

UNDP ART GOLD ALBANIA PROGRAMME

IDEASS INITIATIVE

The second mission of “La Compagnia dei Parchi” and Federparchi for sustainable tourism in Albania

Foreword

11th to 14th December 2006

The previous mission of the President of “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” Mr. Roberto Di Vincenzo and the President of *Federparchi* Mr. Matteo Fusilli to Albania for the promotion of “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” Innovation had been held on December, 11 to 14, 2006, in the framework of the IDEASS activities for the promotion of “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” innovation in Albania.



The first mission aimed at the promotion of the Italian Innovation *La Compagnia dei Parchi* (CdP) in Albania and followed the interest of the Albanian Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, and Albanian Ministry of the Environment Forest and Water Administration to implement a successful strategy for Albanian Park management and development and for sustainable tourism initiatives. The Albanian Authorities expressed the will to support a cooperation project for sustainable tourism based on the experience of *La Compagnia dei Parchi* and proposed the realization of a common working table in order to explore the way to activate in Albania an innovative tourism product fostering economic local development.

On May 24, 2007, according to the recommendations of the Albanian Ministry of Culture, Tourism, Youth and Sports and the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration and following the positive results of the mission to Albania of Italian experts of “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” held on December 2006, was organized the first meeting of the Working Table for the promotion of

Sustainable Tourism initiatives in Albania. The objective was to define, together with all the interested actors, the modalities for the activation of a new Albanian tourist product, aimed at the promotion of sustainable economic growth in the Albanian Natural Protected Areas, and at the development of sustainable tourism initiatives, also following the experience of “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*”. At the meeting participated Mrs. Suzana Turku, Deputy Minister, Albanian Ministry of Culture, Tourism, Youth and Sports and Mr. Taulant Bino, Deputy Minister, Albanian Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration. UNDPART GOLD/IDEASS Albania presented to Working Table 3 proposals for possible sustainable tourism pilot projects, elaborated by the three Local Economic Development Agencies (LEDAs). The participants agreed in given priority to the Northern area, in the Region of Shkoder, and proposed to realize a collective study field trip to Thethi and to Kelmend area.



24th to 28th September 2007

The second mission to Albania of the President of “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” Mr.Roberto Di Vincenzo and his staff and the Representative of *Federparchi*, main Italian Association of Natural Parks, Mrs.Stefania Petrosillo was carried out from 24th to 28th September 2007 in the framework of the IDEASS activities for the transfer of the “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” innovation in the Country.



The main objective of the mission was to realized a study field trip in the Northern area of the Country, in the Region of Shkodra in order to conduct a feasibility survey, to receive further

information about tourism in Thethi and Kelmendi area, and to identify the possibility to implement a project for developing and managing the natural protected areas with the CdP's methodologies.

The collective study field trip to Thethi and to Kelmend, in Shkodra Region was organized by UNDP ART GOLD/IDEASS Albania in collaboration with the Albanian Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration, GEF/UNDP (Global Environmental Fond) project, GTZ, TEULEDA (Local Economic Development Agency) and the Local Authorities of Shkodra Region.

The CdP mission was also accompanied in the field trip by the Representative of the Department of Policies on Tourism of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, Mr. Elton Noti and the Representative of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration Mr. Petrit Imeraj.

Meeting at UNDP ART GOLD Office in Tirana

The “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” and Federparchi representatives’ mission’s agenda started with a preliminary meeting at the UNDP ART GOLD Office.

In the meeting participated UNDP ART GOLD Albania Programme CTA, Mr. Piero D’Onofrio, IDEASS National Coordinator, Mrs. Renata Uruci, Mr. Giovanni Bruno IDEASS probationer, UNDP Albania-UN Echo and Cultural Tourism Support Programme, Mrs Lauren Bohatka, UNDP Albania – UN Fellow for Tourism and Environment, Mr. Marco Bordonni, GTZ GmbH (*German Organization for Technical Cooperation*) Programme Manager, Mr. Ismail Beka, GTZ GmbH Project Coordinator Mr. Luan Dervishaj.



UNDP ART GOLD Albania Programme CTA Mr. Piero D’Onofrio introduced the meeting thanking the participants for the work carried on for the transfer of the “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” Innovation in Albania.

