

**(in compliance with Paragraph 169 of the *Operational Guidelines*)**

## **Zagori Cultural Landscape (Greece) (1695)**

### **1. Executive Summary of the report**

This SOC report responds to the recommendations included in **45 COM 8B.34 Decision** for inscription of Zagori Cultural Landscape on the World List, in 2023

#### ***a) Consider including the villages of Skamnéli and Eláti in the buffer zone:***

On 11.01.2024 a modified map was sent to the World Heritage Centre including the villages of Skamnelli and Elati within the buffer zone of the property.

#### ***b) Prepare documentation on the traditional villages and traditional buildings within the nominated property to create a baseline for the conservation and management of the nominated property as a whole:***

A digital platform has been developed so as to register in a systematic way the rich documentation of Zagori Cultural Landscape traditional architecture and monuments within the property and its buffer zone. The scope of the project is the collection of the historical information about each of the forty five (45) traditional villages and buildings and the documentation of their origins, uses, architectural styles, and evolution over time. The project includes also the listing of all the stone-arched bridges, the historical paths and staircases of the nominated property documenting their structure, construction, as well as current state (damage, decay, or alterations) and a condition assessment. The outcome of the project is the creation of a baseline for the conservation and management of the nominated property as a whole.

#### ***c) Develop a comprehensive conservation plan that considers the stone-arched bridges, the historical paths and staircases, and the traditional villages in a holistic way:***

The designation as traditional -according to the strict provisions of the Archaeological Law- of nine (9) settlements has been completed, while the designation of the remaining nine (9) settlements of the nominated property are awaiting such an approval by the competent Central Council for Modern Monuments of the Ministry of Culture. At the same time, -conservation and restoration actions in accordance with the comprehensive conservation plan, as set out in the Management Plan included in the nomination file, are implemented.

#### ***d) Develop a coordination platform and mechanisms for the management of the nominated property, taking into consideration other designations, institutions, and levels of implementation that overlap with the nominated property:***

The coordination for the management of the nominated property is the objective of the Cultural Development Programme Agreement concluded among the three key stakeholders (Ministry of Culture, Region of Epirus and Municipality of Zagori). At the same time an Advisory Committee for the Preservation and Promotion of the Zagori Cultural Landscape has already been established involving all main stakeholders from state agencies, other interested parties and the civil society.

***e) Include within the proposed management plan a financial programming, a detailed timetable, and a Local Master Plan based on a comprehensive conservation plan:***

The Cultural Development Programme Agreement includes a three-year action plan with the associated funding per year. Furthermore, key stakeholders implement conservation and enhancement projects per year with regular state funding based on the comprehensive conservation plan set out in the property's Management Plan.

***f) Develop a mechanism and opportunities for local communities, rights-holders, and other stakeholders to participate in the management of the nominated property:***

See above paragraph (d)

***g) Develop a risk preparedness and disaster risk management strategy:***

The competent Ministry of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection has compiled natural disaster response plans at the country level, which are further adapted and specialized by the Municipalities depending on the particular circumstances at the local level and their immediate priorities. Apart from the above, the Cultural Development Programme Agreement (Action 8) provides for the assignment of a study on the effects of climate change on Zagori Cultural Landscape to a specialized research team.

***h) Develop a tourism strategy that takes into account the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property, and determine scientifically its carrying capacity:***

According to the Cultural Development Programme Agreement (Action 6), a strategic study for tourism in the region is planned to be carried out by the Region of Epirus, taking into account the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and the carrying capacity of the region of Zagori.

***i) Develop a sustainability strategy for the traditional masonry and building techniques and skills in order to maintain the traditional villages over the long term:***

The need for an apprenticeship school in traditional art of stone has been obvious in recent years at the country level. For this reason, a Cultural Development Programme Agreement was signed between the Ministry of Culture, the Region of Western Macedonia, the Region of Peloponnese and the University of Western Macedonia, on the subject of "Development of a Curriculum and Educational Material for the Establishment and Operation of Vocational Apprenticeship Schools in the Traditional Art of Stone in Pentalofos of Voio (Northern Greece) and Lagadia of Gortynia (Southern Greece)".

