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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
the Enhancement of the Cultural Heritage

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Credits

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Unless otherwise stated, pictures included in the book were taken during the Analysis phase of this research project by the members of the working group (professors, research fellows and students).

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Acronym Key

CELIM, Albania	Centro Laici Italiani per le Missioni NGO, Vlorë
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 I

THREE VILLAGES OF PËRMET: BËNJË, KOSINË AND LEUSË

Settlements and buildings

SECTION I.4.1 – BËNJË

Historical overview

Traces of cave dwellings provide evidence of human presence in the area of Bënjë since the 3rd millennium B.C. (Kola, 2002; Saliu, 2011). According to Frashëri (1969), during the last few centuries before the Christian era the area was inhabited by the Illyrian tribe of the Parauej, which had settled along the banks of the River Vjosa and the adjacent territories (Dangëlli, Shqeri, Nemërçkë and Dhëmbel). An Ottoman fiscal registry (*defter*) dating back to the year 1431 mentions a hamlet with the name of “Bano” or “Bana” in the area where the village is now located (Buharaja, 2018). It is probably the ruined settlement, which lies on the hillock known as “Bregorja e Bërçeve” (Kola, 2002). The reasons that led the inhabitants to abandon the original location of Bënjë¹ are unknown, and there is no certain information concerning the date of foundation of the current village. The only available ‘documentation’ consists of the inscriptions on the cornerstones and entrances of dwellings, all dated between 1860 and 1910.

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

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

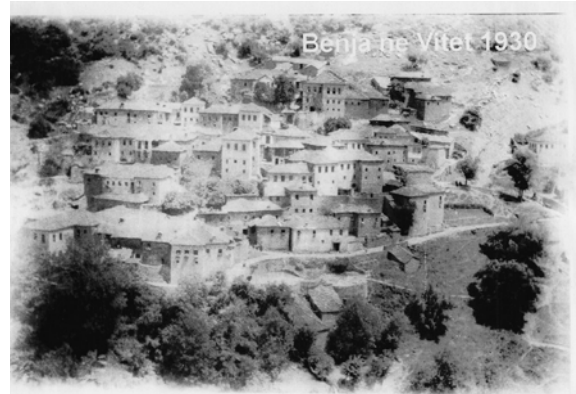


Figure I-4.1.1 houses of Bënjë, with aesthetic and typological features inspired on the stately homes of Gjirokaštër, belong to this phenomenon (Fig. I-4.1.1).

A traditional fortified dwelling in its landscape background.

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

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

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

The residential area

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

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

² Decree of the Council of Ministers no. 776 of 02.11.2016



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

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

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

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

The traditional dwellings

Typological features

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

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



4 Dwelling Service annexes Courtyard

5

Figure I-4.1.4
The urban settlement pattern of Bënjë's historic centre. [Author: Dritan Kapo]

Figure I-4.1.5
Two dwelling typologies in the historic centre of Bënjë. Above, the Prifti house.

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

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

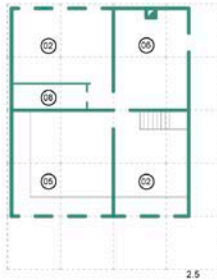
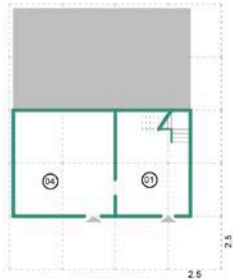
Houses usually have from three to ten rooms (in three-storey buildings). In the layout of the house, the main spaces were the room with the hearth (*shtëpia e zjarrit*) and the guest room (*oda e miqve*).

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

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

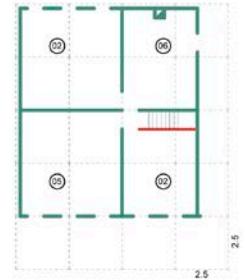
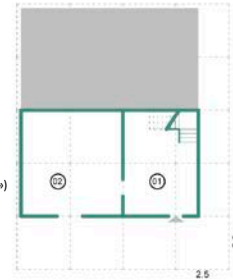
It was exclusively for the use of men and for the main family rituals, such as wedding feasts and funerals (Muka, 2007). Important guests were received in this room, which was generally located on the uppermost floor and in a privileged position. The guests would also sleep there in case of prolonged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

