plant species such as *phragmites communis*, *typha angustifolia* and *latifolia phyllirea* (the latter constitutes a serious threat to migratory birds) produce great damage to the biota. The southern part of the lagoon, on the other hand, has preserved its original fresh water composition.

#### Zvërnec and its island

The village of Zvërnec stands on a promontory surrounded to the north-east by the waters of the Lagoon of Nartë and to the south-west by the Adriatic Sea. The area is characterised by small plains separated by low hills.

The village has very little agricultural land available, much of which has been abandoned, due to the salinisation of the soil, and colonised by spontaneous vegetation. The olive trees (some of which are centuries old) of the esteemed variety known as *kalinjot*, are the main trace of the historical agricultural landscape (Fig. III-3.3).

The lagoon area has been continuously shaped through the centuries. On the 1941 Italian Geographic Military Institute map, the coastal landscape was still dominated by beaches and a vast extension of dunes and ripples. The construction of the *Uzina PVC* (a chemical plant for the production of PVC) and the planting of the Soda Forest (during the Sixties) deeply altered the landscape. The Soda Forest is a maritime pine grove that lies between Zvërnec and Vlorë. It originated as an environmental mitigation and compensation action in the production area. Even though it is considered a green lung of strategic value, today it lies in a state of degradation and abandonment due to environmental pollution and the total lack of maintenance and care.

The area also includes the thermal power plant of Vlorë (TEC), a canal belonging to Vlorë's system of waste-water disposal and an open-air dumps (which are periodically burnt).

The cliffs overlooking the sea and two small fine-sand beaches are the only surviving testimonies of the historic coastal landscape in this area (Figs. III-3.4 and III-3.5).



Figure III-3.3  
The agricultural landscape around Zvërnec with vineyards and, in the background, olive trees of the *kalinjot* variety.



4



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In the hilly area between Kepi i Treportit and the Zvërnec's small harbour, stand the ruins of the walls that once surrounded the ancient settlement of Treporti (*Kështjella e Treportit*, category I Cultural Monument). Several fragments of the ruins can be seen underwater or on the hillside.

An entirely different landscape characterises the Island of Zvërnec, which stands majestically in the southern section of the lagoon, just in front of the village that takes the name from it (Fig. III-3.6). It constitutes today the main tourist destination of the area.

The island is covered by an evergreen forest of *selvi cupressus sempervirens* (with trees up to 10 m) in association with *quercus ilex*, *quercus pubescens* and *pinus spp.* The

Figure III-3.4  
A view of a cliffed coastal landscape in Zvërnec.

Figure III-3.5  
A view of one of the sandy beaches of Zvërnec.



Figure III-3.6  
A view of the Island of Zvërnec from the wooden gangway.



Figure III-3.7  
A view of the  
lagoon from the  
Island of Zvërnec.  
In the background,  
the Karaburun  
peninsula.

planted areas are rather dense and cover almost the entire surface of the island (MedWetCoast, 2004) (Fig. III-3.7).

The forest coexists with a brush vegetation of many species (*myrtus communis*, *pistacia lentiscus*, *laurus nobilis*, *rubus spp.*, *phillyrea angustifolia*, *olea olaster*, etc.) and a limited herbaceous layer colonised by *chrysopogon gryllus*, *asparagus acutifolius*, *dactylis glomerata*, *desmazieria rigida*, etc. (MedWetCoast, 2004).

The island also includes a noteworthy cultural heritage: the Church of the Dormition of Mary, the lodgings of the former Monastery and the Chapel of the Holy Trinity, which is located in the western part of the island, in an exceptionally scenic position (see chap. III.5).

#### Industrial plants

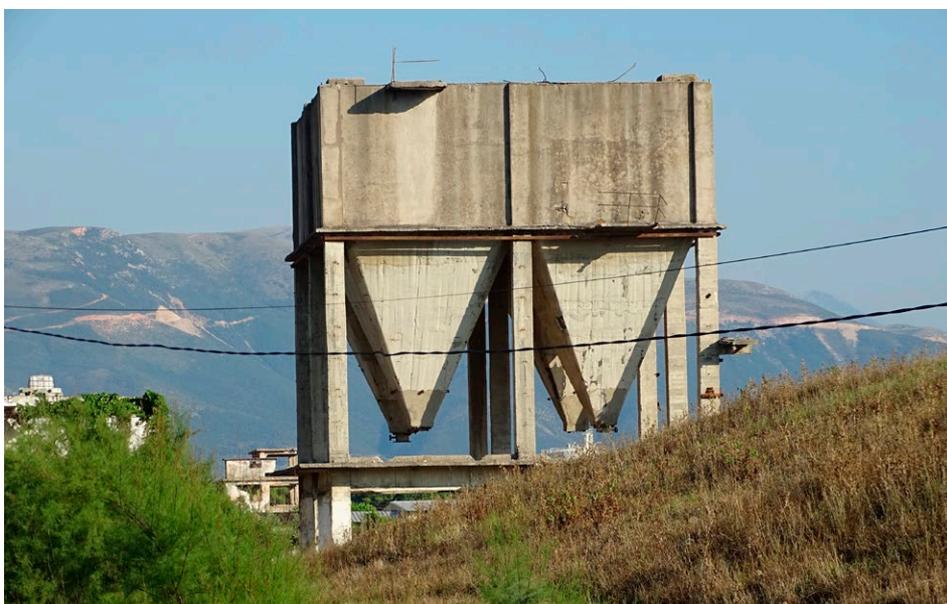
The Uzina PVC industrial plant was located four kilometres from the north of Vlorë, next to the Soda Forest and to an oil storage plant (Petrolifera Italo-Albanese). Uzina PVC included three chemical substance production units (chlorine, vinyl chloride, and polyvinyl chloride) (UNEP, 2000). Its construction began in 1967 and was completed in 1978. The factory was closed in 1992 and was almost destroyed during the political disorders of 1997 (Fig. III-3.8).

According to the data provided in the analytical framework of the Vlorë General Town Plan, from 1967 to 1992 this plant dumped directly into the sea approximately 500 m<sup>3</sup>/h of liquid waste with a high mercury content (Bashkia Vlorë, 2017: 175). The sludge dumped into the sea heavily polluted the nearby beaches and the Gulf of Vlorë, contributing to the enlisting of the area among the nine most polluted sites in Albania (Bashkia Vlorë, 2017: 127).

Approximately 100 families (1,200 inhabitants) who illegally occupied the plant after its closure, live either in the decayed buildings of the former industrial site or in



Figure III-3.8 – Above and on the next page: Remains of the former Uzina PVC plant.



structures built with recycled materials (EDEN, CRCDC, 2018). This is a real emergency from both a medical and a social standpoint. The inhabitants suffering a severe economic hardship and have no housing alternative.

During the on-field analysis, a high number of dwellings were observed next to the illegal dumps of toxic waste or near the only authorised dumping ground for mercury waste materials. There are some vegetable patches in these polluted soils and it is common to see livestock grazing on the dumps.

In 2002, following the UNEP/MAP<sup>1</sup> mission, the area was identified as an environmental 'hot spot' due to the high levels of mercury, which was over 1,000 times greater than the level permitted by the European Union (EDEN-CRCDC, 2018). The polluted area was partially decontaminated following the agreement/concession between the

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Environment Programme/Mediterranean Action Plan (GEF Project GF / ME / 6030-00-08) (EDEN - CRCDC, 2018).

Albanian State and the Petrolifera Italo-Albanese company<sup>2</sup> (2004). During the decontamination works (2005-2006) the Petrolifera Italo-Albanese also demolished part of the factory's warehouses. This action was repeated in 2011, but did not obtain the expected results (EDEN-CRCD, 2018). Surveys carried out in 2018 confirm a high level of pollution, which seriously threatens the health of the inhabitants and hinders the prospects for the development of tourism in the area (EDEN - CRCD, 2018). Among the remaining industrial buildings, the only ones of any interest are two great brick chimney stacks and a silo (Fig. III-3.9).

The Municipality of Vlorë, thanks to recent funding from the European Union, has approved a decontamination and site-rehabilitation project with an estimated cost of 3 million Euros. The project also envisages alternative housing for the people living in the former industrial plant (Bashkia Vlorë, 2017: 127).

#### The military heritage

There is a large number of bunkers in the area of the Lagoon of Nartë, which are owned by the Ministry of Defence. Most of them are in disrepair and are usually used as animal shelters. In the area of Zhukë, in particular, near the old riverbed of the Vjosa, there are four monumental bunkers built between 1986 and 1989, during the last years of the Communist regime (Fig. III-3.10). The structures are in an isolated position and in a particularly beautiful landscape. In addition to the hemispherical caps, they include underground spaces whose characteristics could not be ascertained.

Other military assets in the area are the former summer camp of the Albanian army (which stands on a hill that separates the two quarters of the village; see chap. III.4), and the former military airport of Akërne (which was built during the Communist era and is now the subject of a debatable project for converting it into an international airport).

#### Critical issues and future prospects

The Protected Landscape of Vjosë-Nartë is of a high environmental quality and a remarkable biodiversity. Unfortunately, it has been subjected, over time, to particularly aggressive anthropic actions, which have caused an inherent environmental unsustainability that threatens the entire ecosystem of the area as much as any future projects focused on the tourism development. The environmental degradation has not gone unnoticed, for example, by BirdLife International, which, in its last review

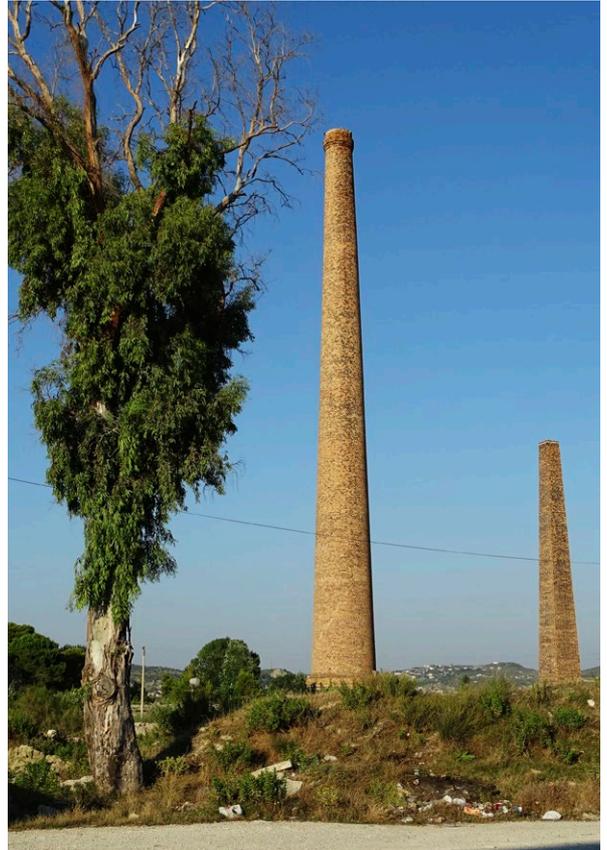


Figure III-3.9  
Industrial  
archaeology: the  
two brick chimney  
stacks of the former  
Uzina PVC plant.