## **2. Response to the Decision of the World Heritage Committee**

### **Introduction**

A key parameter for the implementation of the recommendations of the 45 COM 8B.34 Decision is the creation of a scheme for the planning and management of the projects for Zagori Cultural Landscape, in accordance with what is mentioned in the nomination dossier as regards the cooperation that will be developed between the three directly involved bodies (Ministry of

Culture, Region of Epirus and Municipality of Zagori) for the implementation of the management plan and broader synergies with civil society.

The consultations between the three bodies concluded that the most appropriate form of administration and cooperation is a Cultural Development Programme Agreement. This is a statutory framework for cooperation (provided in Law 3852/2010, article 100) between the Ministry of Culture and local bodies or public entities, including municipalities and regions, with the aim of implementing studies and projects of cultural interest in a specific geographical area. According to the relevant legislation, Programme Agreements " shall define the scope of the agreement, the purpose and content of the studies, projects, programmes or services, their budget, the rights and obligations of the contracting parties, the timetable for the execution of the agreement, the resources from which the financial obligations assumed will be covered and the duration of the agreement". The Cultural Development Programme Agreement therefore ensures the systematic and uninterrupted implementation of the projects planned by all the parties involved, within a specific timetable and with the necessary resources.

The Cultural Development Programme Agreement for Zagori Cultural Landscape was signed on 13 May 2024 with a three-year duration in a first phase and renewal option. The Agreement contributes to creating the necessary conditions for the implementation of the planned actions and projects, on two levels:

1. At the administrative level, the Monitoring Committee for the Programme Agreement according to its Article 7 provides for a specific framework for cooperation between the three stakeholders. The Committee, which is chaired by the Mayor of Zagori, is composed of two representatives of the Municipality of Zagori, two representatives of the Region of Epirus and two representatives of the Ministry of Culture. At the same time, the Programme Agreement creates a framework for communication with the other key stakeholders through the Advisory Committee for the Preservation and Promotion of the Zagori Cultural Landscape. This is an advisory committee with a broad composition, which includes local state agencies and stakeholders, representatives of civil society, local professionals or eminent researchers related to the nominated property.

2. At the level of project implementation, it identifies the projects to be implemented in the short term (within the next three years), with a specific commitment by the three contacting bodies to undertake them on the basis of a specific timetable and a guaranteed budget. The projects, as we will see below, are directly related but sometimes broader than the recommendations of the **45 COM 8B.34 Decision**.

