

Transboundary CAMP Otranto Project



MANY SHORES, ONE SEA

NATALINO RUSSO



MANY SHORES, ONE SEA

Seventy five photographs
with two forewords

The Strait of Otranto, between Italy and Albania, separates the two countries and connects them at the same time. This sea is a bridge between two shores, two different and yet similar worlds, from a naturalistic and human point of view.

The photographer Natalino Russo traveled to these rich and complex places. He went in search of their stories and fragilities. He met the women and men linked to these lands and this sea. Two lands, one sea.

Carnet «Many shores, one sea»

© 2023 Natalino Russo

© 2023 PAP/RAC

natalinorusso.it

paprac.org

Project coordinators:

Daniela Addis (Italy)

Ina Janushi (Albania)

Marina Markovic (PAP/RAC)

With the support of and financed by the partners of the

Transboundary CAMP Otranto project, 2021-2023:

Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security (IMEES) & Puglia Region

Ministry of Tourism and Environment (AMTE) & Vlora Region

UNEP/MAP Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Centre (PAP/RAC)

On the cover:

The Palascia lighthouse in Capo d'Otranto. The mountains of Albania can be seen on the horizon.

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording or any other information storage and retrieval system, without prior written permission from the author and authorized parties.

Digital Edition, 2023

ISBN: 9788898074310

FOREWORD

Through the lens of Otranto Strait, 'Many shores – one sea' invites you to explore a region that transcends boundaries, and weaves together the stories of Vlora in Albania and Puglia in Italy.

The Otranto Strait, where the Adriatic and Ionian Seas connect, is not just a geographical point on the Mediterranean map. It is a place of profound significance, both historically and ecologically. This photo book captures the unique natural beauty and rich cultural heritage of an area where identities are deeply rooted in centuries-long traditions. Its purpose is to help strengthen understanding that this biodiversity hotspot is vulnerable to environmental pressures.

Albania and Italy with the transboundary CAMP Otranto project intend to jointly address in the project area key challenges that affect both countries through the framework of the Coastal Area Management Programme (CAMP). The project highlights the importance of tailoring planning and activities to the needs of local stakeholders and communities whilst exchanging experiences and best practices. CAMP Otranto is the first transboundary project since the launch of the Programme in 1989, supporting the implementation of the Barcelona Convention. It reinforces sustainable development,

integrated coastal zone management (ICZM) and marine spatial planning (MSP) across the South Adriatic.

The landscapes and everyday moments as well as crucial issues captured in this book celebrate and share the stories of the people who call these shorelines home and offers an authentic glimpse into their daily lives. The photographs can support our work to improve sustainable coastal management, reduce pollution, especially marine litter, and promote sustainable tourism. It is a visual narrative that reminds us of the extraordinary potential countries have when they come together in the name of our shared environment, the resilience of nature and its boundless beauty. It was made possible with support from the Albanian Ministry of Tourism and Environment (AMTE), the Italian Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security (IMEES), the Puglia region in Italy, the Vlora region and the National Agency of Protected Areas of Albania, along with the dedicated efforts of national project coordinators, INFO/RAC and PAP/RAC.

FOSTERING PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS THE ADRIATIC SEA.
For coastal sustainability in Albania and Italy

ONE SEA

My photographic research focused on the Otranto Strait. Both sides. This sea has always been a place of trade, exchange, navigation, migration, commerce. It was the gateway through which cultural influences passed and still pass today, in both directions. Italy and Albania are not separated by the sea: they are united by it.

The sea is a bridge between two lands and two peoples. It separates the two coasts, but it's also a zipper that connects them. Between Salento and the Vlora region, this union is narrated, for example, by the plant species. This is the case of the Vallonea oak, which takes its name from the city of Vlora, and which is also widespread in Salento. And then the migratory birds, the fish or other marine organisms, and like them the sailors and all the navigators who have crossed this sea for centuries.