Original layout

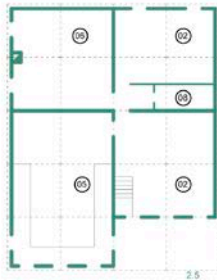
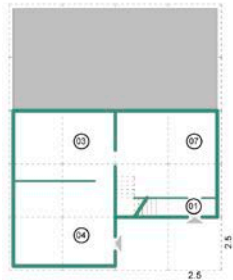


- 01. entrance
- 02. bedroom
- 03. harvest storeroom
- 04. stables and troughs
- 05. guest room («koda e miqve»)
- 06. hearth room («shtëpia e zjarrit»)
- 07. Hallway and/or food storage room
- 08. storage closet

Transformed layout

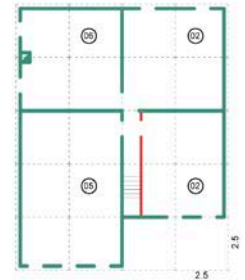
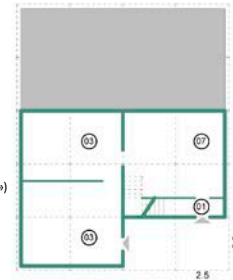


Original layout



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

Transformed layout



6



7

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

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



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

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

Building features and state of conservation

The village preserves some of its original features.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Public space

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

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

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



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



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



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



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

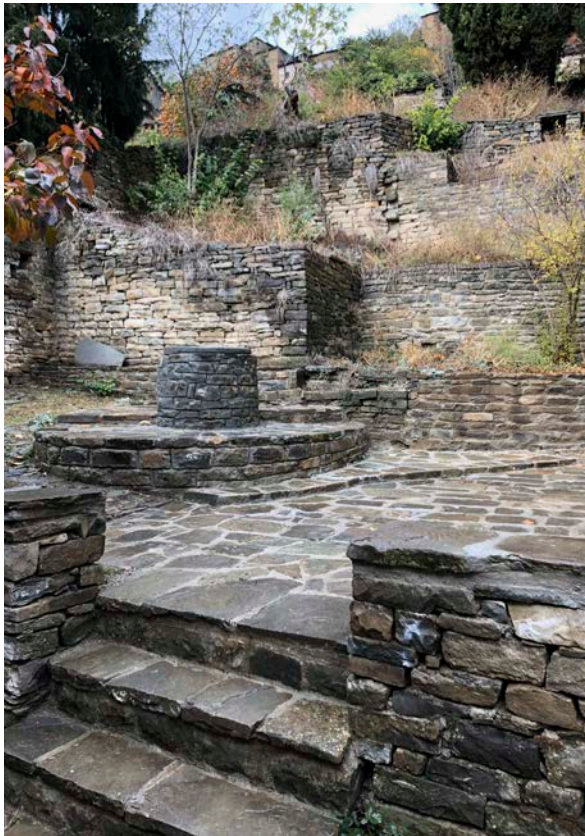


Figure I-4.1.13 – The small courtyard, with a well at its centre, before the entrance of the Church of St. Mary.

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

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

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

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

Infrastructure networks

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

An even greater problem is the absence of a depuration plant for waste water, which currently flows into the stream that runs next to the village⁴.

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



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

Public services, shops and tourist facilities

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

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

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

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

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

Critical issues and future prospects

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

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

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

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

Intervention strategies

S1 Education and Training Strategies

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

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

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

S2 Planning Strategies

A.2 Preparation of the Bënjë Urban Recovery Plan

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

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

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

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

PHASE I. SURVEY

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

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

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

PHASE 2. DRAFTING THE PLAN

Zone: Historic centre

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

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

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

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

Zone: Buffer zone of the historic centre

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

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

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

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

PHASE 3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

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

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

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

S4 Living Quality Strategies

A.3 Ensuring adequate infrastructures

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

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

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

- Feasibility study and preliminary cost analysis.