The meeting allowed the participants to discuss the previous experience carried out by the IDEASS Initiative for the transfer of the “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” innovation in the Country, and to plan the current mission’s works

During the meeting, the CdP experts were provided with information on the Thethi and Kelmendi area. A technical discussion followed in which the GTZ GmbH Programme Manager, Mr. Ismail Beka made a brief presentation on the activities carried out by the GTZ GmbH and the Small Grants

Programme of Global Environmental Facility (GEF/SGP) in Thethi area. The GTZ GmbH and GEF/SGP in order to create a sustainable livelihood for the residents of Theth while aiming at the preservation of the unique landscape, is supporting the development of eco tourism in this region, said Mr. Beka. Focal point of this support has so far been the creation of accommodation facilities without harming the naturally grown identity of this area. Thus, the project supported the renovation and modernization of traditional houses and their transformation in guesthouses, whose standard is basic, but still comfortable. There are six guesthouses available with an overall capacity of 63 single beds. All houses dispose of two to four carefully equipped guestrooms (up to 4 beds each) and at least two fully modernized bathrooms (European standard). All accommodation facilities are ideal for backpackers as well as for organized groups. The valley of Theth is for sure one of the best places to start exploring the Albanian Alps. The surrounding mountains are full of hiking trails and stunning beauty offering a wide variety of hiking destinations varying from the leisurely walks to the more technically challenging ones for the expert climber. Detailed maps regarding hiking tours are being realized by another joint project between GEF/SGP and GTZ.

UNDP Albania-UN Echo and Cultural Tourism Programme is accomplishing a research study about tourism in Thethi. This study is a joint effort of the United Nations Development Programme-Albania, the GEF/SGP, the Central American Institute for Business Administration (INCAE), and the Government of Albania, - said Mr. Marco Bordoni, UNDP Albania – UN Fellow for Tourism and Environment.

Field visit on Shkodra Region (25st September)

On the second day of mission activity, the delegation composed by UNDP/ARTGOLD/IDEASS, "La Compagnia Dei Parchi", *Federparchi*, the National Coordinator of GEF/SGP Programme Mr. Arian Gace, accompanied in the field trip by the Representative of the Department of Policies on Tourism of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, Mr. Elton Noti moved to the Shkodra Region.

An important meeting took place, at the TEULEDA (Local Economic Development Agency) Office in Shkodra. The IDEASS-CdP-Federparchi-GEF/SGP delegation accompanied by the Representative of the Department of Policies on Tourism of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, Mr. Elton Noti and the Representative of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration Mr. Petrit Imeraj met the Director of TEULEDA, Mr. Elvin Hoxha. Mr. Hoxha made an important presentation on the activities carried out by TEULEDA in Shkodra Region.

TEULEDA, said Mr. Hoxha, is a non-profit organization established on June 2001 with the support of the UNOPS (United Nations Office for Project Services) –PASARP Programme. The members of the Board are all active local institutions as Shkodra Region, Shkodra Prefecture, Municipalities of the Region, Chamber of Commerce. TEULEDA aims at contributing, in accordance with other institutions' competencies and in co-ordination with them, to the definition and implementation of the objectives for the local economic development of the Region of Shkodra.

TEULEDA's activity is focused on the improved exploitation of local resources and the inclusion of disadvantaged population and depressed areas into the formal economic circuit. Within this scope of purposes, the core object of TEULEDA is identification, analysis and implementation of initiatives favoring the development of economic activities and the creation of employment opportunities, within a framework that combines poverty reduction and the promotion of an integrated and sustainable development of the territory.

TEULEDA is mostly focused in four fields: *Agro industry, handicraft, fishing and tourism.*

It is since June 2005 that TEULEDA is sustainable. The guaranty fund provided at TEULEDA disposal by UNOPS/PASARP is the main income resource of the agency thanks to the capabilities of technical staff of TEULEDA to issue credits to local entrepreneurs.

Other resources for the agency are obtained by the management of the national and international projects aiming an impact in our territory, served by TEULEDA and other local experts and offering specialized services to local small and medium enterprises. Having at disposal a Guaranty Fund of 500,000 USD TEULEDA has contributed in the establishment of 15 new enterprises and the consolidation of 9 already existing ones. Until now the credited amount released has been around 1 million of USD, starting the credit with a minimum of 10,000 USD. 300 new direct jobs and almost 1000 others indirect were created in Shkodra region.

TEULEDA is different to the banks or other financial institutions operating in Albania. For the TEULEDA staff, after the approved credit, starts the real work in assisting to the enterprise in quality of the products, possible markets, possible suppliers, raw material, machineries etc.