The Italians of the Salento coast and the Albanians of the Vlora region are pretty different, but at the same time have much in common. First and foremost, the sea. A wonderful, shared sea, a very rich marine and coastal environment, however threatened by overfishing, mass tourism, marine pollution, maritime traffic and anthropogenic pressure on the two coastlines.

This photographic carnet is the result of a personal research. I tried to observe the complex relationships between man and the sea. A very ancient relationship that can be found in the landscape and its changes, in the faces of the inhabitants, in the architecture and objects of these two fascinating territories.

Through photography I investigated places and their memory, ports, cultivated fields by the sea, pastures, cities and villages. I sought the work of women and men, their little and great stories of commitment and obstinacy. I observed the effort of those who work on these two coasts every day. I admired the commitment of those who carry out scientific research to understand the richness and fragility of the sea, and to imagine more sustainable economic activities.

I tried to photograph a long history and a deep connection. A bond born thanks to this sea. The same sea, lo stesso mare, i njëjti det.

Natalino Russo

PHOTOGRAPHS





Previous page:

1. On the Capo d'Otranto promontory, a few kilometers south of Otranto, there is an important lighthouse called Palascia, built in 1867 and included by the European Commission in a list of five Mediterranean lighthouses to be protected.

2. Capo d'Otranto is the eastern point of Italy: Albania is less than 70 kilometers away. On the horizon the profile of the mountains of the Vlorë region is outlined. The sons of the last lighthouse keeper still remember tales of the Cold War.



3. Steep mountains rise immediately behind the Albanian coast.



4. The Strait of Otranto is crossed daily by ferries that travel back and forth to connect the two countries.

Next page:

5. In addition to small pleasure boats, the main vessels sailing in the Strait of Otranto are fishing boats and ferries.



6. The gigantic Vallonea Oak near Tricase, in southern Salento. The tree is estimated to be 900 years old. It is known as the «oak of the 100 knights», because legend has it that under its foliage one hundred people could find refuge. These trees bear witness to the botanical continuity between the two coasts of the Otranto Strait. The name of these plants probably derives from the city of Vlora, an area from which they were imported in ancient times by the Basilian monks.





7. Cosimo Piscopiello, in Tricase, is a farmer expert in plant species from Salento. The botany of this area is influenced by the sea and the proximity to the Albanian species. Francesca Casaluci takes care of communication for the Costa Otranto-Santa Maria di Leuca and Bosco di Tricase park.

8. On the coastal slopes in southern Albania the influence of the sea favors the growth of extensive agave forests.





9. The humid sea air generates clouds that cover the town of Castro. This sight is quite common in the morning on the eastern coast of Salento.

Next page:

10. On the coast near Capo d'Otranto, not far from the Palascia lighthouse, the so-called "red lake" rises on the site of a former bauxite quarry. The water of the small lake is emerald green: red is the color given to the soil by the high concentration of bauxite, a mineral that was mined here from 1940 for about thirty years to produce aluminium. The abandonment of the quarry allowed the renaturalization of the place and the birth of a small and peculiar ecosystem.



11. Trulli in a stretch of the Apulian coast near Polignano a Mare.

Next page:

12. The mountains are reflected in the calm waters of the Orikum coastal lagoon.







13. Two cormorants in the gulf of Vlora.



14. Specchiulla is one of the most spectacular parts of the Salento coast. During the high season the pressure of tourism is very strong, but nature is pretty well preserved.



15. The southern coast of Albania has many stretches that are still quite wild. The tourism industry here has only just arrived.