***a) Consider including the villages of Skamnéli and Eláti in the buffer zone:***

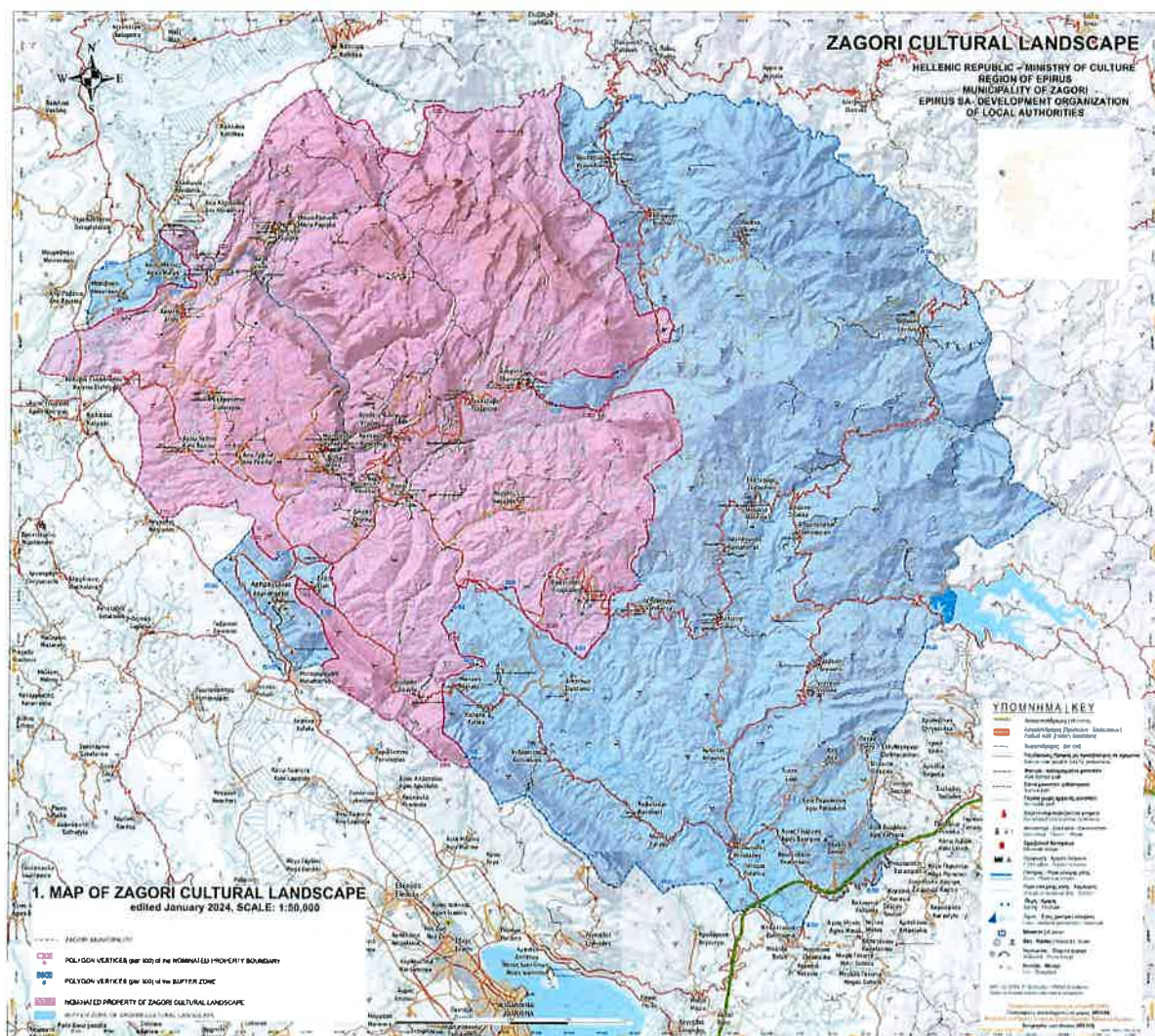
On 11.01.2024 a modified map (see attached map on page 4) was sent to the World Heritage Centre so that the villages of Skamneli and Elati are included in the buffer zone. Also, appropriate digital files (e.g.shape files) were sent in order to integrate the cartographic data of the zones of the nominated property into the new GIS platform of the World Heritage Centre website for the World Heritage properties.

***b) Prepare documentation on the traditional villages and traditional buildings within the nominated property to create a baseline for the conservation and management of the nominated property as a whole:***

The rich documentation material of Zagori Cultural Landscape that has been collected during the preparation of the nomination dossier or stored in the archives of the Services of the Ministry of Culture in Ioannina, as well as a number of studies by experts of various specialties on the traditional settlements and individual monuments of Zagori, dictated the need to create a digital platform for the registration, organization and management of information.

More specifically, a digital platform has been created which will support the implementation of the Management Plan for Zagori Cultural Landscape, as a UNESCO World Heritage site. As part of the project, a systematic organization of geospatial data related to the cultural and natural heritage of Zagori will be carried out. The data will be incorporated into an information infrastructure, which will function as a repository and dissemination point for geoinformation, enabling central management, systematic updating, and presentation of information.

The infrastructure will integrate data from activities carried out by various stakeholders, as well as existing open data sets from third-party organizations. Examples include basemaps (orthophotos, digital terrain model, hydrographic network), Monuments, Archaeological Sites, Areas of «Special Natural Beauty» of the Ministry of Culture, Trails, Forest Maps, Protected Zones, Geosites, and Urban Planning Information for Settlements. The digital platform will include all the necessary tools for searching, viewing, and downloading the data that will be included, as well as suitable mechanisms for updating the information. Open-source technologies will be utilized, allowing for thematic expansion and scaling of the system in the future, ensuring resource savings and the sustainability of the project. The implementation also includes the organization of detailed training seminars and the provision of cloud computing hosting services.



The operation of the system will facilitate the mapping and monitoring of the condition of cultural monuments, traditional architecture, and protected landscapes, tracking changes over time due to natural hazards, climate change, or human activities. The systematic recording and management of cultural and natural environmental data will allow stakeholders to access and share critical information in real-time, enhancing effectiveness, transparency, and accountability.