With regard to the proposal for possible sustainable tourism pilot project in Kelmendi Commune, elaborated by TEULEDA and presented to the Working Table meeting on May 2007, Mr.Hoxha said that the project was developed out of the need to promote and enhance natural environmental and cultural heritage, in the area of Kelmend Commune, by means of specific actions for consolidation of local development processes, of governance and local resources planning.

This area offers relevant potentialities for local economic development, especially in tourism, even though they are scarcely developed so far. Accordingly this may facilitate the planning of promotion actions in these areas and to set up sustainable tourism integrated packages. These new tourist products will diversify the supply, with is focused on seaside tourism up to now, providing new perspectives to the country-sides around mountains and valleys as well, applying environmental sustainability patterns, by developing tourism packages of slow mobility, promoting rural internal zones of Albania.

General objective is to promote a local sustainable process, by means of tourism promotion, cooperation in the development of incoming tourist products, development and promotion of new tourist packages and tourist marketing actions, taking into consideration the interaction and negotiated action to be developed between public and private subjects (local authorities, local tour operators and so on).

Specific objective is to promote and enhance mountain areas and valleys with a marginal tourism development. This in order to diversify tourism flows, revitalizing these areas through pilot actions, such small actions for the restructuring of guest houses in area where tourism is improving and also in order to contribute to environment protection, introducing sustainability issues in tourism promotion.

Mr.Hoxha suggested making contact with Father Sergio, a Franciscan Priest, author of a lot of initiatives for local economic development, undertaken in Kelmendi area in order to improve tourism in the mountain and valleys areas of the Commune.



In the late morning the IDEASS-CdP-Federparchi-GEF/SGP delegation accompanied in the field trip by the Representative of the Department of Policies on Tourism of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, Mr. Elton Noti and the Representative of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration Mr. Petrit Imeraj met the Deputy Prefect of the Region of Shkodra, Mr. Shyqyri Bajraktari. The Deputy Prefect expressed the will to fully collaborate with UNDP/ARTGOLD/IDEASS, for the implementation of a project for sustainable tourism in Kelmendi area. Mr. Bajraktari offered complete support to the Italian Innovation's experts.



The field trip followed with a wide tour around Thethi National Park and Kelmendi Commune.

- The National Park “Thethi” is located in North of Albania. It is situated 70 km northeast Shkodra, in the very heart of Albania Alps, close to “Bjeshket e Namuna” (the Accursed Mountains) at an altitude of 1200 m (the lowest part) up to 2568 m (the highest peak), surrounded by steep inaccessible peaks. The road winds among wonderful forests and landscapes.

The mountains ridges and peaks rise above the narrow valleys full of waterfalls. The surface area of the national park in Thethi is 2300 ha. Thethi is a virgin tourist centre.

The relief of Thethi valley is distinguished for the high contrast between alpine natures of the mountain ridges surrounding the twisting Thethi river valley. Thethi valley begins at the springs of Okoli creek and end down to the Kaprei creek outfall. This part of the creek is really ample and looks like a small beautiful lake. Thethi valley is surrounded by high and steep mountains as Jezerca, Radohima, Arapi, Papluka, Aliaj, Zhabore, Valbona, Boshi, Kakia, Mardomi, Lopa, Zeza and Zorzi. At the Mardedaj village, the riverbed is gradually narrowed, while at a certain point it creates the marvelous “Grunas Canyon”. The canyon at the “Shkalla e Thethit” gorge is 40 m high and 1 m wide. A magnificent remarkable sight is the Grunasi waterfall with its water falling from 30 meters high to a purple stone ground. The road system is much damaged.



The last visit was conducted at the guesthouse of the head of Thethi Mr. Prek Harusha in order to collect further data on Thethi village in the field of tourism. The CdP experts received important information on the interested area.

The Thethi Village Head Mr. Harusha states there are 6 families in the area of Theth that administrate guest houses, in a total of 63 single beds. The summer records a passage tourist flow. Mostly they are campers arriving by personal transport and generally remain for only one night. The favourite activity is the trekking. As a weak point, it is the fact that the protected areas lack at the moment of good management.

In the second part of this mission the IDEASS-CdP-Federparchi-GEF/SGP delegation accompanied in the field trip by the Representative of the Department of Policies on Tourism of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, Mr. Elton Noti, and the Representative of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Water Administration Mr. Petrit Imeraj moved to the Kelmendi Commune.