<sup>2</sup> Law no. 9231 of 13.5.2004.



Figure III-3.10  
Two views of  
the monumental  
bunkers located on  
the plain of Zhukë.

(2017), declared the Lagoon of Nartë as an endangered site with a “very high” threat score<sup>3</sup> (Fig. III-3.11).

In order to start a credible enhancement process in terms of sustainable tourism, it is first of all necessary to avoid any new potential threats to the ecosystem of the protected landscape<sup>4</sup>. The Protected Landscape, in fact, can constitute a lasting development opportunity for the local communities, only on the condition that authorised economic uses and practices are compatible with its environmental values and qualities.

It is necessary, at the same time, to implement a series of coordinated actions aimed at resolving pollution-related issues. These actions include the completion of decontamination works, the environmental rehabilitation of the former Uzina PVC plant, the

<sup>3</sup> See <<http://datazone.birdlife.org/site/factsheet/narta-lagoon-iba-albania>>.

<sup>4</sup> This refers, in particular, to the project for an international airport on the plain of Akërne and to a project for a tourist settlement in the area that goes from the beach of Zvërnec to the beach that runs along the lagoon.



Figure III-3.11  
*Above:* The sewage dumping of black waters into the canal that crosses the Soda Forest. *Below:* The authorised dump for mercury wastes. In the background the Petrolifera Italo-Albanese plant.

elimination of illegal dumps, as well as the assessment of the environmental impact of the activities of the Petrolifera Italo-Albanese and of Vlorë's waste water disposal plant.

This approach highlights the need to carry out efficient environmental mitigation works and to embrace the green economy principles. It is a challenging and ambitious endeavour, which depends mostly on the capacity of the national and local institutions to make sustainable choices aimed at the communities' empowerment and on the willingness of the enterprises located in the area to implement ecological conversion processes.

All these actions should be guided by a strategic vision, which combines 'protection' with 'enhancement', placing at its centre the community's aspirations and environment safeguarding policies. The wealth of the habitats and the biodiversity of the protected landscape should be used as a tool for producing well-being and disseminating knowledge, thus going beyond both the purely conservative approach to the landscape and the idea that it is merely an opportunity for tourism-based economic benefits.

## Intervention strategies

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### S1 Education and Training Strategies

#### A.1 Promoting education and training projects on the biodiversity of the protected landscape

The Protected Landscape of Vjosë-Nartë is an extraordinary educational opportunity and a learning place for both tourists and villagers. The latter are not always aware of the environmental assets of the area they live in.

For this purpose, we propose to undertake educational initiatives and projects focused on topics related to the knowledge and safeguarding of the protected landscape and of its biodiversity.

Extracurricular courses, seminars and on-field educational workshops could be implemented at the schools of the municipalities that belong to the protected area<sup>(a)</sup>.

During the summer months further educational initiatives based on recreational activities could be carried out. The model of the summer camp for kids and teenagers proposed in chap. III.4 (see A.9) may be a good option.

It would be particularly useful to envisage awareness raising activities aimed at the protection of the environment. Periodic campaigns for cleaning beaches, pine groves and trails within the protected area could be helpful for giving responsibility to the local population and for strengthening environmental awareness and bonding with the places.

Other initiatives aimed at disseminating the importance of the protected landscape could include guided tours and events such as conferences, theatre and land-art workshops. Since the Lagoon of Nartë is an important habitat for migratory birds, it would be advisable to dedicate special projects to this topic<sup>(b)</sup>.

As a whole, these projects may contribute to the development of individual and social behaviours marked by environmental responsibility and favour active citizenship. They could prove to be useful also for the resolution of socio-economic conflicts that threaten the preservation of the protected landscape.

The National Agency for Protected Areas (Agjencia Kombëtare e Zonave të Mbrojtura) and the Regional Agency for Protected Areas of Vlorë (Administrata Rajonale e Zonave të Mbrojtura Vlorë), are the entities which can better illustrate the environmental features of the territory, the rules and regulations that govern it and the opportunities it offers. They should also guide the development of the educational projects mentioned above. Collaboration between these entities and the Regional Department of Education of Fier (Drejtoria Arsimore Rajonale e Fierit), the schools involved, the local guides and environmentalists, and the NGOs active in the area is needed.

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### S2 Planning Strategies

#### A.2 Drafting of an Environmental Monitoring Plan for the Lagoon of Nartë

Considering the industrial past of the area, and especially the pollution caused by the former Uzina PVC plant, it is necessary to carry out research and analysis aimed at assessing the actual conditions of sea and lagoon pollution. This should serve as a preliminary operation in light of the environmental redevelopment of the site and the enhancement of the fish and agro-food heritage.

In order to pursue this aim, the National Agency for the Environment (Agjencia Kombëtare e Mjedisit) could determine/commission an *Environmental Monitoring Plan* for the entire territory of the Protected Landscape of Vjosë-Nartë and in particular for the Lagoon of Nartë, which suffers from a complete lack of information concerning the levels of pollution.

Through the *Environmental Monitoring Plan* it could be possible to determine the ecologic state of the lagoon so as to prevent its qualitative and quantitative deterioration, enhance the state of the waters and ensure their sustainable use<sup>(c)</sup>.

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#### A.3 Drafting of the Environmental Characterisation Plan for the polluted site of the former Uzina PVC plant

The area of the former Uzina PVC plant is highly polluted.

In view of the gravity of the situation, the Municipality of Vlorë has determined a decontamination project, funded by the European Union (Bashkia Vlorë, 2017: 127). This project envisages, together with the *Environmental Recovery and Decontamination Plan*, a simultaneous *Social Support Plan* aimed at organising and managing the transfer of the 1,200 people currently living within the polluted site to other housing facilities.

Given the absence of official data, it is necessary to carry out a preliminary geological and hydrological analysis of the site and of its level of pollution so as to determine the extension of the area that needs to be decontaminated.

To this purpose, it is recommended to draft an *Environmental Characterisation Plan*, prior to the Environmental Recovery and Decontamination Plan (which consists in the decontamination process, as well as of the necessary environmental mitigation and compensation measures). The *Environmental Characterisation Plan* is a knowledge tool that includes the series of activities necessary for the reconstruction of the polluting events in the environmental compartments (air, water and soil). The aim is to obtain the initial information on which to base subsequent decisions regarding the safety and decontamination of the site<sup>(d)</sup>.

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## S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

### A.4 Creating a Biodiversity Atlas for the Protected Landscape of Vjosë-Nartë

The *Biodiversity Atlas*<sup>(e)</sup> has the purpose of gathering the best-known methodologies that have been applied to different international protected areas. It requires cooperation between nature experts and researchers (biologists, botanists, etc.) who, from a multidisciplinary and exchange perspective, can contribute to analysing the current situation and determining a strong knowledge basis for the choices to be made in the future.

This initiative could be promoted and coordinated by the Regional Administration of the Protected Areas of Vlorë (Administrata Rajonale e Zonave të Mbrojtura Vlorë) in collaboration with the National Coast Agency (Agjencia Kombëtare e Bregdetit).

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### A.5 Creating a Digital Hiking Trail Inventory

See A.7, chap. I.3.

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## S6 Enhancement Strategies

### A.6 Constructing a green corridor between the Soda Forest and Vlorë

Following the decontamination of the abandoned industrial site described in Action A.3, we suggest the creation of a natural corridor for concealing the production site of the Petrolifera Italo-Albanese plant and determining a continuity between the Soda Forest and the green area on the east coast of Vlorë. Considering the high biodiversity of the lagoon, the corridor should serve a double function: as a natural area and as a linear urban park connecting Zvërnec to Vlorë. It would also create at the same time a biodiversity reserve that would be home to plant species of the protected landscape, as well as offering recreational spaces for inhabitants and tourists.

The redevelopment of the landscape should involve the existing road system, through the planting of autochthonous species of trees and shrubs on the sides of the roads.

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### A.7 Preserving identity-ascribing elements from the industrial past of the former Uzina PVC plant

The preservation of industrial archaeology features is an opportunity for keeping alive the historical memory of Vlorë's industrialisation process initiated by the Communist regime, so as to celebrate the many inhabitants of the area who worked at the factory and, finally, to ascribe a new meaning to the existing structures.

In particular, the Action proposes the implementation of safety measures, as well as the structural and architectural restoration and also the seismic improvement of the two brick chimney stacks still standing and of a silo.

The chimney stacks, due to their height, could become a regional landmark.

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### A.8 Enhancing the trail network

See A.13, chap. I.3.

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### A.9 Promoting the territorial knowledge through soft mobility

See A.11, chap. II.3.