Furthermore, the standardization of data will ensure that all information is compatible across different platforms, guaranteeing that all stakeholders work with consistent data. At the same time, the infrastructure will enable specialized users to assess monitoring indicators of key parameters related to the current state of the cultural asset over time, in terms of human activity within the area, as well as risks related to climate change (e.g., floods, landslides, wildfires) and the identification of vulnerable areas. This data will support the decision-making process, as the responsible authorities will be able to identify trends, conflicts, and opportunities, and additionally establish a common framework for implementing actions.

In addition, this documentation project requires systematic involvement of qualified personnel. In this context, a diploma architect has already been hired, in order to proceed with the collection and input of data into the platform, assisting the work of the Services of the Ministry of Culture.

Concerning the content of the digital platform, an analytical documentation and a thorough examination of all the existing files on the traditional villages and traditional buildings (stored at the archives of the relevant Services of the Ministry of Culture in Ioannina) of the property is being implemented. The scope of the project is the collection of the historical information about each of the forty five (45) traditional villages and buildings and the documentation of their origins, uses, architectural styles, and evolution over time. The project includes also the listing of all the stone-arched bridges, the historical paths and staircases of the nominated property documenting their structure, construction, as well as current state (damage, decay, or alterations) and a condition assessment. The outcome of the project is the creation of a baseline for the conservation and management of the nominated property as a whole.

Also, elements of intangible cultural heritage which are equally important for the preservation of the Zagori cultural landscape such as the sacred forests and ancient trees, the transhumant livestock farming, the festival of Vitsa and the art of drystone walling will also be incorporated in the digital platform.

Furthermore, an inventory of the productive activities in Zagori that contribute to the landscape conservation, sustainable development and the strengthening of the economy is now underway and all data will be incorporated in the digital platform. Groups of professionals, such as associations of forestry and agricultural cooperatives as well as companies offering recreational, tourism and informal education services or active in the field of environmental conservation in Zagori have already been registered by category and settlement. The inventory will also include the individual professionals associated with livestock, beekeeping and agricultural production. The creation of this inventory shall also contribute to the identification of a wide range of stakeholders that could assist the overall planning for the management of Zagori Cultural Landscape, according to recommendations (d) and (f)

***c) Develop a comprehensive conservation plan that considers the stone-arched bridges, the historical paths and staircases, and the traditional villages in a holistic way:***

Already since 2023 the process of formal designation as traditional of all settlements located in the nominated area of Zagori Cultural Landscape according to the strict provisions of the Archaeological Law has begun, in order to obtain additional protection beyond the Presidential Decrees 26-9-79 and 19-6-95, and according to which the repair of existing buildings and the



construction of new buildings was until recently controlled. So far the designation of nine (9) settlements (Vikos, Aristi, Vitsa, Vradeto, Dilofo, Kapesovo, Monodendri, Papigo and Mikro Papigo) have already been published in the Government Gazette, while the designation of the remaining nine (9) settlements have been prepared and are awaiting the approval by the competent Central Council for Modern Monuments of the Ministry of Culture. Their publication in the Government Gazette is planned for 2025. It should also be noted that all bridges and stone stairs of Zagori are anyway protected by the provisions of the Archaeological Law, while the competent local Service of the Ministry of Culture in Ioannina controls all the settlements of the nominated area in cooperation with the competent Building Department that issues the building permits.

At the same time, conservation and restoration actions in accordance with the comprehensive conservation plan, as set out in the Management Plan included in the nomination file of Zagori Cultural Landscape, are implemented. It goes without saying that actions other than those planned can also be undertaken when there is a need e.g. due to a natural disaster.

By way of example, in 2024, restoration work on the bridge of Kleidonia was completed and appropriate studies have been carried out for the bridges of Plakidas and Mylos, located near the settlement of Kipoi of Zagori. Regarding the frescoes of the churches, the first-aid conservation works in Agios Nikolaos of Kapesovo, in the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Vikos Gorge and in Agios Nikolaos in Skanneli have been completed, while the appropriate studies for the conservation of frescoes in Agios Minas in Monodendri and for the conservation of the wood carved temple in Agios Nikolaos of Kapesovo have been carried out.