- The Commune of Kelmend is situated in the North of Albania in the western side of Albanian Alps, Tamara the administrative center of the commune is 60 km far from Shkoder and is populated by 5000 inhabitants. A lot very interesting natural monuments composed this mountain area like Bjeshket e Namuna, one of the most beautiful and most magnificent mountain massifs of Albania; alpine landscapes, wild goats, mountain peaks (2000 - 2500m) and passes, alpine pastures. The area is well known for its variety of habitats and vegetation, too. The road system is much damaged and they are not asphalted roads. The very isolated conditions of life caused a tendency of its inhabitants to move towards urbane areas, but during the summer season they return for their holidays, highlighting in this way their efforts for developing the familiar tourism.

The IDEASS-CdP-Federparchi-GEF/SGP delegation last visit was conducted at guesthouse of Mr. Gjovalin Pllumaj in Vermosh Valley.



His building was restructured four years ago with the economic help of Father Sergio. His activity started last year. During this summer he gave hospitality to 180/200 persons for a total of 350/400 presences. The persons have passed in the structure one night, but someone stayed for 5 nights too. Generally they make half board, and sometimes full board. There are other 80 bed places of guest houses in the area. Structure information is available in the internet. The primary problem is the lack of asphalted roads and the lack of merchandise in the shops of the place. He makes the shopping at Shkodra or sometimes in Montenegro. When there is no electricity for many hours, there is the risk that the merchandise breaks down determining a big lost of money. He sells to the tourist's alimony and manufacturers produced by him or by others habitants of the village.



Other meetings were organized with other guesthouses' owners in Kelmendi Commune, to collect data on different naturalistic areas and landscapes that possess the potentiality to generate income by using suitable existing properties as tourist accommodation.



On September 28, 2007 an important work-meeting was organized with Father Sergio at Tamara, the administrative centre of the Commune of Kelmendi.



Father Sergio has been in this area since nine years and besides his vocational mission, exercises an important actor role of the social progress too. He has assisted the residents to open commercial activities, guest houses. He promotes the production and the sale of local products. He was one of the firsts who talked about tourism possibilities in the area of Vermosh. The population mistrusts the innovation that the local tourism imposes; therefore Father Sergio's initiatives do not have positive result always. However his methodic engagement brought good results in the field of tourism reception and of the trout's raise. This is the sign that, even slowly, things here can be changed. Unfortunately, the situation is not easy, so some assurance companies that have made inspections in this area have abandoned their purposes of intervention.

The CdP experts received, in this occasion, other technical information on Kelmendi area.

The Representative of the Department of Policies on Tourism of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, Mr. Elton Noti, said that the Ministry of Tourism is promoting a project for the rural tourism in collaboration with bank's institutes and second level banks. The intention is to create a database of receptive rural structures that has similar traditional and characteristics structures. The model building is between a farm holiday and a guest house, otherwise the Owners should be able to offer their products, the structure should have 4 or 5 rooms and the Owners should live and give

hospitality to the tourists. The structures' list with data to reach and to contact the Owners will be found in the net.

During the mission, the Italian experts and the UNDP-ART GOLD/IDEASS staff met the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports, Mrs. Suzana Turku.



Mrs. Turku expressed again the high interests for the transfer of the “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” Innovation in the Country. Beautiful view, said Mrs Turku. The Minister and the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sport are interested in the Albanian Mountains as an untouchable natural patrimony. The isolation in this case (lack of roads) had had a good effect on the environment. Furthermore, the Minister is making a net of Guest Houses and is promoting small businesses in those areas: horse ridings, picnic, products’ promotion and typical receipts, said Mrs. Turku.

The study field trip in Thethi e Kelmendi was necessarily, said the President of “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” Mr. Roberto Di Vincenzo to the Deputy Minister.

The re-launching of the mountain areas is a challenge that could be controlled. The mountain tourism is more visible than the coast tourism and more diluted in time. Furthermore, the beach can be easily ruined, but with some little attentions it can be saved. Otherwise, the mountain is subject of risks that can be eliminated only by an attentive protection politic of the environmental patrimony.

For the tourism in the Northern area of Albania, we can think of a progress through the time: from a self-contained adventure tourism we can pass through, with the increasing of the offer and of the grant quality, to a familiar organized tourism.

The institutions necessarily must sustain the progress initiatives in the areas of Northern Albania, to give more credibility to the projects, to give credibility to the government and to reassure the tourists. We have seen things that could not have been seen otherwise. The impression thing is to find persons who live in reachable villages only after 100 km of excavating road.

