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Countryside and Nature—Fshat i Natyrës

Coexistence: Balancing Productive and Protected Nature

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Until the 1990s, Albania was rich in natural environments untouched by human activity. But since the fall of communism steady population growth, the rise of tourism, expanding road infrastructure and increased agricultural production have rapidly threatened these fragile ecosystems. Anthropogenic influence has not only destroyed habitats for animals and plants, but has also had repercussions on humans themselves, so that urgent intervention is required to protect these unique landscapes.

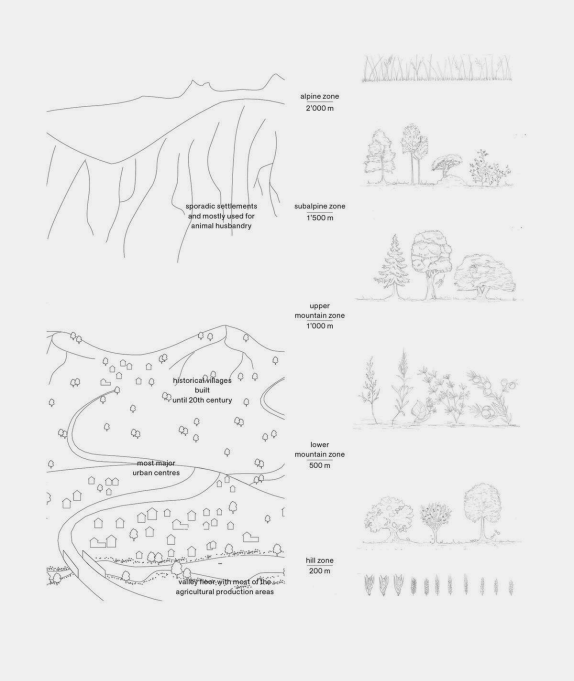


The Drino river close to Gjirokastër. Photograph: Wikipedia [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drino#/media/Datei:Drinos_Albania.jpg].



Rrapi i Libohovës: the giant large tree is a protected nature monument in Libohovë. Source: lajmimire.com [https://lajmimire.com/rrapi-i-libohoves-pema-qe-nuk-thahet-kurre/].

BIODIVERSITY



The mountainous terrain of Southern Albania is home to a wide variety of plant and animal species, resulting from the large altitude differences in its territory, but also due to its different types of land use, ranging from cultivated flood plains in the valley floors to steep subalpine and alpine pastures.

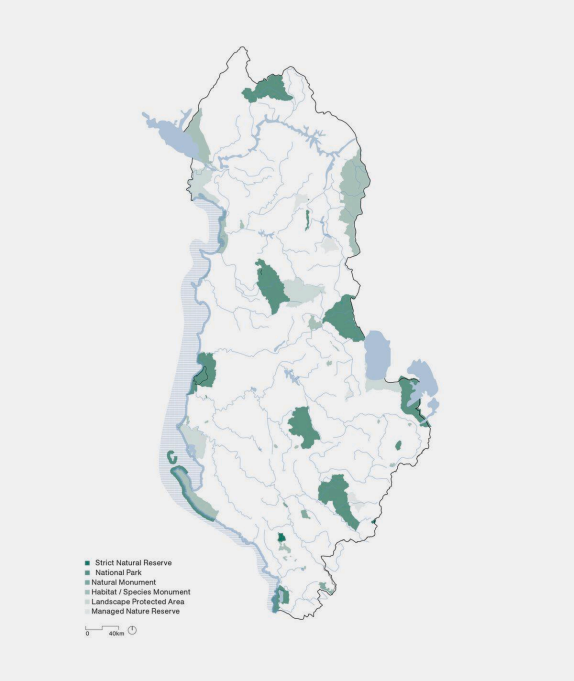


Selection of medicinal plants found in Southern Albania. The many medicinal plants that are used in the region show the close relation between the human and non-human inhabitants.