Regarding the Protected Landscape of Vjosë-Nartë, the following tourist routes are proposed:

- The Bio-Bicycle Trails, based on bicycle paths, which begin in Vlorë and run through the protected area;
- The Trails of Biodiversity, aimed at the discovery of the habitats of the protected area (Island of Zvërnec, Pishë Poro dunes, the salt pans of Nartë, swamps and canebrakes, the wetlands, the beaches, etc.) and the knowledge of the flora and fauna. The itinerary could be aimed, in particular, at schoolchildren and tourists with an interest in nature and botany;
- The Paths of Culture, with routes that follow the existing trails and lead to places of cultural interest, such as the Church of the Dormition of Mary, the Chapels of Holy Trinity and Saint Athanasius or the monumental bunkers (see A.13). Among the existing cultural routes, worth noting is the one that traverses the old threshing floor (lëma) in the village quarter on the hill and leads to the Island of Zvërnec.

*The suggestion is to develop these tourist routes as much as possible on the existing trails, after having them adequately redeveloped.*

*In order for these itineraries to have a real impact on the territory, it is necessary to carry out a strong marketing campaign and to have the support of the local community, starting with the fishermen, the trekking guides and the institutions (particularly, the Administrata Rajonale e Zonave të Mbrojtura Vlorë).*

#### A.10 Promoting landscape redevelopment projects

##### **A.10.1 Accessibility and redevelopment of the open space surrounding the Chapel of Saint Athanasius**

The Chapel of Saint Athanasius enjoys a privileged location on the lagoon. It does not present any particular qualities from an architectural point of view, yet it plays an important role in the lives of the inhabitants of the village.

This Action proposes to link the chapel with the main road of the village (Rruga Zvërnec) through a pedestrian path equipped with facilities and to reconfigure the surrounding area by adding rest areas and scenic viewpoints for contemplating the lagoon landscape. We recommend the use of local materials and that the execution of the works be entrusted to local craftsmen.

##### **A.10.2 Constructing a trail along the Lagoon of Nartë**

Given the peculiarities of the lagoon landscape and its high biodiversity, the suggestion is to build a trail that follows the shore of the lagoon and branches off from the Island of Zvërnec toward the northwest, where it would connect with the road that leads to the former school in the quarter on the hill (see chap. III.4).

The trail could cross the various natural environments thanks to wooden boardwalks suspended over the water and to dirt roads, thus giving visitors the opportunity to observe the lagoon and also the plant and animal species that inhabit it from a privileged perspective.

The project must exalt the qualities of the landscape. For this purpose, the choice of the shape, colour and materials used should be based on criteria of landscape continuity with the context. It is also advisable not to alter the existing vegetal structure but rather to enhance it with the addition of new autochthonous plant species.

#### A.11 Promoting birdwatching

Since the Lagoon of Nartë was declared in 2013 as an “Important Bird and Biodiversity Area” and is the second most important lagoon in Albania in terms of aquatic birds, we propose to incentivise birdwatching, a tourist activity which can be carried out throughout the year.

The Action aims at the construction of a series of bird hides, located at strategic sighting points<sup>(6)</sup>. These shelters should be easily accessible and equipped with concealing devices and turrets for the observation of avifauna, as well as with descriptive panels on the flora and fauna of the lagoon and on the history of the places. So as to limit environmental impact, their insertion in the delicate lagoon habitat must be carefully studied. It is necessary that they be built using fully reversible materials and techniques, starting with the usage of screw foundations.

The initiative could be coordinated by the Administrata Rajonale e Zonave të Mbrojtura Vlorë with the collaboration of the NGOs operating in the area that are more engaged in environmental enhancement and protection.

#### A.12 Creating the Dispersed Ecomuseum of the Protected Landscape of Vjosë-Nartë

This Action is aimed at the creation of a *Dispersed Ecomuseum*<sup>(8)</sup> with the purpose of reconstructing, providing testimony and enhancing – with the active participation of the local communities – the historic memory, the tangible and intangible heritage of the protected area and, in particular, of the Lagoon of Nartë.

The concept of the ecomuseum presumes a network of proposals and activities that aim to describe the cultural resources in which the inhabitants recognise themselves. From this perspective, the *Dispersed Ecomuseum of the Protected Landscape of Vjosë-Nartë* would be configured as an enhancement tool for a variety of cultural components and would be divided into several sections.

Two exhibition spaces could be housed in the monumental bunkers at Zhukë (see A.13). The first, devoted to the *Biodiversity Culture*, could make use of films, interactive video-projections and multimedia educational games in order to show, narrate and document the rich and varied environmental heritage and show how the local communities have related to it through time. The second, devoted to the *Salt Culture*, would retrace the history of the centuries-old salt pans (the only salt production area in the whole of Albania) and document their role in the life of the local communities.

A third exhibition space of the Ecomuseum could be located in the former vacation resort of the Albanian army (see A.8, chap. III. 4), and be devoted to *Food Heritage Culture*. In it, and through the typical products of the region (fish, cheese, *vlosh* grapes and olives), the history of the communities of the lagoon could be presented: fishing tools, as well as farming and shepherding tools and the traditional utensils for preparing typical dishes, etc.

With the purpose of creating a network of interconnected places of interest for preserving, safeguarding and enhancing the cultural heritage, these sections of the Ecomuseum could be stages of the route *The Paths of Culture* (see A. 9).

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#### A.13 Recovery and conversion of the monumental bunkers complex in Zhukë

The four monumental bunkers stand in an isolated position and are an interesting opportunity for the creation of a part of the *Dispersed Ecomuseum* proposed in Action A.12.

The project for the recovery of the structure should envisage:

- An accurate survey of the military complex including the underground sections, and the surrounding areas;
  - The project of musealisation and redevelopment of the structures and their surroundings;
  - The repair of the access road, keeping it as a dirt road;
  - The restoration of the buildings and providing the museum with equipment;
  - The installation of renewable energy technological systems.
- 

### S7 Management strategies

#### A.14 Entrusting the management of the hiking network of the Protected Landscape of Vjosë-Nartë to a single entity

See A.15, chap. I.3.

*In the area under examination, the promotion and maintenance of the trail network could be entrusted to an association created for this purpose and coordinated by the Administrata Rajonale e Zonave të Mbrojtura Vlorë.*

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### Notes

- a) A similar initiative has been undertaken by the NGO CELIM with the project “Azione Comunitaria per la conservazione delle Aree Protette dell’Albania – A.C.A.P.” initiated in 2018. See <https://www.celim.it/progetto/conservazione-delle-aree-protette-in-albania/>
- b) In Italy, a series of worthy projects for the protection and preservation of birds have been undertaken by the Lega Italiana Protezione Uccelli (Lipu). See <http://www.lipu.it/progetti-sulle-specie>.
- c) For the Italian context, see Decree no. 152/2006, Title V, arts. 177-266.
- d) See Directive 2000/60/CE.
- e) In Italy, the Environmental Characterisation Plan is envisaged by Decree no. 152 of 3.4.2006.
- f) For Italian initiatives see: (1) Atlas of biodiversity in Parco Adda Sud. First list of the species living in the protected area ([https://www.parcoaddasud.it/portale/pubblicazioni-menu/libri/item/download/15\\_535802d82146a4d3446e8cf4c14f8f1f7.html](https://www.parcoaddasud.it/portale/pubblicazioni-menu/libri/item/download/15_535802d82146a4d3446e8cf4c14f8f1f7.html)), (2) Atlas of the flora which is endemic, rare and of community interest in the Riserva Naturale Regionale Monterano (<[http://www.parchilazio.it/documenti/pubblicazioni/125\\_allegato1.pdf](http://www.parchilazio.it/documenti/pubblicazioni/125_allegato1.pdf)>), (3) Coastal lagoon atlas of the Po Delta and, finally, (4) Atlas of biodiversity of the upper basin of the river Oglio (<[http://www.parks.it/parco.adamello/gui\\_dettaglio.php?id\\_pubb=7080](http://www.parks.it/parco.adamello/gui_dettaglio.php?id_pubb=7080)>).
- g) There are already some birdwatching shacks along the path of the salt pans, built by private individuals.
- h) An ecomuseum (with different features and purposes) for the area of the Vjosa River has already been proposed as part of the European Union project IPA Cross-border Programme “Greece-Albania, 2007-2013”. See <[http://www.ecomuseum.eu/uploaded/Ecomuseum/Ecomuseum\\_Guide\\_06052014.pdf](http://www.ecomuseum.eu/uploaded/Ecomuseum/Ecomuseum_Guide_06052014.pdf)>.



## Settlement and buildings

### Historical overview

The area in which Zvërnec stands was already inhabited in the 6<sup>th</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., as shown by the presence of the remains of the Castle of Treporti, which had an important harbour attached to it<sup>1</sup> (Baçe, 1975). According to some oral testimonies obtained on-site it appears that the first inhabitants of Zvërnec – who came from the Greek coast – reached the area during the Middle Ages and permanently settled on the hill after having settled first on the Island of Sazan. During the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Evliya Çelebi describes Zvërnec as a village with 150 families of Christians who worked in the salt marshes or were fishermen (cit. in Dankoff & Elsie, 2000).

There are no remaining traces of the ancient settlement, nor any written sources on the origins of the current village.

Today Zvërnec is composed of two quarters: one on the hill and the other downstream, in the direction of the coast (Fig. III-4.1). The former was recorded on the topographic maps of the Italian Military Geographical Institute (1929-1941)<sup>2</sup> and in those of the Geographic and Military Infrastructure Institute of Tirana (1959-1965); the latter has gradually developed during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is populated by Vlachs<sup>3</sup>.

The village saw a period of particular growth during the industrial development of Vlorë in the Seventies.

<sup>1</sup> See In-depth analysis sheet no. 49 “Kartela për trashëgiminë kulturore të paluajshmë”, National Institute for the Cultural Heritage.

<sup>2</sup> These maps are available online at <<https://geoportal.asig.gov.al/map>>.

<sup>3</sup> The presence of the Valchs in Zvërnec must be from an earlier time. From Burileanu (1912) we know that 5 Vlach families lived in Zvërnec in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.



Figure III-4.1  
Zvërnec. A view of  
the quarter on the  
hill.

#### The residential area

Zvërnec is located in an area that remains isolated from the main communication roads. The village is around 9 km from Vlorë. With the exception of an approximately 2 km long section, the road is paved and in relatively good condition.