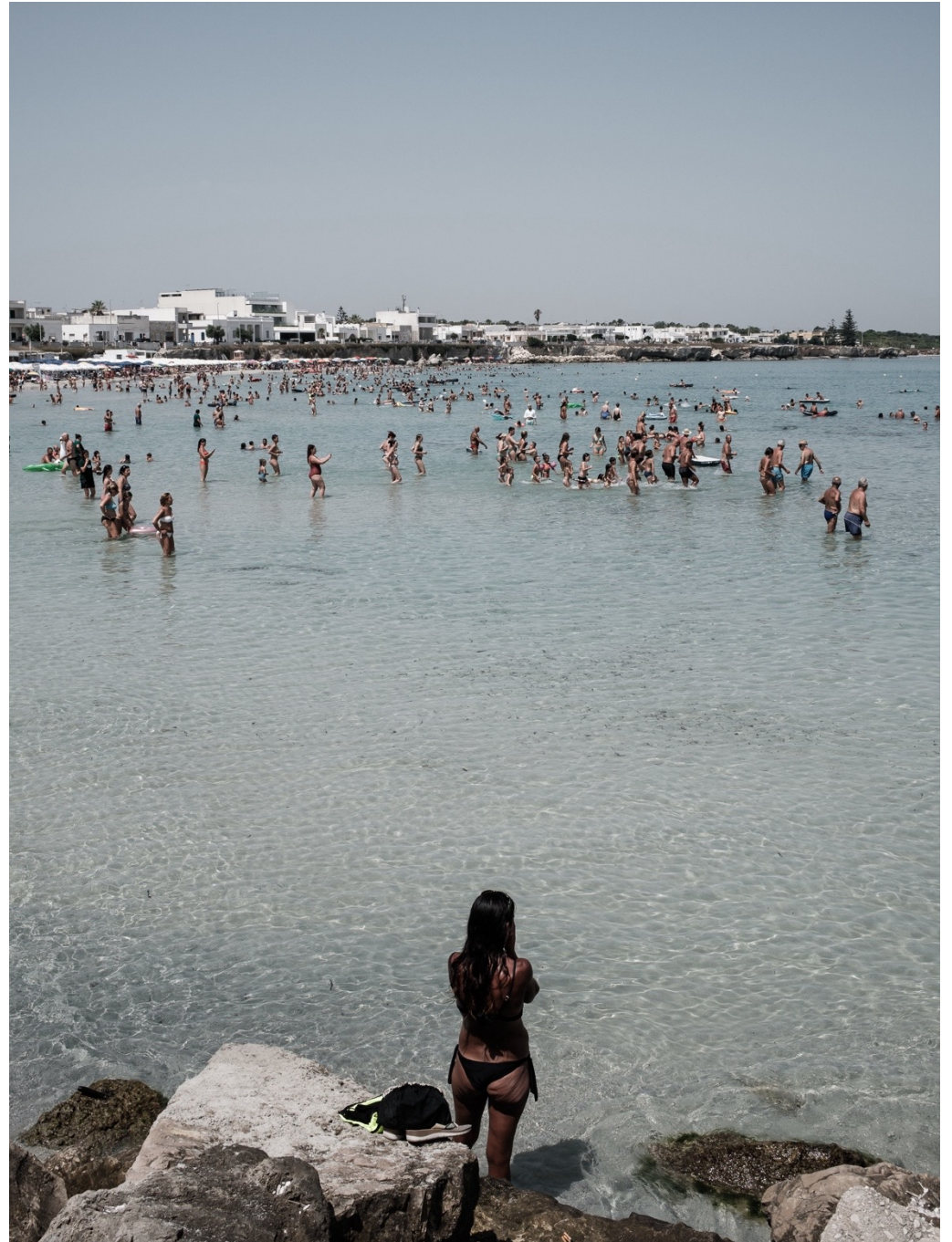


16. The delightful little bay known as Aquarium, near Himare, can only be reached on foot or by sea. This place is a destination for young people who love to camp here freely.

17. Tourism development, especially linked to the sea and the coast of the Otranto Strait, proceeds alongside the centuries-old peasant tradition found both in Albania and in Italy.



18. The beach of San Foca near Melendugno in July.





19. An Orikum beach in September.



20. The Albanian coast is dotted with bunkers and remains of military fortifications dating back to the Second World War and the period of the regime that collapsed in 1991.