***d) Develop a coordination platform and mechanisms for the management of the nominated property, taking into consideration other designations, institutions, and levels of implementation that overlap with the nominated property:***

The coordination for the management of the nominated property is the objective of the Cultural Development Programme Agreement as detailed in the introduction of the report. At the same time the Advisory Committee for the Preservation and Promotion of the Zagori Cultural Landscape has already been established (as mentioned in the Introduction), which is composed of representatives of the Ministry of Environment, the Forestry Service, the Environmental Directorate and the Directorate of Building of the Region of Epirus, Northern Pindos National Park, UNESCO World Vikos-Aoos Geopark, cultural associations and institutions, tourism enterprises, agro-pastoral producers and independent researchers with knowledge of the region's issues (economist, folklorist, historian).

***e) Include within the proposed management plan a financial programming, a detailed timetable, and a Local Master Plan based on a comprehensive conservation plan:***

The Cultural Development Programme Agreement includes a three-year action plan with the associated funding per year. Apart from this funding, the Services of the Ministry of Culture, the Region of Epirus and the Municipality of Zagori, according to their responsibilities, implement conservation and enhancement projects per year with regular state funding based on the comprehensive conservation plan, as set out in the property's Management Plan. Apart from the regular state funding, additional financial resources are sought through European programmes such as INTERREG, Leader, National Strategic Reference Framework, as well as private sponsorships.

***f) Develop a mechanism and opportunities for local communities, rights-holders, and other stakeholders to participate in the management of the nominated property:***

See above paragraph (d)

***g) Develop a risk preparedness and disaster risk management strategy:***

The competent Ministry of Climate Crisis and Civil Protection has compiled natural disaster response plans, which are further adapted and specialized by the Municipalities depending on their particular local conditions and their immediate priorities. Specifically, in the Municipality of Zagori, the Local Operational Civil Protection Body has been established, which has recently specified and approved the following state plans: 1) "Iolaos" plan for forest fires, 2) "Dardanos" plan for flooding, 3) "Enceladus" plan for earthquakes and 4) "Voreas" plan for snowfalls.

Apart from the above, the Cultural Development Programme Agreement (Action 8) provides for the assignment of a study on the effects of climate change on Zagori Cultural Landscape to a specialized research team. In particular, the study will concern the 'identification, recording and mapping of climate risks, the preparation of sensitivity, exposure and vulnerability maps and the formulation of proposals for the mitigation of the effects of climate change on the Zagori Cultural Landscape'. This study, which will be completed within the time frame of the Cultural Development Programme Agreement, will complement the list of similar studies undertaken for all the monuments in Greece inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

***h) Develop a tourism strategy that takes into account the proposed Outstanding Universal Value of the nominated property, and determine scientifically its carrying capacity:***

According to the Cultural Development Programme Agreement (Action 6), a strategic study for tourism in the region is planned to be carried out by the Region of Epirus, taking into account the Outstanding Universal Value of the property and the carrying capacity of the region of Zagori.

***i) Develop a sustainability strategy for the traditional masonry and building techniques and skills in order to maintain the traditional villages over the long term:***

The need for an apprenticeship school in traditional art of stone at national level has been obvious in recent years, so that to ensure the protection and continuity of the art of stone, an element of intangible cultural heritage. For this reason, a Cultural Development Programme Agreement was signed between the Ministry of Culture, the Region of Western Macedonia, the Region of Peloponnese and the University of Western Macedonia, on the subject of "Development of a Curriculum and Educational Material for the Establishment and Operation of Vocational Apprenticeship Schools in the Traditional Art of Stone in Pentalofos of Voio (Northern Greece) and Lagadia of Gortynia (Southern Greece)".

The establishment of the first two apprenticeship schools that will have a common educational programme and will utilize the technical knowledge of the few remaining master masons will fuel the building activity of repair and restoration of traditional settlements throughout the country.

A consultation is underway with the scientific manager of this important project, in order to provide accommodation to the students of these schools during the summer months in the villages of Zagori. Therefore, the students will have the opportunity to practice in the traditional villages of Zagori and at the same time, the craftsmen, who are active in the villages of Zagori, will be given the opportunity to exchange knowledge with those in Voio of Kozani and Lagadia of Gortynia since the processing of stone and the technique of masonry construction is identical to all three regions.

Last but not least, a new website has been designed to promote Zagori Cultural Landscape. The website will function as a digital information and communication platform for the nominated property as a World Heritage site. It is planned to cover through maps, texts, photos, videos and interactive applications, the following sections: 1) Cultural Heritage 2) Built Environment/Architecture 3) Natural Environment 4) Sustainable Development 5) Information,

education and promotion. A pilot version has already been launched and will be progressively enriched.