



## Decentralized cooperation in the Balkans



Kosovo

13th to 22th May 2010

Assessment and  
analysis of the first  
2010 project  
assignment

Text written by Yves Fouque, mountain leader, and expert consultant at the CRET

## General Background Information

The CRET (Regional and European Tourism Centre, [www.cret-cci.com](http://www.cret-cci.com)), within the framework of decentralised cooperation projects funded by the Hautes Alpes General Council and the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs, has been actively involved in helping to develop mountain tourism in the Tetovo area in Macedonia since 2007. This area is located at the foot of the Shar mountain range, on the border with Kosovo.

The French Embassy at Pristina, the capital of Kosovo, organised a prediagnostic assignment with Prizren, which is located at the foot of the Kosovar side of the same mountain range. This was carried out in June 2009. A decentralised cooperation project for mountain tourism between the Hautes Alpes General Council and Prizren was introduced in 2010. The first assignment took place from the 13th to 22nd May.

## Local Background Information

Following municipal elections in winter 2010, Ramadan Muja was re-elected as mayor. He appointed Shend Kabashi as the first Director of Tourism. The creation of a proper Department for Tourism illustrates that the municipality is well aware of the importance of developing tourism as it is a major source of economy.

## The aims of the first assignment

- For the Kosovars, to understand and appreciate the full potential of the Hautes Alpes' know-how for helping set up the Department for Tourism in Prizren
- For the French to determine the municipality of Prizren's needs and expectations
  - o to strengthen institutional relations between the two local authorities by setting up a study trip to France in September 2010
  - o to get to know the area more thoroughly through visits and field trips



# Programme and itinerary

## 13th to 15th May

### Visit to the Peje and Gjakove regions

To really understand the specific features of the Prizren area, you need an in depth knowledge of other regions in Kosovo. "Tourism is a team sport" and therefore, better results can be expected if different regions in Kosovo and the Balkans with a high potential for tourism manage to work together on certain actions and are able to communicate. During these two days, Yves Fouque was accompanied by Bujar Gashin, who took part in the training course for careers in tourism at the Cret in April 2010.

Photo album : <http://picasaweb.google.com/yvesfouque/KosovoPejeGjakove>

## Friday 14th May

In the east of the country, a mighty mountain range, the Albanian Alps, is the point where Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro come together. The Rugova gorge road takes you into the heart of truly alpine mountains which are just beginning to be developed. Peje, with a population of 170,000 inhabitants, is located at the foot of the mountain range and is the residence of the Serb Orthodox patriarchy of Kosmet. Just out of town you can find the source of the River Drina, which crosses Kosovo and Albania to finish its course in the Adriatic.



## Saturday 15th May

From Pristina we went to the town of Gjakovë, half-way between Pejë and Prizren. The lively and bustling Ottoman bazaar was partially destroyed during the war but has been rebuilt almost identically.

## **15th to 21st May**

### **Prizren and the Shar mountains**

#### **Saturday 15th May**

Arrival in Prizren in the afternoon

Evening meeting at the hotel with Shend Kabashi, director of the Prizren Department for Tourism.

#### **Sunday 16th May**

Working meeting with Shend Kabashi, some members of the Shari mountain club, including Nehari Driza and Bekim Bytiqy, a technician from the Shar National Park. Nehari Driza and Bekim Bytiqy accompanied Yves Fouque during his five days Prizren and proved highly motivated and energetic.

We visited the Has region, located to the west of Prizren, close to the Albanian border and at the foot of the Pastril summit (1983m), a place of pilgrimage for Bektashi dervishes.

The villages in the area are inhabited by a mixed Catholic and Muslim population and are traditionally renowned for their bakers. However, the population has declined as many have emigrated abroad.

#### **Monday 17th May**

Hike from the village of Skoroviste (960m) up to Kopana Voda (1550m) then down to Prizren (400m) via the village of Novo Selo (1000m).

The area is not far from the town and very popular in summer with city dwellers escaping from the heat of the plain. It is easy to get to by four-wheel drive and the many sources, panorama of the town and mountains and a small mountain refuge nestling in the greenery also add to its appeal. Although not wanting to judge things in advance, from the first hike on we realised that this area combined all the necessary ingredients to be a perfect test zone for evaluating potential.

