

ESRC CASE STUDENTSHIP: PARTNER FIELD TRIP REPORT

Operation Florian Macedonia

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Background and Context

Operation Florian is a UK Fire and Rescue Service Humanitarian Aid Charity, delivering projects worldwide to improve the operational capacity of fire and rescue services. Operation Florian has been working in Macedonia since 2007, where it supports the capacity building of local and national fire and rescue services by donating fire appliances and specialist equipment and delivering training to firefighters in key technical areas, with the aim of creating a safe working environment and improving the operational effectiveness of fire and rescue services. Additionally, Operation Florian has assisted with the development of prevention strategies encouraging fire service personnel to design and deliver community-focused and participatory safety programmes, seeking to reduce community vulnerabilities to fire risks and other disasters.

An ESRC-funded CASE PhD studentship began in October 2015 as a collaboration between the University of Manchester and Operation Florian to investigate bottom-up politics within a context of decentralisation, investigating fire risks, well-being and pathways towards community involvement in decentralised fire and rescue services in poor urban

settlements. The case study of this research will focus on the context of Zimbabwe; however it was suggested that the researcher join a scheduled project trip to Macedonia in November 2015 in order to learn more about Operation Florian's work in terms of approach, methodology and achievements. This trip would also provide an insight into a specific country context of fire and rescue services, and in particular the operational environment in terms of an ongoing process of decentralisation. It is hoped that the findings from this exposure will inform and contribute not only to key questions within the ongoing PhD research but will also contribute to learning and discussion for Operation Florian in terms of its ongoing engagement in Macedonia, and more widely in terms of its institutional approach. The results of this report will be discussed at a workshop to be convened between the University of Manchester and Operation Florian in early 2016.

As the focus of the studentship project is on political pressure, advocacy and mobilisation within communities in a political context of decentralisation, the report will be framed within this background, drawing on issues raised in the course of the research so far. Through a focus on bottom-up community involvement within a politics of decentralisation, the project aims to

make a social development contribution to the operation of fire and rescue services and associated disaster risk reduction, which acknowledges that disasters are the 'actualization of social vulnerability' (Lewis 1999:8 in Bankoff et al 2004:2). It is hoped that this learning can support Operation Florian in addressing developmental issues around fire and rescue and disaster risk reduction in resource-poor urban settings in different countries, in a way that complements its existing technical solutions and approaches, by recognising that all of its projects operate within particular socio-political contexts. Therefore, how Operation Florian seeks to engage with and support community-led processes needs careful consideration, theoretical underpinnings and an appropriately designed methodology.

At the same time, this document raises additional observations and questions that may be useful for the organisation to reflect on as it enters the next phase of its work in Macedonia. However, it must be noted that this is not a formal evaluation or full technical assessment of Operation Florian's programme of support to date in the country.



Tetovo firefighters and Operation Florian staff with donated vehicle, November 2015.

Approach

To date, the ESRC CASE PhD studentship research project has focused on issues of civil society and community engagement, within a context of decentralisation. The collaboration with Operation Florian introduces the role and contribution of external agencies in mediating and facilitating processes of development through disaster risk reduction activities.

From reviews of literature so far, a key issue within decentralisation studies is an overwhelming focus on bureaucratic efficiency and service delivery outcomes over and above the envisioned deepened democratic potentials such processes are often theoretically bound to deliver. In addition, studies of decentralisation often neglect the role of civil society in such processes. This report looks specifically at linkages between service delivery, democratic and civil society processes, and the role of an external agency in potentially bridging the space between the two.

To this end, the following is analysed in terms of the case study of Macedonia and Operation Florian's work.

The type of decentralisation undertaken in Macedonia, and how this has affected governance and service delivery, with specific reference to the Fire and Rescue Service.

Mechanisms and spaces available for citizen participation that address the 'deepened democracy' concerns of decentralisation and how Operation Florian engages with these beyond securing material benefits

for local Fire Services and populations. How has the work of fire services and Operation Florian to date connected with processes of community engagement and participation at the local level? How can these be built upon and what lessons can be learned?

Relationships between different stakeholders at the municipal level; communities, fire services (professional and voluntary), municipalities, and Operation Florian.

Methodology

The methodology used is based on a case study approach to the work of Operation Florian in Macedonia, looking at the extent to which decentralisation has opened up new democratic spaces, and provided opportunities for participation in securing the provision of local services, in particular fire and rescue services. This is done in order to highlight the political context within which Operation Florian works, and how it can seek to engage with these processes in a strategic way.