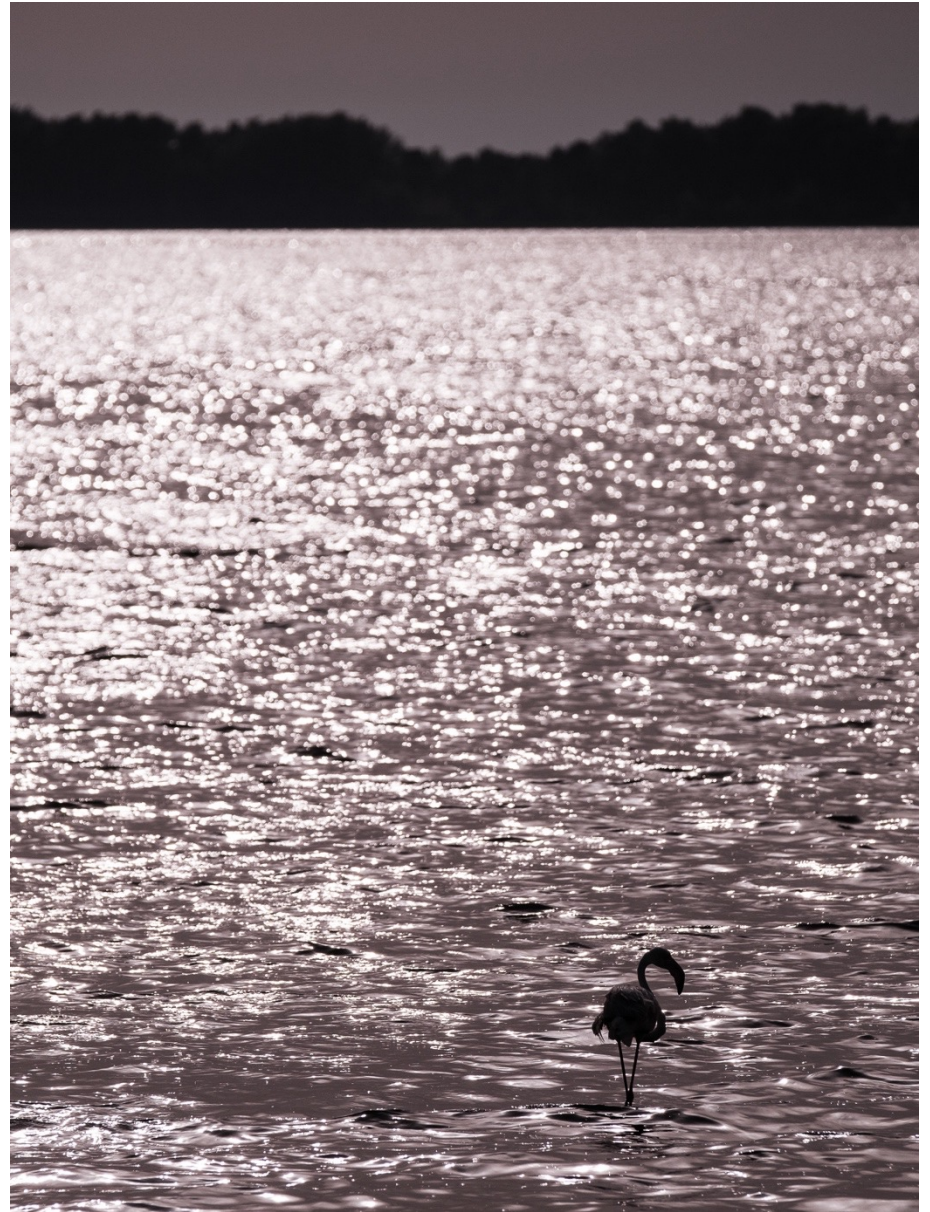
21. The fast economic growth of the sea-bound coastal part of the Vlora region shows the contrasts between a militarized past and a market-driven present.