- a bus service exists to the village of Skoroviste, the starting-point for many hikes parking is available at the start of the paths but, on the other hand, there are no signs indicating directions
- although there are paths, they are not sign-posted the house is still in good condition with a small kitchen and shelter on the ground floor, and bedrooms upstairs
- you could build a second house to accommodate groups of hikers on a neighbouring flat piece of land
- you can walk to Prizren, to Prevalac via the Oslijac ridge or to the village of Planjane and the river Bistrica from Kopana Voda
- it is the perfect place for locals coming to hike for the day or as a solution for hikers wanting longer treks with a possibility of transporting their luggage and finally the terrain is perfect for snowshoeing, an activity which is not yet well known but is bound to develop sooner or later

It is important to note that the villages of Skoroviste and Novo Selo are inhabited by Kosovar Bosnians and that only a dirt track goes from Novo Selo to Prizren. Opening up the area to tourists would benefit these welcoming villages with their many well-preserved traditional houses.

photo album : <http://picasaweb.google.com/yvesfouque/KosovoKoopanaVoda>



## Tuesday 18th May

Drive to the Opoje valley and the villages of Zgatar and Zapluje (1200m, in the commune of Dragash). Short hike to Roc Noir then on to the village of Stuzje. Walk down to Manastirica then back to Prizren via Planjane.

This day out confirmed that to evaluate the potential development of a valley you have to go out and visit the area.

When we stopped at the village of Zgatar, we met a man who had returned from Germany for good, and he offered to show us his house. We were surprised to find that he had collected old items, weaving equipment, copper objects and other traditional tools, which were beautifully displayed in several rooms in a new house. It was empty as the family still lived in the family home on the other side of the road. It only needed a means of heating and some furniture to turn it into a guest house for tourists. However, people are not aware of this type of possibility and training in reception is needed.

After lunch with a guide from the Shar National Park, we walked near the Macedonian border and then on to the peaceful village of Stuje with its lovely old houses. There is no road, only a dirt track but from here a good path leads down to the village of Manastirica, nestling in a green valley. Unfortunately the good impression didn't last long as the skies opened and it started to pour. We wanted to run for shelter rather than visit the village. Many of the old houses have been knocked down and replaced by modern houses, built close together with no real harmony. However, the locals are friendly and the streets are clean which proves that the current state of the village is not such a disaster! Some improvements, including organising household waste collection, could be made as soon as people become aware of the situation.

On the way back, we stopped in the village of Planjane. Two days before we had spotted a house from the small pass above Kopana Voda. Just like at Zgatar, a new house has been built next to the family home and is not lived in. The owners have a big vegetable garden and bee hives. With a few improvements and training they would be able to rent out their house to passing tourists.

photo album : <http://picasaweb.google.com/yvesfouque/KosovoOpojeManastirica>



Wednesday 19th May

Morning hike between Gornje Lubinje and Munishkovë, Bistrica valley.  
 Meeting with the Mayor.  
 Visit of the museum of ethnology and history

A stop at the village of Recan confirmed that the art of traditional weaving has not been lost.

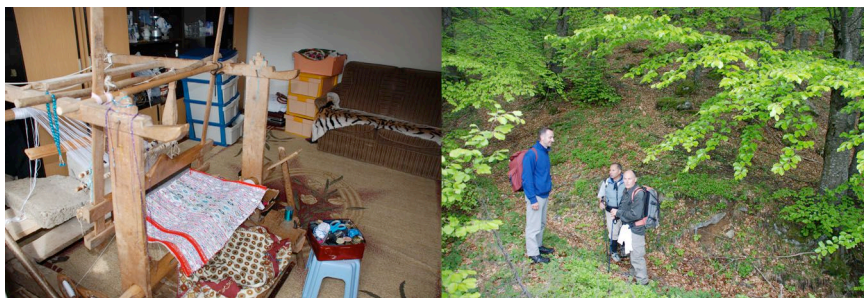
Work done is mostly advance orders for festivals and weddings.

The route between the villages of Gornje Lubinjê and Munishkovê crosses over a deep beech grove where we came across fresh bear tracks. Although we didn't see any bears, the spring flowers alpine were in full bloom despite recent snow falls.

The wealth of Prizren's cultural and historical heritage is a huge advantage for developing mountain tourism. We met Parim Kosova, manager of the League of Prizren historical complex, and head of the ethnography department.