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

A.4 Creating a service for rubbish collection and disposal

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

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

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

A.5 Enhancing public lighting

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

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

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

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

A.7 Constructing a parking area

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

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

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

A.8 Establishing a public transport line

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

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

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

The redevelopment work should include:

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

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

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

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

A.10 Creating additional public and tourist services

This Action proposes the construction of:

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

S5 Knowledge and Safeguarding Strategies

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

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

S6 Enhancement Strategies

A.12 Creating a Dispersed Hotel in Bënjë^(d)

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

It should ensure:

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

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

A.13 Regenerating public spaces

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

ESTABLISHMENT OF REST AREAS AND SCENIC VIEWPOINTS

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

SECTION I.4.2 – KOSINË

Historical overview

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

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

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



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

The residential area

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

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

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

The traditional dwellings

Typological features

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

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

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

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



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



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

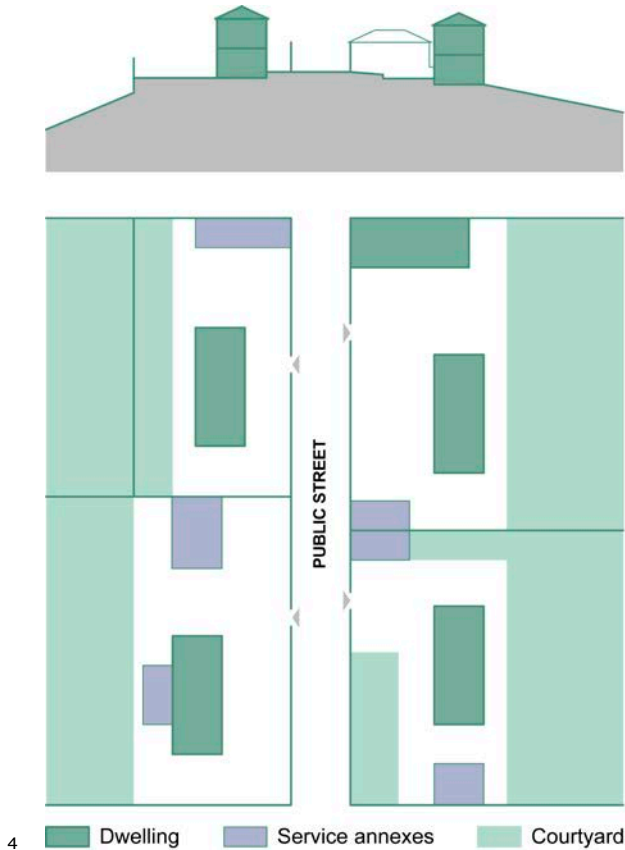


Figure I-4.2.4 *Building features and state of conservation*

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

Figure I-4.2.5
Enclosed courtyards in Kosinë.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

Public space

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

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



7



8

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

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

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

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

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

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



9



10

Infrastructure networks

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

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

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

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

Figure I-4.2.9
The open space around the school.