The two quarters of the village are separated by a hill on which several antennas and radio repeaters are located.

In the quarter on the hill, which faces the lagoon, a clear organisation of the individual urban plots, distributed along the main thoroughfares, can be appreciated. The *Ruga Zvërneci*, which is steeply sloping, runs through the centre of the quarter. It does not have sidewalks and some sections are in a state of disrepair. The old path that is still used to reach the Church of the Dormition of Mary on the Island of Zvërnec during the Marian celebrations of 14-15 August is also in bad condition.

In the downstream quarter, the urban fabric consists of two nuclei of isolated houses separated by cultivated fields. The main road in this quarter is paved and in good condition, and has sidewalks on both sides. The inner streets, however, are in gravel and have no lighting.

The repair of road sections in critical condition is envisaged as part of the regional development by the General Town Plan of Vlorë (Bashkia Vlorë, 2017: 149).

#### The traditional dwellings

##### *Typological features*

Most of the historical buildings in Zvërnec have been demolished and rebuilt using 'modern' materials and techniques, or else have undergone major alterations, which have completely changed their original appearance.

The few surviving historical buildings are in the quarter on the hill. They are either abandoned or in a state of ruin (Fig. III-4.2). Among the abandoned buildings, two are quite interesting.

The first is a two-storey building constructed during the years of the Communist regime and used as vacation resort of the Albanian army. This building is located in the centre of a slightly sloping area and can be easily reached on foot following the path that connects the two quarters of the village. In front of the building, there is a large



Figure III-4.2  
Remains of a  
traditional dwelling  
in the hill quarter  
with horizontal  
reinforcing timber  
elements.



Figure III-4.3  
The former military  
vacation resort on  
the hill next to the  
oldest quarter.

courtyard, today in a state of total decay, which offers a magnificent view of the lagoon. The building measures 20.00 by 12.00 m (Fig. III-4.3).

The other building is the former village school, which was closed in 2007 due to the lack of students. It is adjacent to the quarter on the hill and next to a small square that overlooks the lagoon. The access road is unpaved, yet accessible by car. The building is composed of two volumes: a two-storey structure (approximately 18 by 14 m), and a smaller single-storey one (approximately 14 by 14 m) (Fig. III-4.4).

In the downstream quarter, the buildings were built after the Forties and mostly modified or rebuilt after the Communist regime collapse.

From the analysis of the older residential buildings, only one typology could be observed. Two different variables could be distinguished, both based on a rectangular shape: one with a side ratio of 1: 2 and the other with a side ratio of 2: 5.

Both the buildings show the same interior layout, but differ in structural terms. In the 1: 2 ratio type, only the outer walls are load-bearing, whereas in the other case the interior walls are also load-bearing.

The traditional house was usually one-storey. Occasionally, however, and depending on the plot shape, there was a semi-basement, which served as storehouse (divided into sections depending on the items stored) and as stables. The ground floor, instead, consisted of two rooms and a central entrance/corridor. One of the two rooms housed the hearth (*shtëpia e zjarrit*) and was used for preparing and eating meals; the other was used as a bedroom. Originally, the two levels of the house were not connected internally by means of a staircase, but were only accessible from the outside (Fig. III-4.5).

The recently constructed residential buildings in most cases have a square plan, and are placed at the centre of a courtyard. These are almost exclusively second homes used by their owners during the summer. In the downstream quarter, there are also some houses for renting (partially or totally) to tourists (Fig. III-4.6).

The second homes generally have two levels above ground and share the same interior layout: at the centre there is a corridor that includes the staircase and serves the different rooms: a living room with a dining kitchen, two bedrooms and a bathroom. Along the main facade (on both levels), there are usually balustrade terraces that offer weather protection. Usually, parents live on the first level, while their children and their respective families live on the upper floor.

Houses for rent usually have 3-4 rooms per floor, each with a kitchenette and a bathroom. In these houses, the staircases are on the outside, so as to make each floor independent. Here, the terraces are also present and guarantee the entrance to each room.

Many buildings are incomplete, with the upper floors unfinished.

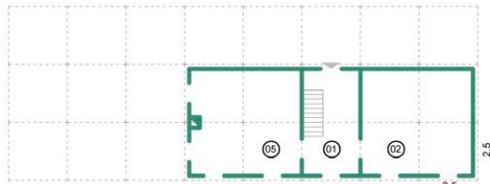
#### *Building features*

In traditional buildings, load-bearing walls are in three-leaf stone masonry and have an average thickness of 60-70 cm. The external leaves are made up of uncoursed rubble stones. Gaps between stones are filled with smaller stones and copious quantities of mud mortar. In more recent maintenance works, joints have been repointed with lime mortar. The inner leaf is of smaller pieces of stone and earth.



Figure III-4.4  
The former village  
school, abandoned  
since 2007.

Original layout



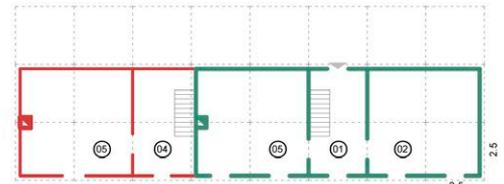
Ground Floor



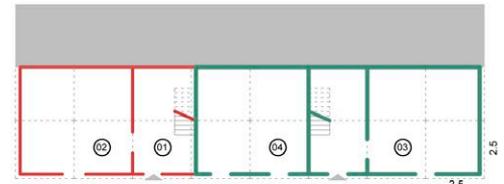
Semi-Basement Floor

- 01. entrance
- 02. bedroom
- 03. harvest storeroom
- 04. stables and troughs
- 05. hearth room («shtëpia e zjarrit»)

Transformed layout



Ground Floor



Semi-Basement Floor

5



6

Inside the wall, there are timber tie beams repeated at regular intervals in height (approximately every 60 cm). This technique was found during the surveys also in the nearby village of Nartë, both in residential buildings and in some chapels. The analysis of the buildings revealed a greater care in the execution of corners, for which squared off blocks that are slightly larger than those of the walls were used.

Opening are small and lintels are generally in timber.

Intermediate floors are also in timber. Directly above the beams, wooden boarding serving as paving is placed. In semi-basements, which are used as storerooms or stables, the paving is in rammed earth or in concrete screed.

Bedrooms and living rooms often have false ceilings made with wooden planks.

Roofs are hipped and have a timber structure consisting of trusses with a king post. Above the trusses are joists on which a wooden boarding is placed. The roof covering is made of brick tiles.

The roof pitches are slightly protruding (approximately 10 cm) from the walls by way of jutting bent tiles.

Figure III-4.5 Hypothesis on the original layout of the domestic space and subsequent expansions of two traditional dwellings. [Author: Dritan Kapo]

Figure III.4.6 Examples of a recent building in the downstream quarter.

Partitions have a timber frame covered with woven reeds plastered on both sides. The frame is made of regular vertical elements (studs) floor to ceiling (at a distance of approximately 70 cm one from the other), connected by horizontal elements (cross-beams). Doors and windows, both exterior and interior, are in timber.

The building system used for recent constructions (since the Nineties) is a frame in reinforced concrete, with infill walls and partitions in hollow bricks. Doors, windows and shading systems are generally in aluminium.

#### Public Space

The urban fabric of Zvërnec has few public spaces.

Only the quarter on the hill has a square, overlooked in the past by the shops and the village school. The square, located near the church, is a rectangular and unpaved space, which on one side faces the Island of Zvërnec. This space is currently in a state of abandonment and used as a car park, and the only remaining places available to the inhabitants of the quarter for social interaction are a shop/bar and the space behind the church (Fig. III-4.7).

#### Infrastructure network<sup>4</sup>

Some of the village's infrastructure networks are in critical condition and require urgent works.

The situation concerning the water supply is particularly serious. In the past, water was supplied to the quarter on the hill took place, basically, in three different ways: (1) from the village fountains (*çezmat e fshatit*), (2) from individual wells, and (3) from a common well which today is located inside a private courtyard. Toward the late Seventies, the village was connected to the water network coming from Vlorë and a cistern was built on top of the hill that separates the two quarters, including a pump plant. Supply to houses is discontinuous, generally once in three days and the water is not drinkable (Bashkia Vlorë, 2017: 62). In the downstream quarter, many houses do not use the water main, but rather the water from the well, which, due to its high salinity, is not drinkable. Drinking water in both quarters is ensured by tanker trucks or bottled water purchased from the village shops.

The villagers recount that electricity came to Zvërnec in 1968. The electric supply network has been recently upgraded and its service quality has been greatly enhanced.

The use of solar panels is steadily increasing in both quarters. They are used for producing domestic hot water and for facing the greater electricity consumption that takes place during the summer.

Public lighting is limited to the main streets running through the two quarters.

Zvërnec does not have a sewage system. The disposal of grey and black waters is done mostly by leaching cesspools, generally installed in the courtyards of houses by the owners themselves (Bashkia Vlorë, 2017: 77). This type of sewage disposal has gradually polluted the underground water and perhaps also the public water supply network, through leaks in the ducts.

The main roads of the village are equipped with a system for the collection and the disposal of rainwater (Fig. III-4.8).

<sup>4</sup> The description of the conditions of the network infrastructures is based on data taken from the General Town Plan of Vlorë and on information gathered from the inhabitants.



Figure III-4.7  
Two views of the currently abandoned square in the centre of the hill quarter. In the background of the photo below, the village church can be seen.

Another critical aspect concerns the malfunctioning of the public waste collection and disposal system. Waste is disposed of in a dump located at the former airport of Akërni and then burnt, together with rubbish coming from the city of Vlorë<sup>5</sup>. Otherwise, the inhabitants leave waste on the sides of the roads just outside inhabited areas, or burn it in the courtyards of their houses.<sup>6</sup> The issue of the open-air illegal dumps obviously increases during the summer, due to the presence of tourists (Fig. III-4.9).