Theth and Kelmend are very different. Generally for these areas have been activated different actions, disconnected between them, even not organized, that converge through the same results.

The Teuleda organization and its work in this field have made a very great impression to us.

The receptive structure level in those areas is very raw, the hospitality is rude, and it is tasteless related to the requested standard from an occidental that wishes to go in the village. The hospitality can not fulfill the hygienic and health norms and the norms of the legal assurance that are upon the travel packet of the tour operators. This made us to think of a non organized tourism, on which can be find complete information in the internet. Also, the marketing is administrated online.

We have made a question, said Mr. Di Vincenzo: which area is promotion worth, that of Thethi or that of Kelmendi? The answer is that of promoting both areas under the voice Albanian Alps and then paying attention in details on the different areas. The promotion has to be done in relation to an area that is the Albanian Alps.



Also, the first objective is that of a unitary action based on the morphological identity of the area. The second objective is: the actions of structural and infrastructural development for different areas. In these areas can be offered great touristy activities: horse tracking, alpinism etc. Further, an other relevant aspect is the relation man-nature that has remained the same for one century, unusual thing wherever in Europe.

The Representative of Federparchi Association, Mrs. Stefania Petrosillo transmitted to the Deputy Minister, the official communication that Albania will be “Special Guest Country” at the next “Mediterre” International Mediterranean Park Fair, on 2008.

The official invitation will be forwarded to the Minister of the Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports Mr. Ylli Pango, and to the, Minister of Environment, Forest and Water Administration. Mr. Lufter Xhuveli.

There are still discussions about the organization of a preliminary event called “Waiting Mediterre”, that will be held in Tirana and will be a general prove of what is going to happen at Bari, Italy.



These activities sign the growing interest of the international community for the Albanian environmental patrimony, probably the only one in Europe that maintains its century-old characteristics untouched, of the promotion presence and progress of the natural areas requested by the Ministry of the Environment, Forests and Water Administration and by the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports.

In this context, particularly relevance will have the area of the Albanian Alps, territory of suggestive beauty, where is working the UNDP ARTGOLD/IDEASS with the “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” innovation.



The Albanian Authorities appreciated the decision of Federparchi Association and confirmed the intention to closely collaborate with UNDP ART GOLD/IDEASS Albania and Federparchi Association in ensuring the participation of Albania in such important event.

Between the UNDP ART GOLD- IDEASS Albania, “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*”, Federparchi and the Deputy Minister is stipulated a contact to collaborate in the development of strategies/projects in the area of Theth and Kelmend, with priority the development of the environmental tourism and conservation.

Mission conclusion in Tirana

At the end of the mission a de-briefing meeting took place in the UNDP ART GOLD Office, with the participation of UNDP ART GOLD Albania Programme CTA, Mr. Piero D’Onofrio, the President of “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” Mr.Roberto Di Vincenzo and his staff , the Representative of *Federparchi*, Mrs.Stefania Petrosillo, IDEASS National Coordinator, Mrs. Renata Uruci, Mr. Giovanni Bruno IDEASS probationer.

The meeting aimed the definition of an operation plan that proposes actions and that have to be general. This operative plan is going to be elaborated again and will be official from the Albanian Government.

It is better introducing to the donators an Operation Strategy produced by the Government, or by the Ministry of the Environment, of the Tourism and promoted from the region of Shkodra, said Mr. D’Onofrio. There are different donators: Molise Region for the cartography, Austria can offer financing for three years to support the local progress (the local agency is the twin of Teuleda); there

is Gef, the World Bank, GTZ, “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*”, Ferderparchi.... a strategic plan is necessary.

The Region of Shkodra becomes a laboratory with this project, because the pilot project can be applied in another place. “*La Compagnia dei Parchi*” can be implementing of this project and to make a profit from the fundaments of cooperation decentralized and then the different introductions are financed from the donators. The Governments is relevant, because it has not a section line but a general one. Then the different actors work with different sections of their competence.

The project may be the first operative plan for the mountain areas of the Mediterranean sea, said Mr. Di Vincenzo. The Parco d’Europa Apenin Project was a project from Bangkok. The same project is going to be held in Barcelona in 2008 where it will be discussed on the Mediterranean Mountains project. In this project may enter the Operative Plan that will be developed in Albania.

There is in editing the book “Mountains of Mediterranean”, that mostly has images and the Alps of Albania can be put there.

