



Decentralized coopération in the Balkans



Kosovo 2010

Report on the decentralized cooperation project between the Hautes-Alpes General Council and the municipality of Prizren, the Republic of Kosovo.

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

The Project Manager's Trip to Kosovo from Thursday 16 to Friday 24 September 2010

Programme

Thursday 16 Arrival in Prizren from the north of Albania

Friday 17 Meeting with Shend Kabashi in Prizren

Saturday 18 Ascent of the Bistra Summit (2651 m) from the Preval Pass
Just as during his previous trips, Yves Fouque, the project manager, went hiking accompanied by Bekim Bytiqy head of tourism at the Shar National Park, and by Nehari Driza, a member of the Shar Mountain Club.

The River Bistrica valley, located between the Preval Pass and Prizren, is fairly densely populated and already a popular tourist destination with many hotels and restaurants. The Pass is renowned for fantastic views, the quality of air and spring water. On the north side, there are bungalows and caravans and on the south, smart houses belonging to the Kosovan intelligentsia. For the time being, building work is still underway and so the site is not particularly attractive. However, the local authority has plans to develop the site and install a ski lift. We are only 30 minutes away from the ski resort of Brezovitsa, which is internationally renowned and would be worth redeveloping. However, it would be a waste of money to install a lot of equipment here. A chairlift between the Pass (1640m) and the Pavlov Kanen summit (2080m), would be ideal for beginners but limited in range, and make it easier to reach Lake Gorno Ezero and the Bistra summit in summer, the highest point of the Shar mountain range and technically easy.

We walked back to Preval via the Lake Jazinacko (2000m) where we met bilberry pickers. Berry picking is a good earner – one person can pick about 30 kg per day and 350 kg in the season earning 2 euros per kilo so there are lots of pickers.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/yvesfouque/KosovoBistra>

Sunday 19 Hiking from Restelica to Brod

Territory belonging to the Dragash district in the extreme south of Kosovo, is inhabited by the Gorani people, a minority group of Slavic origin, Macedonian culture and Muslim by religion. The war has left its mark causing a mass exodus. Before setting off on our hike, we stopped at the village of Restelica, a lively place but where most of the old houses have been knocked down and replaced by new ones, mainly due to diaspora. Here, as everywhere else in the region, we were given a warm welcome. We were later joined on our hike by Mr Musa Balje, a supermarket owner, and his son Zico, 17. He shared his knowledge of the area with us and especially where you can observe chamois. They walked with us to the Pass which separates the villages of Restelica and Brod which we reached late afternoon. The open countryside reminds you of Mongolia or Kirghizstan with wide open expanses as far as the eye can see, flocks of sheep, and the solitary shepherd on horseback returning to Albania. In short, this landscape must be one of a kind in the Balkans.

<http://picasaweb.google.com/yvesfouque/KosovoGorani>

Monday 20

Day spent exploring the town of Prizren.

Tuesday 21 Traverse of Oshljac Ridge

This route on the ridge is long but not technically difficult, with beautiful vistas all around and links the Preval Pass and Prizren. The view of the north slope on the Preval side, confirms it would be feasible to install a chairlift above the bungalows. (see Saturday 17). Before Kopana Voda, a likely pilot area for the development of mountain tourism, we are welcomed to a sheepfold where they make “kashkaval”, a local ewe's milk cheese. Yet another plus point towards developing this area !

<http://picasaweb.google.com/yvesfouque/KosovoOshljak>

Wednesday 22

Morning spent with Shend Kabashi, the manager of the Department for the Economy and Tourism, for a feedback session and preparing the delegation from the municipality of Prizren's trip to the Hautes Alpes.

Press conference with journalists from the printed media press and a local television station.

Thursday 23

Morning meeting with Claire Chastang in Pristina. She is a Masters 2 student, carrying out territorial development projects and currently working at the OSCE. As part of her Masters, she would like to get involved in designing and writing the Prizren mountain tourism development plan. Drafting this type of document is not one of the project managers' strong points, so working together will help produce a complete document much more rapidly. Feedback meeting in the afternoon with Josiane Baylac, cooperation councillor at the French Embassy.

Friday 24

return to France



The delegation from the municipality of Prizren's study trip to France, 11 to 15 October

This study trip was granted by the French Embassy in Pristina.

The Participants

Nijazi KRYEZIU, President of the Municipal Council
Shend KABASHI, Director of the Economy and Tourism Department
Sadik PACARIZI, Director of the Town Planning Department
Minir KRASNIQI, Director of the Administration Department

Programme

Monday 11 October

Pick up at Milan Malpensa Airport and transfer to Briançon.

Tuesday 12 October

Morning

Meeting with René Borel, head of the Hautes-Alpes Departmental Tourism Commission

Topics discussed :

The history and statistics of the number of tourists visiting the department
how tourism is organized at each level and the role of each structure : municipality ,
community of communes, region, state

Flowchart and budget, legal status, link with the *Conseil Général* (county council)
the role of the CDT (Departmental Tourism Commission) : classification of holiday self-catering accommodation, promotion of the area, tourism watchdog, training.