The General Town Plan of Vlorë envisages the enhancement of network infrastructures. In the specific case of Zvërnec, the following works are planned for the 2017-2021 period:

- Renovation of the potable water supply network, including the installation of new water cisterns;

<sup>5</sup> In 2018, the Ministry of Infrastructures presented the project for the construction of a dump in the village of Shirisht, which would serve the municipalities of Vlorë, Himarë, Konispol and Sarandë. See [www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-ENV-009](http://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-ENV-009)

<sup>6</sup> The Italian NGO CELIM coordinates a project known as ACAP (“Azione Comunitaria per le Aree Protette” or “Community Action for Protected Areas”), aimed at promoting the recycling of waste.



Figure III-4.8  
The poor  
conditions of a road  
in the hill quarter.

- Assessment of the current state of the waste water disposal systems and installation of a sewage system;
- Introduction of a waste collection and disposal service;
- Repair of roads sections in poor condition (Bashkia Vlorë, 2017: 156-161).

#### Public services, shops and tourist facilities

Zvërnec is a tourist destination visited mainly during the summer. The tourists (mostly families) who stay in the downstream quarter generally choose the beaches of Vlorë, which offer better services and vehicular accessibility than those of the village.

Fragmented and partial tourist information can be found on several official governmental web pages and amateur Facebook pages<sup>7</sup>. Here, basic information on the hotels and the places to visit has been disseminated.

There is an almost total lack of many of the typical (cultural, hiking, recreational and sport) activities of a lagoon or coastal tourist destination.

Medical services consist in a first-aid medical office, which is available only in case of an emergency.

As mentioned above, the quarter on the hill used to have an elementary and middle school, which was closed in 2007 due to the lack of children<sup>8</sup>.

The lack of services is worsened by the bad condition of some sections of the road leading to the quarter on the hill, as well as by the absence of parking spaces and of a public transport service connecting Vlorë to the village.

Accommodation facilities are limited to the downstream quarter, due to their proximity to the beaches. These include two hotels and many guesthouses or rooms for rent, often managed by the parents of owners living abroad<sup>9</sup>.

In the downstream quarter, there are two small restaurants, while in the quarter on hill there is a small bar-general store.

<sup>7</sup> See for example: <<https://smilealbania.gov.al/fshati-zvernec/>>; <<https://vlora.gov.al/turizem/informacion-per-vizitoret/>>.

<sup>8</sup> When the field analysis was undertaken (summer of 2019), only five school-age children lived in the village, all of whom went to school in Vlorë.

<sup>9</sup> As expected, generally these people are not able to offer a competent and professional service.



Figure III-4.9  
An illegal open-air  
dump just in front  
of the lagoon.

#### Critical issues and future prospects

Considering the results of the analysis undertaken, road repair, as well as the enhancement of network infrastructures and of the waste disposal system, appear to be the most urgent works to carry out in Zvërnec. The situation is critical and has a negative impact on the inhabitants' quality of life and on the balance of the lagoon's ecosystem and, additionally, hinders the development of the tourism sector.

After these priority actions, it would be necessary to redevelop the public spaces and the ancient trails, as well as to activate a public transportation service between the village and Vlorë.

In general, it is necessary to activate intervention strategies that involve the few resident inhabitants, as well as the villagers who have emigrated abroad and the NGOs operating in the area. It is also pivotal to undertake a campaign to promote the image of the village, based on its landmarks (the island with its church, the coast, the pine grove, the hill with its ancient olive trees, etc.), on other 'minor' places (such as the Chapels of the Holy Trinity and of Saint Athanasius) or others which are shamefully neglected, like the area of the Castle of Trepoti.

The Rules and qualitative regulations for strategic investments in sites with a national importance for the development of tourism<sup>10</sup> has identified Zvërnec as one of the priority areas, envisaging the construction of a tourist accommodation complex that includes a five-star Ecolodge Resort, a golf course and 100 timber cottages. A project of this magnitude risks endangering a vast area of the Lagoon of Zvërnec-Novoselë (a section of the wider Lagoon of Nartë), a particularly fragile ecosystem including a range of habitats in a precarious balance (see chap. III.3).

<sup>10</sup> This document – “Rregulloret dhe parametrat cilësore për investimet strategjike në vëndet e rëndësishë kombëtare për zhvillimin e turizmit” – is part of the General Town Plan of Vlorë and has been approved by the Municipal Council through the Act no. 64 of 31.08.2017.

## Intervention strategies

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### S2 Planning Strategies

#### A.1 Assessing the environmental and social impact of the construction of a tourist resort in the area of the Lagoon of Zvërnec-Novoselë

The Rules and qualitative regulations for strategic investments in sites with a national importance for the development of tourism envisage the construction of a tourist accommodation complex in a vast area of the Lagoon of Zvërnec-Novoselë. This area is very important in ecological terms due to the variety of natural environments included within it.

For the purpose of environmental safeguarding, our suggestion is to submit this project to an *Environmental Impact Assessment* (EIA), in accordance with the European Union Council Directive 85/337/EEC. The EIA could identify and assess the direct and indirect effects of the works envisaged in the project on the environmental components of the area so as to prevent, reduce and, if necessary, compensate the negative effects they may entail.

Considering the inevitable consequences of this intervention on the local communities, it would be necessary at the same time to develop a *Social Impact Assessment* (SIA). It consists in an analysis of the social context and is aimed at highlighting the social sustainability of the project and its effective capacity to generate value for the inhabitants.

Within a perspective of local development based on the priorities and needs outlined by local stakeholders and beneficiaries themselves, the SIA should focus mainly on the following specific objectives:

1. Exploring the main strengths and weaknesses of the considered case, also evaluating its replicability on other areas as a successful model;
2. Understanding the main relations among relevant local stakeholders and local residents;
3. Collectively identifying and evaluating potential innovative policies at a community level.

The relevant social impacts could be identified through the definition of specific indicators of 'social values' (e.g. Awareness/Educational; Visual impact, Nuisance and Pollution; Well-being and Recreation, etc.). Benefits could be evaluated based on the results of in-depth interviews (see Beinat & Nijkamp, 1998). Further social values could be added according to specific results emerging from stakeholder interviews (see da Rocha *et al.* 2017).

The results of social assessment (SIA) need to be considered together with the results of the environmental assessment (EIA). Thus, we suggest conducting part of the environmental and social analysis of the place in an integrated manner.

Finally, we recommend the periodic monitoring of the environmental and social impact of the works undertaken by the project once in use, following Post Occupancy Evaluation (POE) methods (Patton, 2014).

### S4 Living Quality Strategies

#### A.2 Upgrading the technological systems in the houses of the village

See Action A.3, chap. II.4

*Works for enhancing the network infrastructures of Zvërnec are already envisaged by the General Town Plan of Vlorë.*

*We suggest that an in-depth study of the quality of the waters and of the impact of domestic waste waters on the soil, the underground and the aquifers be carried out.*

#### A.3 Enhancing the waste collection system

This Action is aimed at intervening on the management of domestic waste, so as to enhance the living conditions of the community, tourism development, and to safeguard the protected area.

For this purpose, it would be necessary to extend the door to door waste recycling system (promoted and implemented in 2018 by the NGO CELIM, through the ACAP<sup>(a)</sup>) project to the entire village, and to provide adequate rubbish bins where waste is more usually dumped.

#### A.4 Installing public fountains<sup>(b)</sup>

The supply of potable water in Zvërnec is carried out mainly through tanker trucks or by the purchasing of bottled water.

The widespread use of water bottled in plastic, in addition to being costly to the inhabitants, also has a heavy impact on the environment and on public health. In fact, the prevailing method for disposing of plastic bottles in the village is through combustion.

In order to prevent this, and while waiting for the supply of drinking water to the village houses to be provided by the public water system, we propose that two drinking water fountains be installed, one for each quarter. In both cases, the choice of the water purification method will depend on the microbiological and chemical analysis of the water.

The Action is also aimed at re-considering the public fountain, which also in Zvërnec historically played an important role in terms of social interaction.

The Action could be implemented with the support of the NGOs that operate in the area, in agreement with the Municipality of Vlorë.

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#### *A.5 Upgrading of some sections of the existing vehicular roads and construction of a public parking area*

With the purpose of enhancing the quality of life of the inhabitants and the tourism supply we recommend the following:

- Repair the pavement of certain sections of the main road that leads to the quarter on the hill and repair the minor roads of both quarters;
- Build a public parking area with no more than 30 parking spaces (cf. Bashkia Vlorë, 2017: 197), to be located at the crossroads of the street that goes to the island and the one that goes down to the beach. With the purpose of mitigating the impact on the lagoon environment and avoiding traffic jams, it would be convenient to locate it in an unobtrusive location and to follow the indications of Action A.7, sect. I.4.1.

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#### *A.6 Establishing a public transport line connecting Zvërnec and Vlorë<sup>(c)</sup>*

See A.8, sect. I.4.1.

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#### *A.7 Establishing a tourist information centre in the downstream quarter*

This Action is aimed at establishing an info point to provide tourists with information concerning the environmental assets of the area and the recreational and cultural activities it offers, as well as to organise guided visits to the lagoon (either on foot, by bicycle or boat) and to offer a bicycle rental service.

This info point (which should include an ATM) could be placed at the entrance of the downstream quarter, and be built by the Regional Agency of the Protected Areas of Vlorë (Administrata Rajonale e Zonave të Mbrojtura Vlorë) in collaboration with the Municipality of Vlorë. Its management could be entrusted to a community cooperative.

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### **S6 Enhancement Strategies**

#### *A.8 Renovation of the former vacation resort of the Albanian army and its transformation into an exhibition space.*

The Action is aimed at transforming the premises of the former vacation resort of the Albanian army, located on the hill that separates the two quarters of the village, into an exhibition space devoted to the *typical products and culinary tradition of the area of the lagoon*, as part of the *Dispersed Ecomuseum of the Protected Landscape* described in Action A.12, chap. III.3.

Next to the exhibition spaces, the building could house spaces devoted to tasting and purchasing of local typical products.

The building, partially collapsed, stands in a place of remarkable landscape beauty, with an outstanding view over the lagoon. For this reason, we recommend recovering the surrounding spaces for open-air activities such as exhibitions, cultural events, etc. Taking advantage of the sloping nature of the terrain, a small open-air amphitheatre could be built on the southern side of the building and be used for events and gatherings.