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



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

Public services, shops and tourist facilities

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

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

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

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

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

Critical issues and future prospects

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

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

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

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

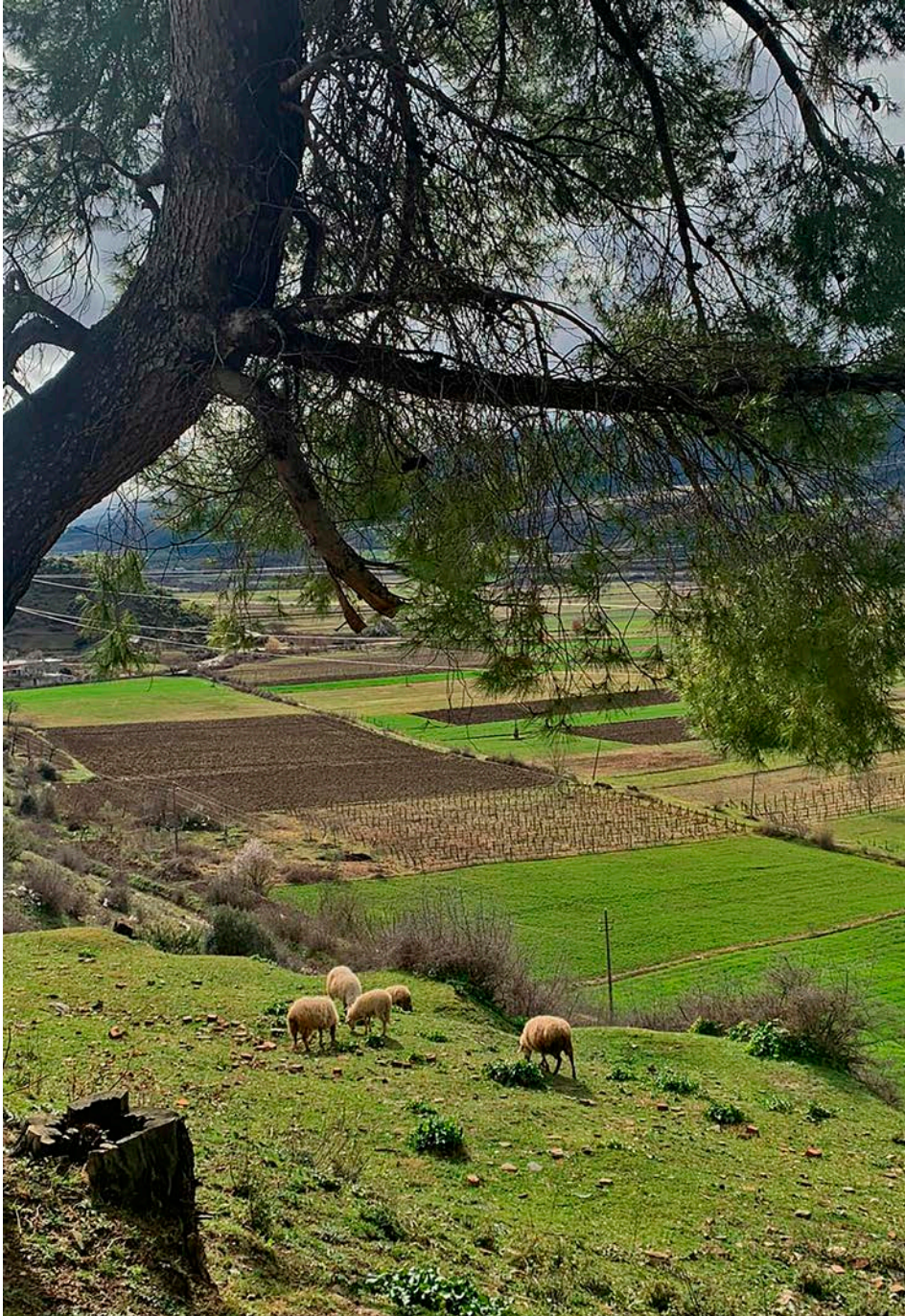


Figure I-4.2.12
A view of the Vjosa
Valley from the
area surrounding
the Church of the
Dormition of Mary.
[Photo: Samuela
Hidri]

Intervention strategies

S1 Education and Training Strategies

A.1 Environmental education project in the school of Kosinë

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

This Action is preparatory for Action A.4.

S3 Social Cohesion Strategies

A.2 Creating a Community and Artisan Centre

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

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

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

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

S4 Living Quality Strategies

A.3 Ensuring adequate infrastructures

See A.3, sect. I.4.1

A.4 Enhancing the rubbish collection system

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

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

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

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

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

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

Where possible, it is advisable to build sidewalks.

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

A.6 Construction of a parking area

See A.7, sect. I.4.1

S6 Enhancement Strategies

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

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

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

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

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

A.8 Restoration of the school and the surrounding area

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

The redevelopment project should provide for:

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

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

A.9 Repair of the sports field and the playground

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

For the sports field the following works are suggested:

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

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

A.10 Redevelopment of Stefan Dhima Square

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

To this end we propose the following:

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

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

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

A.11 Promoting the creation of a horse trail

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

For this purpose our suggestion is to:

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

Notes

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

SECTION I.4.3 – LEUSË

Historical overview

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

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

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

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

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

The residential area

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

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

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

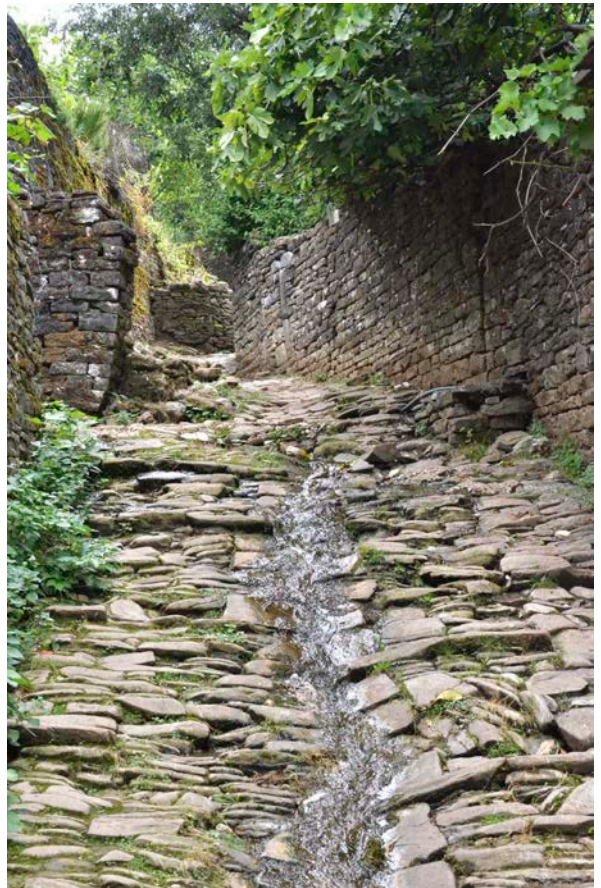


Figure I-4.3.1 – The main street of the village paved in *kalldrëm* and its water drainage channel in the middle.



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

The traditional dwellings

Typological features

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

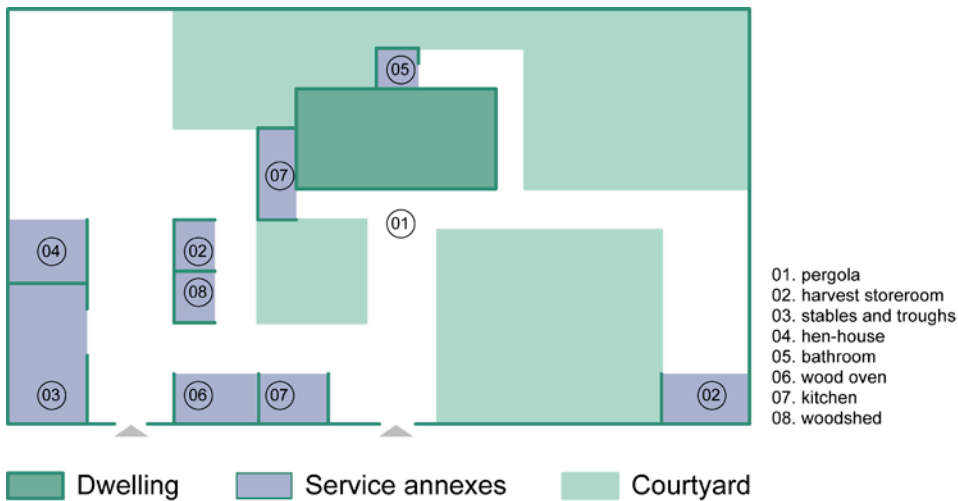


Figure I-4.3.3
The layout of the dwelling spaces in Leusë. [Author: Dritan Kapo]