Next page:

22. The large Skrofotine salt pan extends for about a third of the Narta lagoon, north of the Gulf of Vlora.



23. A pink flamingo in the Narta lagoon.





24. A traditional boat used to navigate the canals and fish in the Narta lagoon.



25. The dunes near the Narta Lagoon are an important coastal ecosystem. They are part of the habitats of the Vlora area, which also include Mediterranean pine forests, old river beds, small coastal wetlands, salt marshes, uncultivated salt lands and agricultural land.



26, 27. Pollution caused by maritime navigation is also addressed through on-board checks to verify the adequacy of engines and equipment.

28. The cave of Haxhi Ali, near the Cape of Gjuhëz in the Karaburun peninsula, is among the most spectacular karst formations in Otranto Strait. The two coasts are made up of carbonate rocks, therefore on both sides the karst is highly developed. The result is a large presence of fresh water springs directly on the seashore. Coastal aquifers are natural fresh water buffers and are very important to mitigate saltwater intrusion caused by sea levels rise.





29. *Lithophyllum* is a genus of thalloid red algae. This algae is widespread at sea level and is easily observable in the Karaburun-Sazan marine park.



30. Researchers in the Karaburun-Sazan park carry out frequent sampling to check the state of the water.



31. Water sampling and measurements are important to understand the behavior of the sea with respect to fishing and tourism, in Karaburun-Sazan park as elsewhere.



32. Surveillance is among the main activities of the Karaburun-Sazan park. For this purpose, the organization has a patrol boat that can transport rangers and researchers.



33. Sherif Durmishaj, born in Radhimë and locally known as Baçi, is a fisherman. After a long period of work in Italy, he was among the first and main promoters of the marine protected area of Karaburun-Sazan. Baçi also created a cooperative to promote sustainable fishing. At first the other fishermen didn't understand his proposal. Now they admit that he was right.



34, 35. Rexhep Mustafa is one of the fishermen who promote and practice sustainable fishing in the marine protected area of Karaburun-Sazan.





36. Elona Isaj is the last Albanian woman who repairs fishing nets. She and her husband Dorian Cela work in the pine forest near Triport, north of Vlora.

37. A wooden boat repairman doing caulking at the Triport shipyard.



38. Master captain Antonio Sicuro aboard the fishing vessel Buonaventura, in Otranto, where he works together with his father Pietro Liberato. The nets of their boat are equipped with modern electronic systems that allow monitoring of the seabed and the various phases of fishing.





39. Rocco Cazzato at work on his boat in Tricase Porto. Together with his wife and their sons they are pioneers of fish tourism in Apulia.



40. The master shipwright Antonio Frasanito in his workshop in Marittima, in the province of Lecce. Here he's completing the construction of a hand made almost seven meters goiter boat. Antonio also created a small museum, dedicated to his father Salvatore, known as Totu.



41. The coast guard is often involved in monitoring boats along the Apulian coast. Here between San Foca and Torre dell'Orso.



42. The Otranto coast guard checks a fishing vessel that has just returned to port.



43. «Io posso» is an association that works in San Foca to allow people with disabilities to experience the sea. In recent years, at least two important associations on these issues have been created. Among them also the «Sunrise».



44. Fortifications and other human interventions marked the Apulian coast over the centuries. Torre dell'Orso, near the ancient settlement of Roca Vecchia.



45. Saranda, on the Albanian coast, seen from the hill with the ruins of the Monastery of the 40 Saints. The name of the city originates from this monastery.

Next page:

46. The city of Vlora is experiencing notable development in recent years, starting from the seafront which has been completely redesigned to encourage tourism. In the background, the Narta lagoon.





47. The port of Brindisi is among the most important and rich in history of the Otranto Canal. Many connections between Italy and Albania leave from here.



48. A small fishing boat at the entrance to the port of Brindisi.

Next page:

49. Santa Maria di Leuca is the southernmost point of Apulia. Its name derives from the Greek λευκός (leukós), meaning white, from the color of the limestone rocks overlooking the sea. The lighthouse was built in 1864 and is among the largest in the Mediterranean.