Given the landscape features of the area, the redevelopment works of the open spaces and of the paths should respect criteria of landscape continuity by choosing equipment consistent with the context and by planting only autochthonous plant species.

As for the recommendations concerning the project of recovery of the building see Action A.2, sect. I.4.1.

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#### *A.9 Creating a Summer Camp for children and teenagers at the former school of Zvërnec*

This Action proposes a *Summer Camp* for children and teenagers as a concrete and effective solution for disseminating the culture and values of the lagoon environment among the young, combining education and environmental awareness with playing and recreational activities (A.1, chap III.3). Participants could be involved in activities connected to the welcoming tourists visiting the Island of Zvërnec. The camp could be located at the former village school, which is currently unused. We suggest that the following spaces be included in it:

- A multi-functional area;
- Lodgings;

- A kitchen for preparing breakfast and quick meals;
- Toilets and showers;
- A space for the janitor.

For recommendations on the project for the recovery of the building see Action A.2, sect. I.4.1

In addition to the building, we suggest that the surrounding space be redeveloped as well, including the square opposite the school, to be used either for playing or for workshops.

For the Action to succeed, collaboration is necessary between the middle and high schools of the Municipality of Vlorë, the local entities (such as the Regional Agency for the Protected Areas of Vlorë) and the NGOs of the area involved in actions related to the protection of nature.

#### *A.10 Redeveloping the square in the quarter on the hill*

For the general requirements of the square, see A.13, chap. II.4.

#### *A.11 Recovering the old road that connects the quarter on the hill to the Island of Zvërnec*

This Action is aimed at recovering the ancient path that traverses the only threshing floor (*lëma*) of the village and leads to the Island of Zvërnec.

The restoration of the path must be considered as a preliminary work aimed at its inclusion among the cultural itineraries proposed in Action A.9, chap. III.3.

For further information concerning redevelopment works see A.9, sect. I.4.1.

### *Notes*

- a) The ACAP (“Azione Comunitaria per le Aree Protette” or “Community Action for Protected Areas”) project currently envisages the door-to-door recycling of waste only in the quarter on the hill and the placement of rubbish recycling containers near restaurants. The main problem is the disposal of waste once it has been collected.
- b) A particularly interesting project was promoted by the Agenzia Comunale Energia (ACEA) in Rome, as part of the “Case dell’acqua” project. The “Case dell’acqua” (or “water houses”) are multifunctional devices installed in Rome and its province which in addition to supplying drinking water also provide the services of charging the batteries of tablets and smartphones and accessing public information through their digital displays. For more in-depth information visit <<https://www.gruppo.acea.it/al-servizio-delle-persone/acqua/le-case-dellacqua>>.
- c) Similar initiatives aimed at enhancing the connections of isolated villages to larger urban centres using public transport are found in a number of Italian contexts (for example in the Municipality of Castel Gandolfo, in the province of Como, and in the Municipality of Empoli, in Tuscany).

## The Church of the Dormition of Mary on the Island of Zvërnec

The Island of Zvërnec is in symbiosis with the Lagoon of Nartë and constitutes a reference point for the village community, as well as an important and picturesque tourist destination.

It can be reached from the mainland via a curved wooden gangway, rebuilt in 2014, which offers the visitors a dynamic perspective of the island.

In addition to its landscape values (see chap. III.3), the island also has a historical tradition, primarily represented by the Monastery of Zvërnec. The complex consists today of a Byzantine church and the buildings of the lodgings which seem to date back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>1</sup>. There are also some ruins of other buildings on the island, which presumably belonged to the monastic complex. Among the lodgings, there is also a newly built structure, clearly distinct from the others due to the materials and construction techniques used (Figs. III-5.1 and III-5.2).

Adjacent to the church, around the apsidal area, is a small cemetery with approximately ten tombstones. Among these, the tomb of a well-known figure linked to the Albanian Renaissance is found: Marigo Pozio, the woman who embroidered the flag that was waved on the day of the Declaration of Independence in 1912.

To the rear of the church, there is dense woodland. In addition to the buildings of the Monastery and of the Church of the Dormition of Mary, on the western side of the island there is also a chapel devoted to the Holy Trinity, probably built around 1870.

Until the late Sixties, the island was not accessible to villagers or visitors, since the Communist authority had turned it into an internment camp for political dissidents.

<sup>1</sup> The only useful reference for dating the buildings of the monastery is found in a report of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage (NICH) written in 1977 and signed by its director at the time, Sotir Kosta. The Albanian term *konak* (now archaic) was used to indicate lodgings where to spend the night during long voyages.



Figure III-5.1  
The Island of  
Zvërnec from the  
mainland, with  
the lodgings of the  
monastery in the  
foreground. *Above:*  
A photograph  
from the late  
Sixties [Courtesy:  
NICH]. *Below:* The  
situation as it is  
today.

#### Historical and typological overview

The original part of the Church of the Dormition of Mary (category I Cultural Monument) has been dated back to the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> centuries, based on its building features and the comparison with other similar buildings in Albania (Meksi 1975; 2016) (Fig. III-5.3).

The current layout of the church – referred to in the literature also as a “chapel” (*kapela*), due to its small dimensions (Meksi 1975; 2016) – is the result of two different building phases.



Figure III-5.2  
A south-east view  
of the Church of  
the Dormition of  
Mary.

The Byzantine layout consists of the classical tripartite division: narthex, naos and bema. The bema is separated from the naos by the iconostasis and ends with a semi-cylindrical apse. The church belongs to the free-cross type with a dome resting on a cylindrical drum<sup>2</sup>. The passage from the square space of the crossing to the drum of the dome takes place through four classical pendentives, characterised by a different brickwork pattern.

The exonarthex was added to the north of the original structure and the portico to the east. The masonry discontinuity between the original structure of the church and the subsequent additions can be easily detected. As a consequence of these additions, the entrance to the church is through the portico (on the lesser side of the narthex), rather than from the north side (greater side of the narthex), as it was originally. The current portico and exonarthex probably date back to 1862, as the date engraved onto a portico stone seems to indicate. Some details (a different paving and bigger arches in the portion corresponding to the exonarthex) suggest that the current portico might be an enlargement of an older one (Fig. III-5.4). Together with the exonarthex, a bell-gable was also built onto the north facade. It is possible that 1862 is also the year when the other buildings of the monastic complex around the church were built (Gega, 1985).

A feature that attracts attention is the orientation of the building. In fact, the church is not placed canonically along the east-west axis, but along the north-south axis instead, with the apse located to the south and the main entrance (in the original version) to the north. This orientation could have been conditioned by possible pre-existing structures located along the perimeter of the area on which the church stands, which

<sup>2</sup> There is only one other church with the same layout in all of Albania: the church of Marmirò, located to the south of the Gulf of Vlorë (Meksi *et al.*, 2016).



3



4

Figure III-5.3  
A view of the  
collapsed apsidal  
area at the end of  
the Sixties. The  
exterior walls and  
the drum were  
still plastered.  
[Courtesy: NICH]

Figure III-5.4  
An interior view of  
the portico.

compelled the access from the north. Otherwise, the choice might have been due to the wish to offer the visitors arriving to the island an at least partial view of the main facade of the church, rather than of the apse. On the other hand, orienting the church along the east-west axis would have been quite difficult, because the visitor would thus have been forced to unnaturally circumvent the building in order to reach its entrance on the side of the forest (Fig. III-5.5).

Above the architrave of the original entrance door, a decorative pattern with three blind arches can be seen (Fig. III-5.6). It seems to indicate a stylised version of a *tribelon* (a recurring feature in Byzantine architecture, which links the narthex to the naos) (Krautheimer, 1986; Ćurčić, 2010)<sup>3</sup>. The same configuration can also be seen on the fronts of the eastern and western arms of the cross. The decorative pattern can be fully appreciated especially on the front of the western arm, where it is part of a more organised structure that juts out from the facade (Fig. III-5.7). It can be presumed that the same jutting wall pattern also characterised the northern facade, where, as mentioned before, the original entrance of the church was located.

The wooden iconostasis is finely carved and seems to belong to the 19<sup>th</sup> century post-Byzantine tradition. As in other Albanian Orthodox churches, it has been unfortunately tampered with and is lacking its original icons. Near the western wall of the narthex, there is a tombstone on the floor, with stylistic features that suggest the influence of European Renaissance art. On a corner of the exonarthex there is a stone basin similar to a holy water font which was probably also used as a baptismal font.

<sup>3</sup> A 13<sup>th</sup> century Byzantine church in the South of Albania that has a proper tribelon is the Church of Saint Nicholas in Mesopotam. It constitutes the *katholikòn* (and the only surviving building) of a monastic complex. See Macchiarella (2011).

### Building system

The load-bearing walls of the church probably consist of three-leaf masonry with a thickness of around 75-80 cm. The two external leaves are made up mainly of uncoursed rubble stone held together with lime mortar. The stones are sandstones made up of porous limestone; they are therefore stones of sedimentary and mainly organogenic (fossiliferous calcareous) origin. Ashlars are used exclusively for the corners, the decorative strips on the fronts of the eastern and western arms and for the jambs and voussoirs of the arches of the portico and also of the arches supporting the cupola. Connections between orthogonal walls are well made.

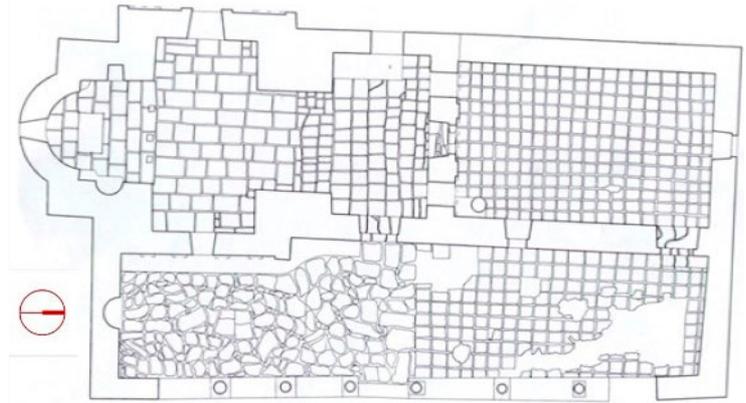


Figure III-5.5  
The church plan.  
[Courtesy: NICH]

In the facade walls, there are brick inserts, mostly on the oldest part of the church, but when compared with period photographs it is clear that some of these inserts are the result of more recent restoration works. The drum of the dome presents a *cloisonné* masonry made of stones and bricks while the bell-gable is made of bricks.