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

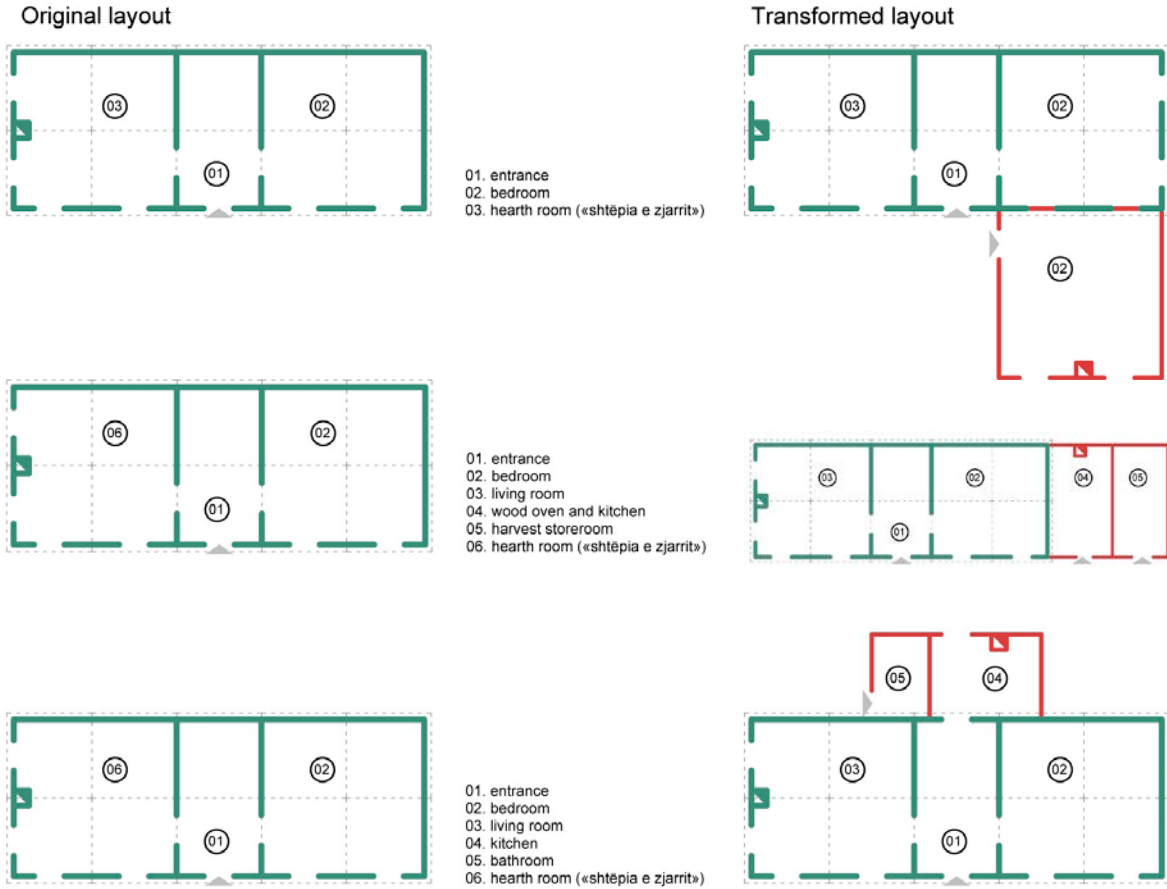


Figure I-4.3.5 *Building features and state of conservation*

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

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

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

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

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

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



6



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

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

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

Partitions are usually made with timber and reeds.

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

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

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

Public space

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Infrastructure networks

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

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

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



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

Public services, shops and tourist facilities

There are no public services and shops in the village.

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

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

Critical issues and future prospects

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

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

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



Figure I-4.3.9 – Stone seats along the street.



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

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

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

Intervention strategies

S1 Education and Training Strategies

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

See A.1, sect. I.4.1

S4 Living Quality Strategies

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

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

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

The following works are proposed:

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

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

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

A.3 Ensuring adequate infrastructures

See A.3, sect. I.4.1

S5 Knowing and Safeguarding Strategies

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

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

S6 Enhancement Strategies

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

See A.7, sect. I.4.2

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

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

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

This Centre could house the following functions:

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

The redevelopment project should include:

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

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

A.7 Redeveloping urban spaces

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

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

We suggest the following works:

RECOVERY OF THE STREETS AND SQUARES

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

RESTORATION OF SOFAT AND COURTYARD ENTRANCES

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

RESTORATION OF THE THREE FOUNTAINS OF THE VILLAGE

See A.13, sect. I.4.1.

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

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Part I PËRMET

I.0 General Overview

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I.1 Food Heritage

<<http://www.fondazione Slow Food.com/it/arca-del-gusto-slow-food/raki-rigoni/>>

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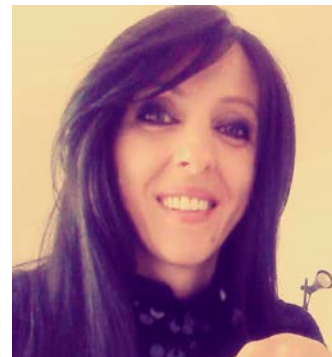
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Five Albanian Villages. Guidelines for a Sustainable Tourism Development through the Enhancement of the Cultural Heritage. This book is the result of a research project designed and carried out at the Department of Architecture, University of Florence. 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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