50. Otranto has always been a city of maritime trade. In the second century AD the city of *Hydruntum* was connected to Rome through the construction of the Via Traiana, an extension of the famed Via Appia. Crusaders and pilgrims left for the Holy Land from this port too. Here the Turks of Gedik Ahmet Pascià landed in 1480, coming from Vlora. On that occasion, 813 people from Otranto were killed, whose bones are preserved in a chapel of the Norman cathedral.

51. The cathedral houses one of the largest mosaics in the world. It covers the entire floor and depicts a complex tree of life with scenes from the Old Testament, animals, symbols of classical and medieval mythology and the Zodiac. This astonishing work was created in the 12th century. Due to its history as a place of welcome, meeting and dialogue between cultures, the city has been declared a "Witness of a culture of peace" by UNESCO.



52. The archaeologist Francesco D'Andria in the Castro museum with the statue he discovered in the excavation in the upper part of the town, where there was a sanctuary dedicated to Athena. The site has great historical importance: it testifies to ancient navigation in the Otranto Strait and was Aeneas's first landing in Italy, as described by Virgil.





53, 54. Decorations on churches and palaces in Apulia testify to an ancient history, often linked to the sea. The sculptures are made of «pietra leccese», a limestone rock that was formed by the accumulation of biological organisms at the bottom of the sea in the Miocene. Some bas-reliefs depict the passage of pilgrims who for many centuries arrived at the Apulian ports to embark for the Holy Land.



55. Torre Pinta, a few kilometers from Otranto, was discovered only in the 1970s. It is an ancient underground dovecote that belonged to a farm on this stretch of coast, not far from the sea.



56, 57. Porto Palermo has always been a strategic place on the Albanian coast. Evidence of this are the castle of Ali Pasha and the tunnels still used today by the navy.

58, 59. Young archaeologists from the University of Bologna are working together with Albanian colleagues on new excavations at the Butrint site. The site demonstrates the great importance that this place has always had, on the bank of the channel that connects the large coastal lagoon to the sea.





60. To cross the Butrint channel you need to use a small raft that can carry a few cars at a time.



61. The archaeological park of Orik, near Orikum, is further evidence of the strategic importance of these places near the sea. Today, a military naval base is located at the Orikum lagoon.

62. On the coastal road near Shënvasili, between Saranda and Ksamil.



63. A shepherd returns home with his donkey and his small flock in the Vlora District.





64. Giuseppe De Matteis, president of the Il Delfino fishermen's cooperative in Vernole, is committed to increasing the size of the mesh of fishing nets. This avoids the capture of smaller individuals, and therefore helps to limit the environmental damage caused by fishing.



65. In Specchiolla and in the stretch of sea included in the Torre Guaceto reserve, fishing is strictly regulated. Only traditional, minimally invasive fishing can be carried out. However, there are very few authorized fishermen.



66. A park ranger of the Torre Guaceto marine reserve watches the surrounding area with binoculars from the top of the tower.



67. During the high season, every morning the staff of the Torre Guaceto marine reserve walks along the coast to clean it from waste transported ashore by the sea. Most of this waste is made up of plastic, mainly marine litter.



68, 69. Lucia Fanini working in Acquatina di Frigole reserve on the «Ocean travelers» protocol for marine litter. She is a researcher at the Department of Biological and Environmental Sciences and Technologies (DiSTeBA), UniSalento.





70, 71. Plastic tubular nets for mussel farming are among the most common marine litter on beaches.