The stone foundations suffer from the constant stress caused by the movement of the clayey soil below which, in contact with abundant underground water, frequently dilates and contracts (At Theologos *et al.*, 2001).

The columns of the portico (six in total) are made of regular drums of fossiliferous calcareous stone. Some of these have been replaced or repaired during the various restoration works, yet are still in a serious state of decay, which threatens the stability of the portico.

The cupola is entirely built with bricks. The top of the intrados of the cupola is plastered and some portions of a wall painting are still visible on it (Fig. III-5.8).

At the base of the drum a narrow strip of slightly protruding bricks is also visible. It may indicate the existence of an older dome, which was placed directly on the pendentives and that probably at some point collapsed and was replaced by the current one. The barrel vaults on the arms of the cross and on the narthex are made of stones and bricks, whereas the supporting arches are built using exclusively stone voussoirs.

In the intersection between the barrel vaults of the northern arm of the cross and of the narthex (which are perpendicular to one-another) a complex spatial and structural solution (a three-dimensional arch) takes shape<sup>4</sup>, revealing the refined building expertise of the master builders and craftsmen who worked at the church. With the exception of the wall where the original entrance of the church was located, the walls and the vault of the exonarthex are plastered. In this space there are three wooden tie rods, one of which has a steel tie rod above it.

The current timber structure and tiles of the roof were replaced during the restoration work in 2001. Unfortunately, the roof was covered using industrially produced clay

<sup>4</sup> An example of a three-dimensional arch can be found on the second level of Saint Sophia's narthex in Istanbul.



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Figure III-5.6  
The original entrance of the church, now integrated into the exonarthex.

Figure III-5.7  
The front of the western arm of the cross with the triple-blind-arch pattern.

Figure III-5.8  
A view of the intrados of the dome.



Figure III-5.9  
A view that highlights the chromatic difference between the roof covering of the church and that of the lodgings.

bent tiles, which are questionable both in terms of the preservation of the value of the monument and of the aesthetic impact on the building<sup>5</sup> (Fig. III-5.9).

The pavings are in stone slabs, except for the exonarthex and a portion of the portico, which are paved in terracotta tiles.

Except for the four windows on the drum, all the openings have timber frames and glass panes.

#### State of conservation

The church has undergone different restoration works (Fig. III-5.10).

A 1977 report of the former Institute of the Cultural Monuments (Institut i Monumenteve të Kulturës-IMK) (see note 1. of this chapter), refers to a significant work that was carried out in 1972<sup>6</sup>. Some photographs kept at the archive of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage, which date back to 1968, show the church in a serious state of disrepair: whole parts had collapsed (especially in the area of the apse), the masonry was damaged and the columns were in an advanced state of decay. The 1972

<sup>5</sup> In the 2001 restoration project report, the covering of the roof was to be done using new 'Byzantine' clay tiles, in a colour similar to those of the lodgings. Unfortunately, while performing the work this was not respected.

<sup>6</sup> The main restoration works were carried out in 1972 and 2001. The last restoration project dates back to 2018 and at the time of the drafting of these Guidelines it had not yet been implemented. The authors had the opportunity to observe, through some photographs, the results of the implementation of this project shortly before the delivery of the book drafts to the publisher. They decided, however, not to modify the content of the text concerning the analysis of the monument, nor the recommendations regarding its restoration (see A.2), as a testimony of what, in their opinion, would have been the most respectful strategy towards the history of the monument. See <[https://orthodoxalbania.org/2020/2020/05/20/vijojne-punimet-per-restaurimin-e-kishes-se-manastirit-te-fjetjes-se-hyjlindeses-ne-ishullin-e-zvernecit/?fbclid=IwAR2wC9WcKacb5EW211Fbo3i5H7Xtxwwu\\_lvf8tKH7dnolNDg6LUI SZOVFY](https://orthodoxalbania.org/2020/2020/05/20/vijojne-punimet-per-restaurimin-e-kishes-se-manastirit-te-fjetjes-se-hyjlindeses-ne-ishullin-e-zvernecit/?fbclid=IwAR2wC9WcKacb5EW211Fbo3i5H7Xtxwwu_lvf8tKH7dnolNDg6LUI SZOVFY)>.

restoration works must have therefore been decisive for the monument's recovery. In fact, the 1977 IMK report only mentions the need for maintenance works concerning the church<sup>7</sup>.

During the restorations in 2001, several works were carried out which radically modified the appearance of the monument. The main works involved the removal of the plaster (which was seriously decayed according to the report of the restoration project)<sup>8</sup> that covered the exterior surfaces of the building and the aforementioned replacement of the roof. Through these works (and perhaps, also by creating decorative patterns especially on the exterior of the drum and of the apse), the church was aligned to the dominant appearance of Byzantine religious architecture. It cannot be excluded that the plaster had been there since the beginning. In those cases where the walls did not possess an evident decorative value, the churches were often plastered, especially in outlying areas such as Zvërnec (Ousterhout, 1999; Ćurčić, 2010).

It is certain though, that concern about the exposure of the bare walls to the particularly aggressive weather conditions of the lagoon had convinced those in charge of the 2001 restoration project to accompany the removal of the plaster with an appropriate protective wall coating (At Theologos *et al.*, 2001). It is unclear, however, if this protective coating was actually applied. The fact is that some parts of the walls are in a serious condition of disrepair. There is a noteworthy loss of surface material, as well as deterioration of the mortar joints.

Despite the rebuilding of the roof, water leaks are still an unsolved problem. There are traces of water leaks in all the vaults of the church, particularly in the exonarthex.

In order to prevent rising damp, in 2001 the perimeter of the church was surrounded by a channel for collecting and disposing of the rainwater that falls on the roof and flows on the sloping ground to the west of the building. The drain channel (50 cm deep by 20 cm wide and covered with stone slabs) does not seem to have solved the problem.

As far as structural decay is concerned, the elements that most need attention are the columns of the portico<sup>9</sup>. From information gathered on-site and from an interview with Prof. Pirro Thomo<sup>10</sup>, it appears that the first column to the south (the most damaged one) was relieved of its load-bearing function thanks to a steel beam placed tangentially to the top of the arches. The two columns of the central arch and the last column to the north are also in an advanced state of decay. The will of prof. Thomo not to substitute the damaged columns appears comprehensible, even after considering the inadequacy of the columns for their proper structural function. These eroded elements, have in fact become a connoting and almost symbolic feature of the image of the church (Fig. III-5.11).

<sup>7</sup> From this report, we know that the *konakë* (lodgings) of the monastery were in a serious state of disrepair. In the 1980s, a restoration campaign was launched which affected only the building to the east.

<sup>8</sup> The report includes some photographs that confirm the presence of exterior plastering.

<sup>9</sup> The columns were greatly eroded (in some cases their diameter had been reduced to a few centimetres) already in 1976, as shown by a survey report (signed Mati Baba) and by the photographs of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage archive. In the restoration projects of 1985, 2001 and 2010 the substitution of the most damaged columns was envisaged, whereas in the 2018 project the strategy consisted in consolidating them with an exterior steel frame. However, it appears that during the restoration works carried out on May 2020, the substitution option prevailed.

<sup>10</sup> Prof. Pirro Thomo participated in the 2001 restoration as a scientific adviser.

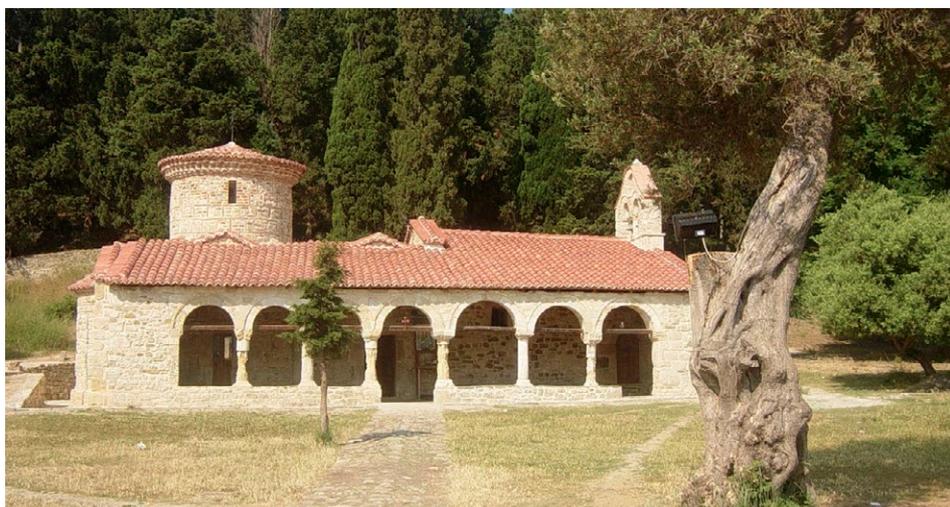


Figure III-5.10  
Starting from above:  
The church before,  
during and after the  
restoration works  
carried out in 2001.  
[Courtesy: Pirro  
Thomo]

The iconostasis presents several issues: stains, colour loss, mildew and repeated xylophagous insect attacks.

The church currently has an intruder alarm system and interior and exterior video-surveillance<sup>11</sup>, as well as a lighting system. These systems are visually invasive, with exposed superficial cables along the walls, and do not comply with safety standards.



Figure III-5.11  
The eroded  
columns of the  
portico as symbolic  
image of the  
church.

<sup>11</sup> A custodian who lives in the proximity of the church ensures surveillance of the building.