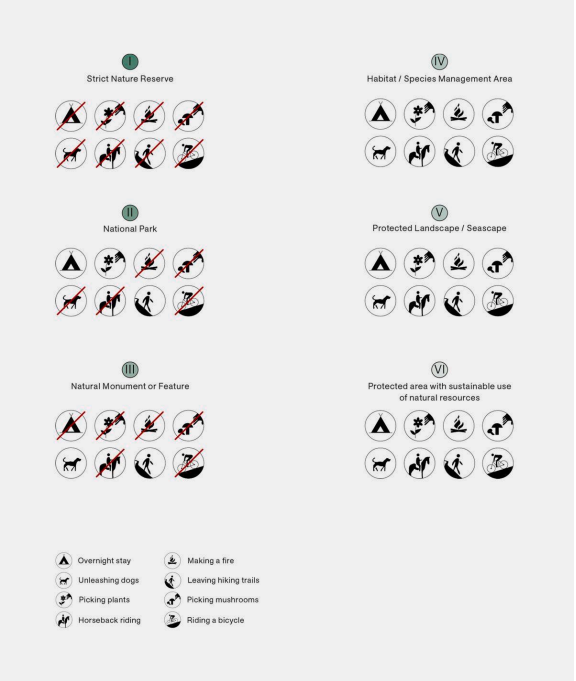


Picking caj mali (mountain tea), a local herbal plant used for tea. Photograph: Kiara Muka.

NATURE CONSERVATION



Nature conservation areas in Albania.



Nature conservation is based on the system of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Different types of human activities are allowed dependent on the level of protection, from camping to bringing pets. The top two protection levels allow almost no human activity. Generally, the protection categories seem to address touristic use, not land or resource use.



Nature reserve: fir of Hotovë-Dangëlli national park. Photograph: Visit Gjirokastra [https://www.visit-gjirokastra.com/see-and-do/national-park-bredhi-i-hotoves-dangelli/]

The Third Paradise Park

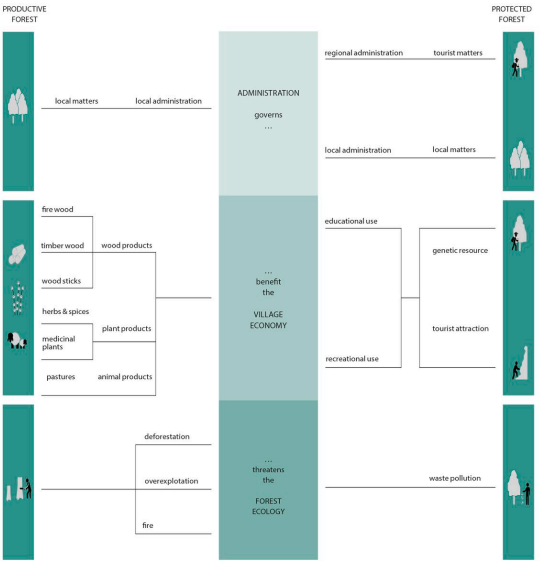
Humans have to stay in touch with nature in order to interact with it responsibly. Therefore we would like to propose a nature park typology that aims at protecting non-human species whilst allowing for a contact between humans and non-humans: The park of the third nature.

In the rural villages of Peshtan and Benjë-Novoselë, nature tourism has paradoxically created a divide between the local communities and their surrounding nature. The infrastructure and economy around natural attractions only cater to the tourist. Boom gates and entry fees literally cut communities off from their natural surroundings, until slowly they become completely disconnected from what was once the source of their livelihood. Protected nature should benefit local rural communities and preserve traditional practices. Therefore we propose two approaches with the goal to learn how to live from and with nature: the Village of Medical Herbs and the Renaturation of Riverbeds and the Creation of a Buffer Zone.



We envision a future for rural areas in which agricultural production does not have to be at the expense of natural habitats.