Visit of the town of Gap followed by a reception at *the Conseil Général* (County Council) .

Afternoon

Technical meeting with Robert Agnel, head of the Development Division and Christian Roman head of the Territorial Policies Division. We mainly discussed the *Conseil Général* (county council)'s organization and budget, as well as areas of expertise and compared the two authorities concerned.

Meeting with Jean-Yves Dusserre, President, in the presence of Corinne Chanfray ,the principal private secretary, Raymond Marigne, the vice-president, and Maurice Brun, President of the Chamber of Commerce.

The President reiterated his support for Decentralized Cooperation with the Balkans, stressing the importance of pooling expertise and skills and the opportunities provided by this type of project.

Wednesday 13 October

Morning

Meeting with Isabelle Fouilloy, head of the Heritage Department of Briançon, a town inscribed on Unesco's World Heritage List as part of the Vauban Network. Many topics were discussed including the organization of the heritage department and the restrictions and constraints of life in a protected area. Madame Fouilloy stressed the importance of working within a network and also explained how complex the application to Unesco was.

After visiting the Old Town of Briançon and the Ecrins National Park Visitor's Centre, we had lunch at the CRET with the Deputy Mayor and other Town Councillors, Marc Liberelle, the mayor's principal private secretary, and managers from the CRET and CCI (Chamber of Commerce and Industry).

Afternoon

Briançon Town Hall, meeting with the Mayor, head of cabinet and deputies. Various subjects were discussed namely : - decentralization, day to day life of a commune like Briançon, cross border relations and those between local councils.

Thursday 14 October Queyras Regional Natural Park

The Queyras and the Shar mountains have many points in common. They are both mountain areas which have seen a lot of emigration; both have deep-rooted traditions and agricultural activity that manages to survive despite all the difficulties but, above all, they share a well-balanced development of tourism. They have both managed to retain their individual characteristics and develop tourism whilst preserving the environment.

During the day we visited the "Maison de l'Artisanat", (the arts and crafts centre where local craftsmen in the Queyras display their work), the villages of Arvieux and Ceillac and the family ski resort. We had a meeting with Jean-Claude Catala, County Councillor and President of the District Tourist Office and of the Queyras Ski Resorts joint association. Mr Catala outlined the history of the development of tourism and of the ski resorts and then explained how it had been necessary to restructure the ski areas with all the political and financial problems that had entailed.

Friday 15 October Transfer to Milan Malpensa and return to Prizren

<http://picasaweb.google.com/yvesfouque/VisiteHautesAlpes>



Assessment and Outlook

At the end of this first year of cooperation between the Hautes Alpes General Council and the municipality of Prizren, the two parties involved have got acquainted and now know exactly what they can expect from each other. We can now move on to an operational phase with the theme of the Mountain Tourism Development Plan currently being drafted.

The Hautes Alpes

The project manager has now visited the area on two occasions, giving him both a global and precise vision of the territory's strong and weak points. "Territory" here should be extended to take in the Shar mountain range. Although the project concerns the municipality of Prizren, and the main actions, in particular the Kopana Voda pilot project, will take place on its territory, it will be essential to eventually extend to the neighbouring communes of Strepce and Dragash .

Prizren

During the study trip to France, the delegation saw that the current situation in Prizren and its surrounding villages is the same as in the Hautes Alpes not so long ago, with emigration due to the closure of industrial sites and the difficulties of agriculture. Current issues in Prizren echo those in the Hautes Alpes with the departure of military garrisons. There is a lot of work to be done, but with an ambitious yet realistic plan of action there is no reason for failure.

Exchanges were both rich, convivial and simple ; solidarity amongst fellow mountain dwellers! The important role tourism plays in stopping people moving away was made clear in all our meetings. The creation of jobs locally keeps young people "at home". In fact tourism has led to people returning to live in certain valleys in the Hautes Alpes. This relocation has not happened rapidly nor without certain transgressions or mistakes, but this has proved just as beneficial to our partners as the successes.

The concept of the Natural Regional Park also greatly interested the delegation. Being able to conciliate economic development and protecting the environment is a challenge that can be met. The day spent in the Queyras Regional Park was very informative and showed that we can live from tourism correctly, in an unspoiled environment with a good quality of life and even go skiing !

All present realized that a ski resort could not be created in the short term but was the end result of a lengthy process, requiring a lot of consideration and planning. Apart from specific cases like ski resorts for example, this type of tourism can be managed by local inhabitants who keep control of their own initiative and territory, working together in a team spirit towards a common goal. Our participants realized with surprise that even in France working together did not always come naturally, and this reassured them.

They also learned that preserving the biodiversity did not necessarily mean a lot of restrictions but could be done naturally. Although there are evidently some constraints when you live in a protected area, everyone wins out in the long run. For example, in the Haute Alpes ,hunting is strictly controlled but practically free of charge and just over 2200 chamois are hunted every year.

The structure required for developing tourism was studied at all levels and reinforced the objective of drawing up a Mountain Tourism Development Plan. As this concept of mountain tourism has now been assimilated, it will be much easier to work on the Development Plan propositions together, with a true hands-on approach. The project acquisition phase by the municipality is now truly underway.