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■ Five Albanian Villages

Guidelines for a Sustainable Tourism
Development through the Enhancement
of the Cultural Heritage



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Antonio Lauria, Valbona Flora, Kamela Guza

Five Albanian Villages

Guidelines for a Sustainable Tourism Development through
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Credits

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Acronym Key

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CESVI, Albania	Cooperazione e Sviluppo (Cooperation and Development) NGO, Përmet.
DiDA-Unifi	Department of Architecture, University of Florence.
DSPS-Unifi	Department of Social and Political Sciences, University of Florence.
IOM	International Organization for Migration.
LG	Lauria, A. Agaj, E., Cala, M, Flora V., Guza K., Kapo, D., Misseri, G., Toçila, A. & Vessella, L. (2020), <i>Linee Guida per la valorizzazione del patrimonio culturale dei piccoli borghi albanesi</i> . Research report, Firenze: Department of Architecture, University of Florence.
NICH	National Institute of Cultural Heritage, Tirana.
RP	“The Diaspora as a Resource for the Knowledge, Preservation and Enhancement of the Lesser Known Cultural Sites in Albania” research project.
UniZKM	Catholic University “Our Lady of Good Counsel” of Tirana.
VIS, Albania	Volontariato Internazionale per lo Sviluppo (International Volunteering for Development) NGO, Shkodër.

PART II
THE MOUNTAIN VILLAGE OF RAZĚM

Settlement and buildings

Historical overview

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

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

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

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

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

The residential area

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

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

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



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



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



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

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

The traditional dwellings of Vrith/Razëm

Typological features

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

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

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

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

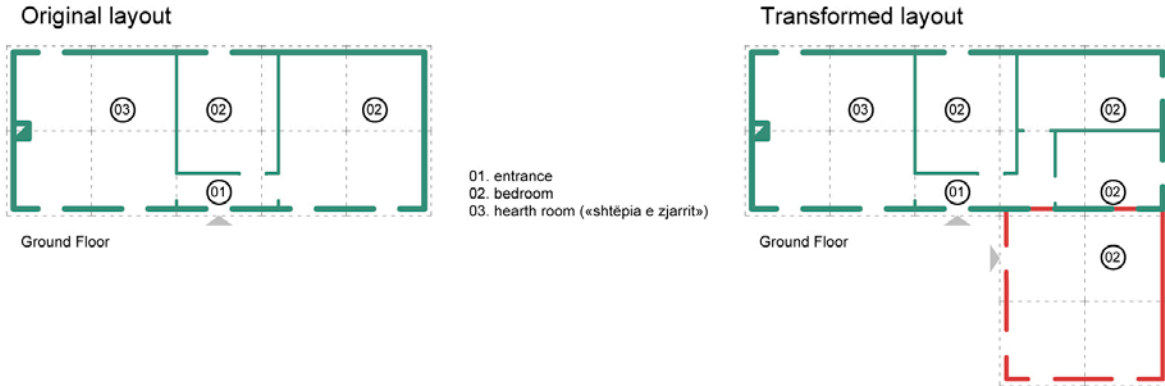


Figure II-4.4 Hypothesis on the original layout of the domestic space and further expansion of the first analysed dwelling. [Author: Dritan Kapo]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

Building features

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

Original layout



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

Ground Floor

Original layout



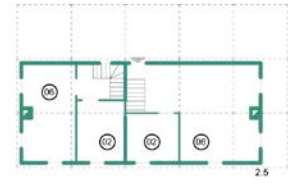
Ground Floor



Semi-Basement Floor

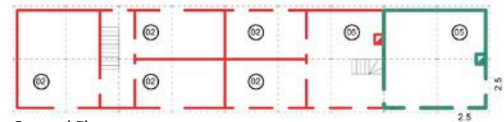
- 01. entrance
- 02. bedroom
- 03. harvest storeroom
- 04. stables and troughs
- 05. guest room («oda e miqev»)
- 06. hearth room («shtëpia e zjarrit»)
- 07. bathroom
- 08. kitchen

Transformed layout



Ground Floor

Transformed layout



Ground Floor



Semi-Basement Floor

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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