Next pages:

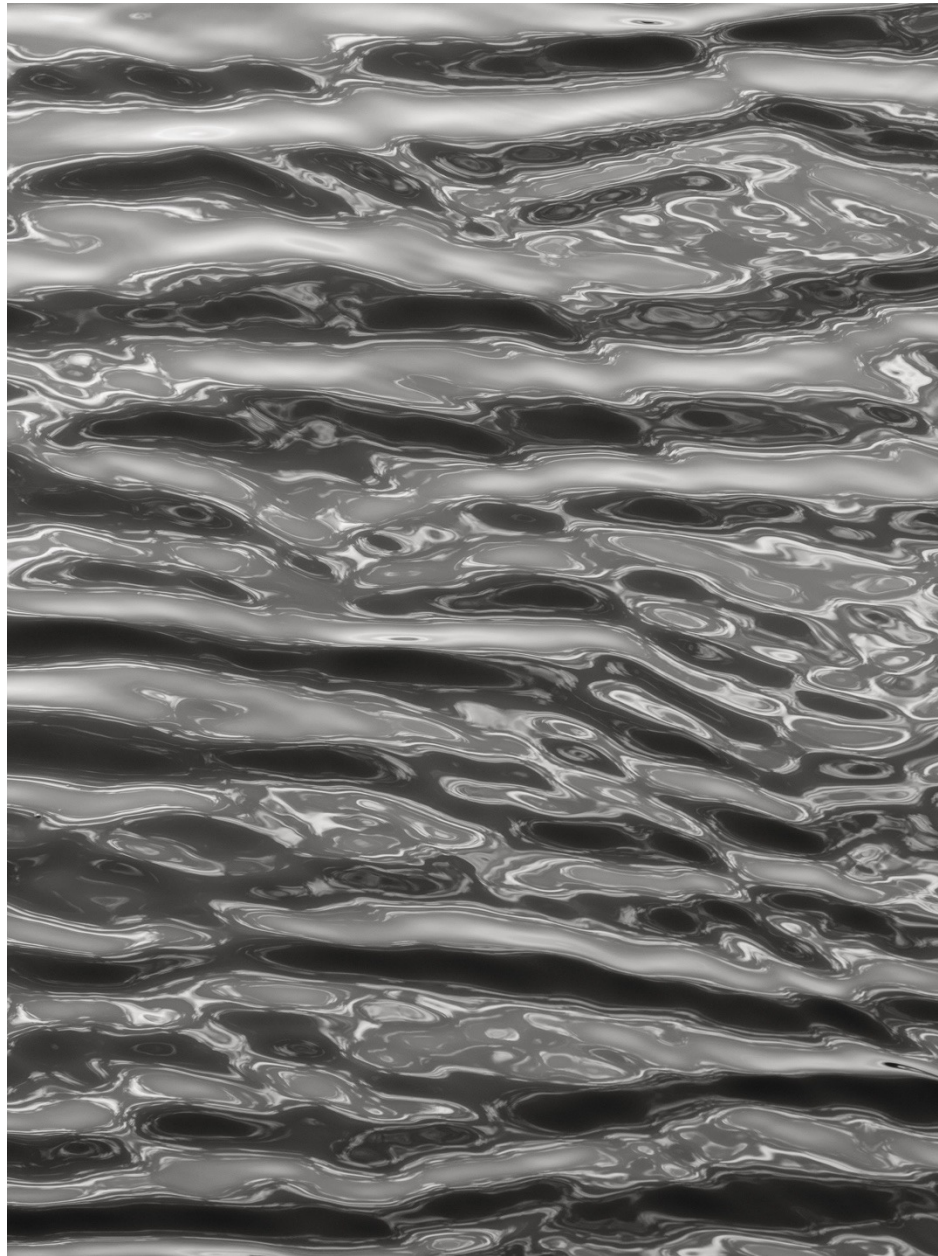
72, 73. Angela Carluccio with the ROV Multipluto machine and Maurizio Ingrosso with a CTD multiparameter module, both used to monitor and study the deep sea. They are researchers at the Department of Bioscience, Biotechnology and Environment (DBBA), Università di Bari Aldo Moro.







74. Don't worry?



75. The sea: fragile and inspirational.

Acknowledgements

In Italy:

Daniela Addis, national coordinator of the project, for her valuable and professional contribution, suggestions, contents and general information.

