



Decentralized Cooperation in the Balkans



Macedonia

22 to 25 October 2008

Assessment Report of
Faton Sherifi and the
Mayor of TETOVO's
visit to the Hautes-Alpes

Text by Yves Fouque, Mountain Leader
and Expert Consultant at the Cret,
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Participants:

Members of the Delegation

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President of the Pollog Region

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Background Information

There were two main reasons for this short , condensed visit to the Hautes-Alpes.

On the 23 and 24 October, a conference on the future of winter sports resorts in France and Europe was organized as part of the Cret's 30th anniversary celebrations.

Faton Sherifi, in his capacity as President of the French Institute in Tetovo and manager at the Popova Sapka ski resort in Macedonia, was invited to speak at a round table during this conference.

During the Tetovo delegation's study trip on 18 to 28 September, upgrading the Popova Sapka ski resort emerged as one of the major stakes in developing mountain tourism in the area. Therefore, the theme of the conference incited Mr Hazib Lika, the mayor of Tetovo, to seize this opportunity to meet professionals in ski resort development and management.

Funding for the assignment:-

All of Mr Cherifi's expenses including his travel expenses were paid for by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Mr Lika's travel expenses were paid by the Tetovo Town Hall and the Cret paid for some of Mr Lika's expenses and Yves Fouque, the project manager's fees, out of the decentralized cooperation budget CG05-MAE mission 3.

Programme and Itinerary

Thursday 22 October

Flight from Skopje to Milan; transfer to Briançon

Friday 23 October

Morning

Reception at the Cret followed by a meeting with Benoît Robert, director, and Jean-Philippe Monfort, development manager of France Neige International (FNI, <http://www.france-neige-international.fr>), and Hubert Escudero, consultant engineer at the MPD research consultancy ("<http://www.mdpsa.com>").

FNI is an association which helps emerging tourist destinations wishing to renovate or create a ski resort to match supply with demand. As the Cret had already worked with FNI on projects in Altaï, we contacted them about the redevelopment of the Popova Sapka ski resort. As this redevelopment was of top priority for Tetovo, the decision was taken to invite the research consultancy to this meeting so that the project could be dealt with rapidly. After the current situation at the resort and certain technical aspects were explained, it was decided to organise a study trip at the beginning of January 2009 with transport and accommodation paid for by the town.

Afternoon

Speeches and discussions on the theme of "Ski Resorts in 2020"

Jean-Yves Salle, president of the Serre Chevalier ski area, asked us not to focus on global warming at the expense of collective action, with the manager on one side against the other workers in a ski resort. For Thibaut Leduc, President of SAS Leduc, the Ventron ski area in the Vosges, this problem does not exist as he owns and runs the whole resort. Therefore, a loss on one hand, on the ski lifts for example, can be offset by benefits from other activities such as hotels and restaurants. By carrying out customer surveys in the resort and in nearby urban centres, he knows exactly what type of client he is dealing with. Guy Hermitte, the mayor of Montgenevre, a ski resort which is run by the local council, emphasized the distinct advantage in being able to react immediately to a particular situation. The councillor is faced with a heavy workload and a lot of responsibility, as he basically acts as the President of the ski lifts, tourist office and other local structures. However, the decision to open the ski slopes as soon as there is enough snow, for example, does not in this case entail long meetings and negotiations as can often happen with a private service provider.

Marinoel Turc, director of the Val Thorens Tourist Office stressed the importance of constantly training and retraining all ski resort employees, through, for example, reception and language courses.

Gilles Guyomard from Cabinet Contours, Paris, reminded us of the importance of customer surveys at a time when the number of clients in France has diminished although paradoxically, the number of ski days remains constant. Resorts that are not located near urban centres are the worst hit areas.

Faton Sherifi presented the geographic, political and economic situation of the Popova Sakpa ski resort. The fact that a high number of potential clients are located less than one hour away is seen by all present as a distinct advantage.

Gala dinner at the Briançon Casino.

Friday 24 October

Morning meeting at the CRET with Christian Grossan, director of the Hautes Alpes General Council economic development department which groups together tourism, agriculture, commerce and tradesmen. He was formerly secretary at the Ceillac Town Hall and director of the Queyras Regional Natural Park.

Mr Grossan explained that industrial activity has practically disappeared in the Hautes-Alpes, leaving an economy almost exclusively based on tourism.

The General Council guarantees all or part of any loans taken out for investments in ski resorts and especially in small ski resorts. Although this does not represent any direct economic advantage as they often run at a loss, the resorts are a means of developing areas. It is important to maintain this support to stop people leaving certain high valleys. Mr Grossan pointed out that real estate presents an important source of income and should be controlled where possible by local authorities. Investors are often tempted to leave the risk involved in running a ski area to the local authority, keeping only profitable activities for themselves. He also stressed the importance of protecting the environment even when work with a heavy impact is envisaged.

He is of the opinion that it will be difficult to find funding for heavy development in Popova Sapka. However, upgrading or even replacing the Tetovo cable car should be possible as it forms part of essential infrastructure.

Late morning short but friendly meeting with Jean-Yves Dusserre, President of the Hautes-Alpes General Council.

Afternoon

Meeting at the Montgenevre Town Hall with Catherine Saurel, who has been general director for 16 years, and Pierre Kovacic, director of the Tourist Office. The ski resort celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2007! Up until 1936 it was a different world with no ski lifts – skiers had to climb back up! Several private individuals decided to set up a business and installed the first lifts. During the Second World War, Montgenevre, because of its location on the border with Italy, suffered heavy losses and destruction at the hands of the Germans. At the end of the war, skiing became more popular than ever but the relationship between the local authority and the lift company became more and more strained. In 1998, after 15 years of proceedings and a hearing, the local authority took over the ski lifts. At first, the lifts were managed privately (Delegation du Service Public), then the local council took over the management of all tourist facilities located on community land. At a time when privatisation is in favour, this decision was seen as outdated by professionals in the field. But since then, times have changed and the village welcomes more and more visitors interested in this way of management with all the advantages and disadvantages that it entails. It is stressed that actual management of the resort, although it is public and therefore under the mayor and local council's responsibility, is no different from running any other business. The local council is responsible for any risks. On the other hand, if the lifts make a profit, which is currently the situation, this is partly reinvested but also used to benefit the local population. The local authority also controls land and undertakes real estate projects. Montgenevre works closely with Italy, and the ski resorts are linked forming the Milky Way.

Pierre Kovacic showed us round the resort, from the bottom of the slopes to the new real estate complex. Just for the record he is of Slovene descent and often returns to the land of his roots.

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