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

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



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

The mountain huts of the alpine pastures of Razëm

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

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

Typological features

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

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

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



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



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

Building features

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

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

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

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



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

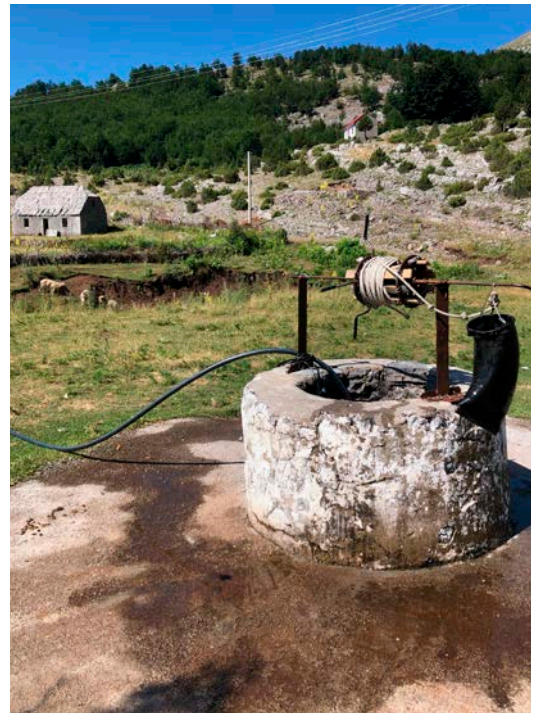
State of conservation of traditional buildings

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

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

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

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



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Figure II-4.14 – The Sheshi i Razmës.

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

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

Public space

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

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

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

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

Infrastructure network

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Public services, shops and tourist facilities

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

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

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

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

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

Critical issues and future prospects

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

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

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

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

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

Intervention strategies

S2 Planning Strategies

A.1 Registering of real estate

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

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

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

S3 Social Cohesion Strategies

A.2 Creating a Community and Artisan Centre

See A.2, sect. I.4.2

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

S4 Living Quality Strategies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A.5 Establishing a public transport line

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A.8 Waste water treatment in the alpine pastures

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

S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

See A.11, sect. I.4.1.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

For the three alpine pastures our recommendation is also to:

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

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

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

S6 Enhancement Strategies

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

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

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

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

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

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

See A.7, sect. I.4.2.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Considering the quality of the landscape, the aforementioned works should respect the landscape continuity of the pre-alpine context. Our specific recommendation is not to modify the existing vegetal structure (through the felling of trees and the elimination of riparian formations), but rather to enhance it with the addition of new autochthonous plant species.

Notes

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

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

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Part I PËRMET

I.0 General Overview

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I.1 Food Heritage

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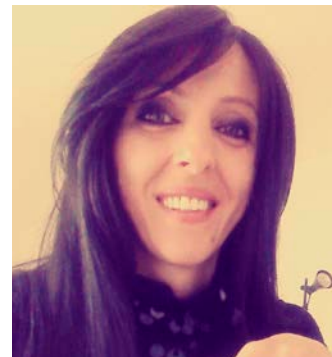
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Five Albanian Villages. Guidelines for a Sustainable Tourism Development through the Enhancement of the Cultural Heritage. This book is the result of a research project designed and carried out at the Department of Architecture, University of Florence. This research was based on the transfer of knowledge from members of the Albanian Diaspora in Italy (university students, young architects and researchers) to their home country. This unique process blazed a trail in the Albania-related studies by creating a methodology, which could be replicated not only in Albanian rural contexts, but also elsewhere.

The book constitutes a structured tool for generating sustainable and socially inclusive territorial development processes in five lesser-known Albanian cultural sites. Their tangible and intangible cultural heritage was seen as a driving factor for triggering development processes aimed at improving the inhabitants' quality of life and strengthening local identity and social networks.

Through concrete proposals and strategies, the book offers scenarios and solutions capable of enhancing the potential of each village and, at the same time, counteracting the effects of land abandonment that so often characterise them.

Antonio Lauria is an architect and a full professor at the University of Florence's Architecture Department. He is the founder and scientific coordinator of the *Florence Accessibility Lab*.

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