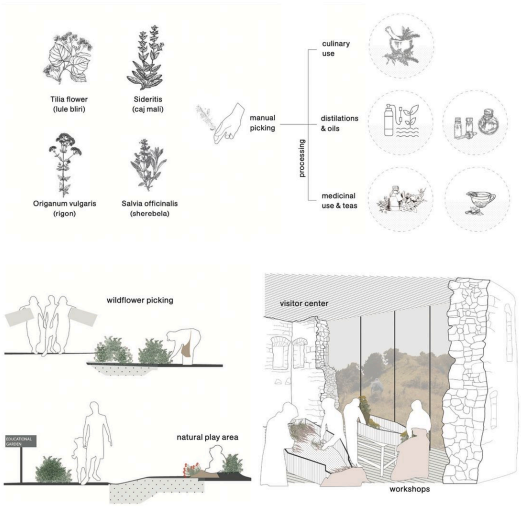


"It is the fusion between the first and second paradise. The first is the paradise in which humans were fully integrated into nature. The second is the artificial paradise, developed by human intelligence to globalizing proportions through science and technology. (…) The Third Paradise is the third phase of humanity, realized as a balanced connection between artifice and nature." Michelangelo Pistoletto, *The Third Paradise*.

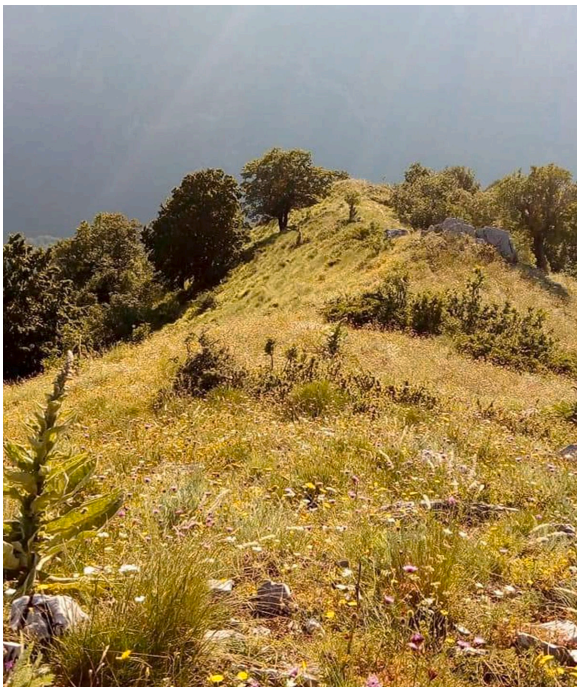
Diagram of action for a Third Paradise Park.

VILLAGE OF MEDICAL HERBS—A SCENARIO FOR A MULTI-SPECIES FOREST

Peshtan is a small village on the Vjosa River. The natural resources surrounding the village—water sources, productive forests and medicinal plants—have only recently become protected. We foresee an education path, a workshop, hiking tours and a visitor centre in the village of Peshtan to raise awareness about medicinal plants.



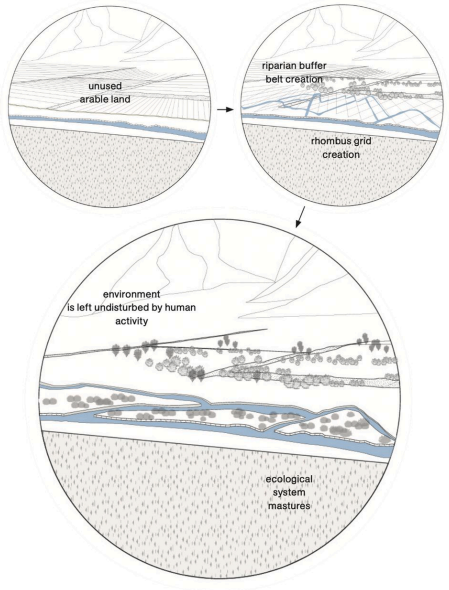
Local people will become caretakers, gardeners and educators, instigating economic activity and job creation in rural areas while passing on their knowledge about the land.



The protected forest zone aims at conserving the habitats for rare medicinal plants which are highly unique to the region. Photograph: Kiara Muka.