Ministry of Environment and Energy Security, Puglia Region (Caterina Dibitonto), Otranto Port Authority (Walter di Marco), Torre Guaceto Marine Protected Area (Alessandro Cicoella and Francesco de Franco), Costa Otranto-Santa Maria di Leuca and Bosco di Tricase park (Francesco Minonne), University of Bari Aldo Moro (Roberto Carlucci), University of Salento (Maurizio Pinna and Lucia Fanini), Municipality of Otranto, Municipality of Brindisi.

In Albania:

Ina Janushi, national coordinator of the project, and Endora Celohoxhaj, communication specialist for the AdZM Vlora.

Ministry of Tourism and Environment, National Agency for Protected Areas, Regional Agency for Protected Areas Vlore, Municipality of Himare, Prefecture of Vlora qark, Fishing Center Radhima.

And also:

Priority Actions Programme Regional Activity Centre (UNEP/MAP - PAP/RAC). Armando Bendaj, Daria Bignardi, Maria De Giovanni, Arlinda Dudaj, Antonio Gnoni, Nexhip Hysolako, Artan Jazoj, Rezart Kapedani, Marcella Maresca, Giuseppe Rizzo, Giorgia Rollo, Luigi Russo, Tonio Sigismondi, Rudina Xhunga. And all the people who collaborated on the project, even if they don't appear in the photographs.

The author

Natalino Russo has a degree in Natural Sciences. He has been passionate about mountains and speleology since he was a child, so as a photographer and writer he combines his passion for nature and travel with urban exploration and reportage.

He published in magazines such as National Geographic, PleinAir, Geo, Dove, Itinerari e luoghi, Meridiani, Azione, Bell'Italia, Internazionale. He is a member of the Order of Journalists and of Neos associated travel journalists, and collaborated with the Parallelozero and Simephoto agencies. His photographs have been shown in exhibitions and festivals in several European countries.

He was a board member of the Italian Speleological Society. Founder and long-time president of the Campania Speleological Federation, he is currently an honorary member. He edited the first *Atlas of the caves of Campania* (2015). With the La Venta team, of which he is vice president, he has carried out geographical expeditions to Mexico, Cuba, Venezuela, Brazil, the Philippines, Iran and various European countries, drawing inspiration for many reportages. He recounted his passion for the underground world in the book *Il respiro delle grotte* (Ediciclo 2013).

He published two books dedicated to the famous Spanish pilgrimage: the novel *La via di Santiago* (Vivalda 2006) and the reportage *Nel mezzo del Cammino di Santiago* (Ediciclo 2010).

For the publisher Touring Club Italiano he edited and wrote many guidebooks and photographic books. With Fabrizio Ardito he made several projects, including the book *Cammini di Calabria/Walking in Calabria* (2018), also translated into English, and the photobook *Il cammino minerario di Santa Barbara* (2024). With Stefano Ardito he wrote the books *Lazio Active* (2019) and *Sentieri del Lazio/Lazio pathways* (2022), published in Italian and English.

He was an author of the project *Sei in un paese meraviglioso/You're in a wonderful country*, displayed along Italian highways. For National Geographic and La Repubblica he wrote and photographed for the series *Montagne incantate* and *Cammini*.

For the publisher Skira he edited the photographic books *Nel cuore della Terra/Into the hearth of the world* (2017) and *Una terra fra cielo e mare/A cave between land and sea* (2018), dedicated to the explorations of the La Venta team, as the book *Naica, le grotte di cristallo/Naica, the crystal caves/Naica, Las cuevas de cristal* (2021).

His latest books are *111 luoghi di Napoli che devi proprio scoprire* (Emons 2018), also translated into German, and *L'Italia è un sentiero* (Laterza 2019). In 2021 the artist's book dedicated to *Matese*, a limited edition photographic carnet, was printed.

His website is www.natalinorusso.it

«Many shores, one sea»

All rights reserved, © 2023

natalinorusso.it

paprac.org