We had an appointment with Ramadan Muja, the mayor of Prizren. On behalf of the Hautes Alpes General Council, Yves Fouque presented him with an official invitation to the Hautes Alpes to find out about the local tourism development policy. Mr. Muja expressed his thanks and stressed that he was confident about the outcome of the meetings planned in France. He also expressed how pleased he was with the results from the meeting of June 2009, which illustrated the extent of France's enthusiasm and commitment to the project.

Photo album : [http://picasaweb.google.com/yves\\_fouque/KosovoLjubinje](http://picasaweb.google.com/yves_fouque/KosovoLjubinje)



## Thursday 20th May

### Morning

There was a summer tourism workshop organised at the town hall in Prizren. Feedback from participants and especially the Dokufest (Documentary Festival) organiser, showed that the Department of Tourism's priority was to gather everyone's ideas together; to take stock of all that already exists and communication. We also learned that a lot of locals rented out rooms to festival-goers, many of whom were interested in guided tours of the town. However, strangely enough there were no tourist guides available, even although there is an association of guides which had held a meeting in Pristina just the week before.

### Afternoon

Transfer to Pristina, followed by meetings at the French Embassy

Yves Fouque was welcomed by Jean-Francois Fitous, the Ambassador for France, accompanied by Josiane Baylac, co-operation councillor and Parviz Fartash, manager of the Kosovo UNDP, United Nations Development Programme.

This was the occasion to relate the history of the Hautes Alpes General Council and the CCI/CRET's involvement in the Balkans and to explain the way in which all the partners involved work together. The Ambassador confirmed the Embassy's support of this decentralised cooperation project for promoting and developing tourism.

The UNDP is concerned with Dragash, next to Prizren and part of our working area. The southern part of the area is inhabited by Gorani, a Muslim Slav minority closely related to Macedonians. We decide to stay in contact, in particular concerning field trips scheduled for October.

## Conclusion

This decentralised co-operation project could not come at a better moment, as a separate Department of Tourism has just been created in the town. Shend Kabashi, the manager, is fully aware that a proper development plan is needed to set up the Department. The Hautes Alpes' experience and the Cret's evaluation come just at the right time to help optimize chances for success and to start actions on a sound basis.

Every day brought a mutual understanding and each one of us became more and more aware of the needs and expectations of the other. The concept of mountain tourism logically remains fairly vague for the people we are dealing with. As is often the case in this type of situation, people tend to have a simple notion of mountains as just meaning the natural environment. We realise that this simplified approach needs to be completed by other aspects such as discovery of habitat, cultural heritage, local specialities, and encounters. In short, you need the human touch. This is no problem in these Kosovar mountains where you are always ensured a warm welcome and city dwellers and villagers alike are friendly, open-minded and patient.

Our companions were fine examples of this hospitality and we would like to take this opportunity to thank them all and in particular, the members of the Shari mountain club, Bekim Bytiqy from the Shar National Park, the drivers from the town and Sevket Colaku, our interpreter. Although our visit only touched the surface, Kosovo, with the regions of Pejë and Gjakovë, could be an interesting destination for cultural and mountain holidays in the short to mid term. We have already mentioned that crossborder tourism is obvious, but we must not forget that hiking is by definition a slow activity. The hiker does not want to "do" the Balkans in 8 days and Kosovo is a big country that offers a whole variety of activities to satisfy those wanting to explore a new destination in Europe.

### Follow up to the Project

Shend Kabashi would like to present a Tourism Development Plan together with a previsionsal budget to the Municipal Council. We plan to work together on this document and the first part will be sent out at the beginning of the summer. It will set out the Department of Tourism's duties in detail.

The broad outline is as follows:

- communication to promote the existence of the Department for tourism
- to set up a data base of existing tourist facilities
- to organise workshops to help all the different participants get to know each other
- to work closely with institutional partners
- to evaluate the needs for training courses and help to set them up
- to set up a schedule of actions to raise local awareness, carry out trial experiments,
- promote the area with internet site, exhibitions, press trips etc

A delegation from the municipality of Prizren is scheduled to visit the Hautes Alpes in September 2010. As well as strengthening institutional relations, this will allow the participants to observe the reality of mountain tourism in the Hautes Alpes, which greatly depends on this type of tourism.

This visit will also help to identify the common points between the two regions and the benefits that the Kosovo mountain dwellers can expect from the Hautes Alpes' fifty years experience in mountain tourism.