## Intervention strategies

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### S2 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

#### *A.1 Preliminary analysis of the church, of the other buildings and of the open spaces on the Island of Zvërnec*

The Island of Zvërnec presents an architectural and landscape heritage of undoubted value, which should be seen as a coherent whole, including the churches and other historical buildings in dialogue with the Lagoon of Nartë and with the dense woodlands.

The drafting of a comprehensive programme of works for the redevelopment of the buildings and of the open spaces on the Island of Zvërnec (see A.2) supposes a preliminary analysis structured into the following activities:

- Environmental overview;
- Analysis of the access routes and of the trails within the woods;
- Analysis of the existing tree species, both autochthonous and imported;
- Analysis of the building history and of the restoration works. In order to determine a comprehensive framework it is necessary to consult the Central State Archive of Albania (Arkivi Qendror i Shtetit) and also the archives of the National Institute of Cultural Heritage and the Institute of History. A precious source, but more difficult to access, would be the archive of the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania. Some records belonging to the Orthodox Church are, however, available at the Central State Archive of Albania, where they were collected during the years of the Communist regime (Rembeci, 2017). Consultation of archival material dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries requires palaeographic competencies, as well as knowledge of Mediaeval Greek and Ottoman Turkish;
- Geometrical, photographic and technological survey of the buildings, including the necessary thematic charts for defining the action proposals<sup>(a)</sup>;
- Typological analysis of the buildings and identification of any additions to the original structures;
- Analysis of the construction techniques, of the building annexes and of the open spaces, including the cemetery;
- Analysis of the state of material degradation;
- Analysis of the mineral composition of the stones, bricks and mortars of the Church of the Dormition of Mary;
- Analysis of the general state of conservation of the buildings so as to understand causes and mechanisms of structural failures and decay phenomena;
- Survey of the buildings' crack patterns.

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### S4 Living Quality Strategies

See A.4 sect. I.4.2.

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### S6 Enhancement Strategies

#### *A.2 Drafting a project for the integrated recovery of the church, the buildings and the open spaces on the Island of Zvërnec*

This Action proposes a series of works that concern the buildings and the open spaces on the island. Each proposal has been conceived within an integrated and unitary vision that respects the precious environmental context in which the island is situated. The proposed works should pursue the following objectives:

- Preserving the identity of the buildings, based upon international restoration principles and regulations<sup>(b)</sup>;
- Eliminating or replacing those elements which alter the integrity of the building (additions, inconsistent materials, etc.);
- Enhancing the seismic performance of the building in accordance with the technical regulations in force;
- Improving the accessibility of the buildings and of the open spaces while safeguarding the features and identity of the places;
- Using, whenever possible, design solutions based on the principles of environmental sustainability;
- Upgrading technological and hygienic-sanitary systems in a way that is compatible with the typological, architectural and structural features of the buildings.

## RESTORATION WORKS CONCERNING THE CHURCH OF THE DORMITION OF MARY

- *Structural consolidation of the columns of the portico.* This work is of utmost urgency due to the serious state of decay of some of the columns. It is necessary, first of all, to assess the effectiveness of the works carried out during past restorations and to identify the precise mineral composition of the stone material of the columns (see A.1). Thereafter, the structural strengthening project needs to be designed, without forgetting the importance of the eroded columns as a symbolic image of the church;
- *Restoration of the walls.* The degradation regards especially the exterior walls of the church. The conservation works should be based on a careful analysis of the stones, bricks and mortars (see A.1). It is necessary to clean and repoint the joints and to replace any broken or decayed stone or brick elements. Afterwards, the walls should be coated with specific substances that assure protection against the aggressive action of the salty air;
- *Waterproofing of the roof.* The roof, especially in the section covering the exonarthex, suffers periodically from water leaks. The waterproofing works should pay careful attention to the areas connecting the pitches and between the pitches and the walls;
- *Replacement of the covering of the roof.* The current covering of the roof in extruded clay bent tiles, clashes both in terms of texture and colour with the overall image of the church and of the adjacent historical buildings. Our suggestion is therefore to remove the existing covering and to replace it with hand-made bent tiles, which fully resemble those used in the past<sup>(c)</sup>;
- *Control of rising damp.* It is necessary to identify the causes of rising damp and to periodically clean the perimeter drain channel so as to prevent stagnation of rainwater. We recommend replacing the plaster of the exonarthex (where traces of rising damp are more evident) with a breathable and compatible lime-based plaster<sup>(d)</sup>;
- *Assess the structural efficiency of the timber tie-rods of the exonarthex.* The timber tie-rods of the exonarthex have problems regarding their toothing to the walls. Currently, there is only one reinforcing steel tie rod. With the aim of ensuring the resistance of the building to horizontal actions, it is necessary to value the possibility of extending this measure to all the timber tie-rods;
- *Assess the conditions of the bell frame.* The timber structure of the bell frame appears to be in an advanced state of decay. It is necessary to assess its condition and if needed to replace the damaged sections with parts consistent with the traditional material and techniques;
- *Works regarding the paving.* The brick paving of the exonarthex and of a section of the portico should be replaced with stone slabs of the same type as those used in the rest of the church floor<sup>(e)</sup>;
- *Works regarding the drum openings.* The drum openings have no windows. It is therefore necessary to contemplate adequate protection so as to prevent water leaks and animal intrusions;
- *Restoration of the iconostasis.* The wooden iconostasis has been heavily tampered with throughout the years, including the replacement of the original icons with bad quality prints<sup>(f)</sup>. It is necessary to programme a general restoration of the iconostasis, to be carried out by wood restoration specialists and to commission copies of the missing icons from expert iconographers, in accordance with the classical canons of traditional Byzantine painting;
- *Removal of invasive vegetation.* Both the exterior walls and the roof of the church present traces of invasive vegetation. So as to limit the damage that the roots of the plants can cause to the building, it is necessary to remove the vegetation and to ensure periodic maintenance;
- *Upgrading of the technological systems of the church.* The 2001 report of the restoration project indicated that the technological systems were to be designed and implemented at a later date; there are no subsequent documents discussing this issue. The current systems seem to be the result of sporadic and patchy works and are incompatible with the historical value of the building and with safety regulations, and should therefore be replaced. Furthermore, a protection system against atmospheric discharges, ensuring the least possible visual impact, as well as a fire protection system should be installed.

## RESTORATION WORKS CONCERNING THE CHAPEL OF THE HOLY TRINITY

Based on the results of on field observations, it is advisable to undertake the following works: (1) restoration of the masonry including crack repairing, using traditional techniques, (2) protection of the walls from rising damp, (3) replacement of the door and windows, and (4) replacement of the current roof covering with hand-made clay bent tiles.

## RECOVERY AND CONVERSION OF THE MONASTERY LODGINGS

The buildings in question are two: the long compact structure to the east of the island, and an isolated building to the north. The following spaces could be envisaged in the first of these buildings:

- A tourist reception and info point, including a bookshop;

- Small apartments for renting to visitors, scholars and researchers interested in the protected area, or for the faithful who come to Zvěrnec from other regions on the occasion of the Feast of the Dormition of Mary. In this way, the original function of the building might be, at least in part, restored;
- A small cafeteria;
- Toilets.

The building to the north, instead, could be used as the custodian's house.

#### DEMOLITION OF THE RECENTLY BUILT STRUCTURES

Near the church, to the north, there is a recently built structure (probably built during the years of the Communist regime). This building has no special value and we suggest, therefore, that it be demolished in order to recover the green area in which it stands.

#### WORKS RELATED TO OPEN SPACES

As far as the regeneration of the open spaces is concerned, we suggest that the natural value of the landscape of the island be respected, preserving the autochthonous species and safeguarding the features of the historical architectural elements.

In particular, we suggest that the following works be carried out:

- Designing the path leading from the wooden gangway to the church;
- Redeveloping the unpaved trails for exploring the island, including the appropriate signage;
- Establishing rest areas equipped with facilities, adequately shaded, both in proximity of the church and along the trails that traverse the woods;
- Restoration and renovation of the area of the cemetery adjacent to the church. The area is currently in a state of abandonment. In order to preserve its value as a historical testimony, it is necessary to provide for the restoration of the tombstones and of the wrought iron artefacts that enclose them; in order to make it more accessible and usable, it is necessary to repair the cemetery inner paths;
- Installing an adequate lighting system for both the buildings and the paths. The wooden gangway that leads to the mainland could be illuminated with walk over LED spotlights, a solution capable of creating a very evocative effect;
- Installing a fall prevention/protection system for the gangway that connects the island to the mainland. If a railing were considered too invasive, it could be useful to mark the edges of the gangway with visual and tactile signals situated on the floor level;
- Restoration and maintenance of the enclosure wall surrounding the monastery using, as much as possible, the materials available on-site.

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#### A.3 Creating an information and communication system

On the Island of Zvěrnec, currently, there is no street signage and no information panels describing the history of the monastery and its natural environment.

It is therefore advisable to place adequate signage that from Vlorë could guide the visitors toward the island, through the Soda Forest and the downstream quarter of Zvěrnec. On the island, in addition to the placement of descriptive panels, brochures and maps could be distributed at the tourist reception and info point proposed in Action A.2.

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## S5 Management Strategies

### A.10 Monitoring of the building

See A.6, sect. I.5.1.

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### A.11 Drafting of a Maintenance Plan of the Island of Zvěrnec

See A.7, sect. I.5.1.

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

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#### Notes

- a) The lack of updated surveys of the cultural monuments is a critical issue in the Albanian context, which over the past few years a number of projects (mostly under international initiative) have attempted to remedy. See, *inter alia*, Boriani & Macchiarella (2009) and Boriani & Giambruno (2015).
- b) See the Charter of Venice (1964), arts. 9, 11, and 12 and subsequent Charters, Conventions and Declarations.
- c) This work was already envisaged in the report on the 2001 restoration project. It was also confirmed by the report on the 2018 restoration project.
- d) This work was envisaged in the report on the restoration project of 2018.
- e) *Ibidem*.
- f) According to testimonies from the inhabitants, the original icons were taken to Greece.