THE RENATURATION OF RIVERBEDS AND THE CREATION OF A BUFFER ZONE

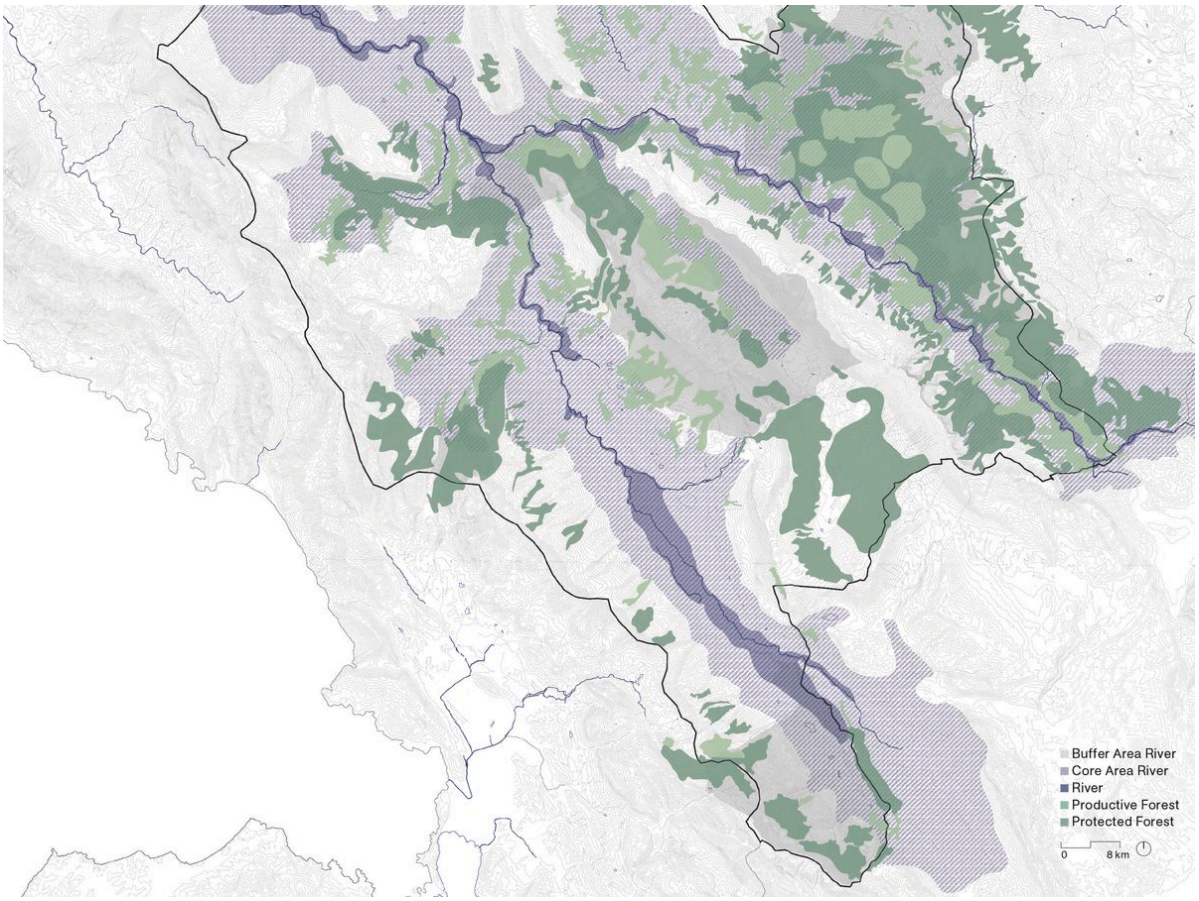
The Drino Valley was transformed by agriculture and was subsequently abandoned. A park aims to renaturalise the landscape and promote growth, diversity and new habitats. The buffer area of the river provides protection to the core areas, which cover the Drino and Vjosa river as well as non-irrigated arable land and which are inaccessible for humans.



In order to restore the natural flow of the river a rhombus grid is created alongside the native vegetation strips near the banks of the river.



Abandoned and unused agricultural land in the Drino Valley floor. Photograph: Gyler Mydyti.



The third paradise park is a zone which oscillates between protection and production. It connects and complements areas in need of protection and focuses on how people interact with the spaces. Park rules, education, research, and community involvement It aims to bring visitors closer to the land and encourage them to understand the precarious balance between pristine nature and human activity.

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