The researcher visited Macedonia from 7th to 14th November 2015, accompanying UK and Macedonian Operation Florian staff on one of their regular project trips to the country. The researcher was also able to observe Operation Florian meetings with local and national stakeholders concerning future projects. In addition, the researcher held informal conversations with key respondents within municipal fire services, government institutions and municipalities in Skopje and ten municipalities across the country that represented a mix of urban and rural areas and demographic

composition (Albanian, Macedonian majorities/mixed population); Skopje, Probistip, Kratovo, Rankvoce, Strumica, Brvenica, Tetovo, Gostivar, Sveti Nikole and Kriva Palanka. The full schedule of the trip is available in Appendix 1. Available documentation, including internal project and programmatic material from Operation Florian was reviewed (listed at the end of this report). Engagement with literature on citizen participation and decentralisation was also incorporated into the framing of the report. The information gathered was systematically analysed and triangulated with the sources listed.



Insignia of Macedonian Professional Firefighters

Programme background



Decentralisation in Macedonia

A process of decentralisation within Macedonia began in earnest in 2002, following the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) in 2001. Principally a peace deal to mark the end of armed conflict during that year between the country's ethnic Albanians and Macedonians, the OFA outlined a basis for improving the rights and recognition of ethnic Albanians as well as addressing the concerns of Macedonians by maintaining the territorial integrity of the state (Latifi 2001; Bieber 2005a in Lyon 2012:75). This was to be achieved through constitutional and legal reforms addressing decentralised local government, principles of non-discrimination and equitable representation, and parliamentary procedures for the protection of minorities, education and use of languages. The municipal decentralisation reforms aimed to give local communities greater control over the management of their own affairs, allowing minority groups to self-govern in areas of the country where they comprised a majority (Lyon 2011: 28).

Internationally, decentralisation is theoretically underpinned by a rationale of bringing governance, decision-making and service implementation closer to citizens, thereby increasing efficiency and developing a more responsive mode of government based on accurate information. However, achieving this in practice is a considerable challenge for many countries, and Macedonia is no exception.

In Macedonia, the mode of decentralisation has not been one of *devolution* of power and empowerment of municipalities and citizens in decision making processes, but of *delegation* of administrative and financial functions, whereby 'most local governments are little more than the payroll agents of the institutions' (Levitas 2011). A block grant system delegates payments for certain public service employees, maintenance of buildings, and salaries – for example, in education and cultural services – to the municipality, rather than actually devolving decision-making on how resources are allocated. Similarly, there is no opportunity for local authorities to set policy. The central state has retained many of the most important functions and decisions, a situation felt by

some to be reflective of the main driver of decentralisation in Macedonia; namely the resolution of ethnic disparities rather than any explicit recognition or commitment to effective, substantive local governance (Mohmand and Mejia Acosta 2012:5). Many financial and administrative functions including ownership of natural resources remain under centralised jurisdiction.

In 2004, when the law on municipal boundaries was passed following the OFA, Macedonia was divided into 84 municipalities (plus the City of Skopje, which consists of ten municipalities), each with its own directly elected Mayor and municipal council. Budgets are financed through personal income tax and supplemented by the national budget through block grants for services such as education and culture, which according to law should be proportional to population (Lyons 2012:204). Municipalities vary widely in terms of population, (from 1000 to over 100,000; 16 municipalities have populations under 5000 [Lyons 2012:236], demography, finances and resources. Each municipality is expected to deploy the same range of competencies (delegated at a very fast pace). This has placed considerable strain on the fiscal, administrative and human resource capabilities of smaller, rural, and remote municipalities, who have more and bigger responsibilities than previously, both financially and operationally, and insufficient capacity building and training to date.

In practice, decentralisation has taken an institutional rather than functional approach, whereby state contributions to municipalities, particularly for cultural and social welfare purposes, are given on the basis of existing institutions and facilities rather than the potential number of beneficiaries and service users (Lyon 2015). Nor has distribution of public resources been equitable across the country; urban municipalities are favoured over rural, as are ruling party local authorities, creating further disparities and preventing equitable access to basic services; 'those municipalities unable to provide in the past, remain unable to do so' (Lyon 2015:1299). Additionally, there is little coordination and coherence across national institutions in the everyday functions of municipalities, which are not represented at a national level. Each local authority is generally left to individually



Operation Florian delivering tactical ventilation training in the Municipality of Tetovo, 2015.

negotiate with each national institution, compounding existing disadvantages faced by those municipalities lacking capacity to do so. This problem is managed to some extent by the Association of the Units of Local Self-Governance (ZELS), which functions as an ostensibly independent association for mayors, and is the only formal mechanism available to municipalities for influencing central government policy (Lyon 2012:76). ZELS is comprised of a number of policy committees which lobby central government on behalf of municipalities, creating both vertical linkages to government and horizontal linkages between municipalities (Jordan 2010:38).

Decentralisation and spaces for participation

One of the key intended benefits of decentralisation, namely expanded democratic participation or deepened democracy, is an ongoing concern within Macedonia. Generally, relations between civil society and local government in Macedonia seem to vary according to region and municipality. In Gostivar, one of the largest municipalities in the country (population 81,000), located in north-western Macedonia and a majority Albanian city, numerous cooperations between the municipality and local civil society organisations were cited, whereas in other municipalities visited minimal collaboration was mentioned. The notion of 'civil society' was reported to be a relatively new one in Macedonia and conceptualised by stakeholders generally in terms of international donor support

and NGOs as opposed to local, community-based engagement. However, civil society engagement can be mobilised around specific activities; an annual national tree planting day has been hugely popular in recent years. At the same time, respondents did not consider the strong community ties that exist in many parts of Macedonia, through the family, and local institutions such as schools, places of worship and work (see box on page 8 on *Volunteer Fire Services (DPDs) in Macedonia*) under the rubric of civil society.

Aside from the opportunity for voting for Mayors and councils, there are mixed opportunities for citizens to participate locally, and these appear to vary from one municipality to the next. Whilst citizens are required by the Law on Local Self-Government to 'directly participate in the decision-making processes on issues of local importance through civil initiative, citizens' gatherings and referendum' (2002 Art. 25 in Lyon 2012:121), in practice this is interpreted widely between municipalities. The use of consultation hours and meetings with neighbourhood communities and citizen groups to discuss specific issues is becoming more widespread (Lyon 2012:121). Respondents also referred to practices such as publishing approved budgetary accounts in local gazettes or online, broadcasting municipal sessions on local television in some areas, and the use of regular community forums by others. Some municipal councils operate open committees dealing with various operational issues and competencies, which function as invited spaces for citizens to discuss particular issues. However these

were not widely known about by those spoken to. Previous research has found that rates of participation in municipal activities are generally low, with few citizens reporting contacting a municipal representative for help, and few believing that they had any influence over municipality decisions (UNDP 2009 and UNDP 2010 in Lyon 2012:124).

The Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) ran a Community Forums Programme in three phases from 2006 to 2014, which aimed to support the decentralisation process from a participatory perspective, to 'support participatory community development through direct citizens' participation in local governance, providing spaces for citizens to communicate directly and exchange information with mayors and municipal administration on various community-based issues' (Parvex 2009; SDC TORs in Mohmand and Mejia Acosta 2012:14). Participants were given the opportunity to prioritise local needs and resulting projects have dealt with infrastructure, economic development, water supply and environmental protection (Lyon 2012:123). However, sustainability has been difficult to achieve, with many forums taking place only in times of need rather than on a regular basis, and also affected by regular changes in local politicians, who may implement them at their own discretion. In addition, ZELS hold community forums to consult citizens on prioritisation of projects. These forums are embedded within local legislation but there was little evidence from conversations with local stakeholders that they were happening in practice.

Aside from formal spaces of participation, *Mesni* or *Urbani Zaednici* (literally Local Community, rural and urban respectively) are traditional forms of sub-municipal, community based self-government found in many municipalities, recognised and regulated in the 2002 Law on Local Self-Government. Through these informal institutions, citizens may come together to discuss issues, strategies and proposals and often have resources allocated to them by mayors for certain tasks, thereby acting as mediating institutions between citizens and municipal governments. They often focus on issues such as implementation of projects, waste management and inter-community relations. Although they can be strongly partisan with strong ties to Mayors (Mohmand and Mejia Acosta 2012:21), they can sometimes transcend the politics that often dominate municipality functions.

Decentralisation and service delivery: fire and rescue services

The fire service was one of the key services devolved to the local level included within areas of public service; urban and rural planning; environmental protection; local economic development; culture; local finances; primary and secondary education; social welfare; and health care (Lyon

2015:1282). Responsibility for the fire service was shifted from the Ministry of the Interior to municipal authorities and the Directorate for Protection and Rescue (DPR). Municipal authorities are responsible for firefighting units, forest and range fires and technical interventions. The DPR, an independent government agency with representatives in each municipality, is responsible for setting rules and legislation on how the fire services operates, as well as supervising performance through its inspection department and providing specialist technical equipment for local and national fire services. However, this was reported to rarely happen in practice due to a lack of firefighting expertise within the directorate, and the fact that 'firefighters in Macedonia are generally left alone' (DPR representative). The DPR also carries out local risk assessments – for companies and local municipalities – but this only takes into account hazard identification, and not vulnerability measures. ZELs addresses fire issues through a sub-component of the Committee on Communal Issues, and through communication with the National Fire Services Network (created following a series of workshops convened by Operation Florian with Chief Fire Officers in 2009). Despite these additional stakeholders and linkages, in reality there is little to no national focus on fire service matters in terms of recruitment, training, equipment procurement, operational competence; additionally there is no national

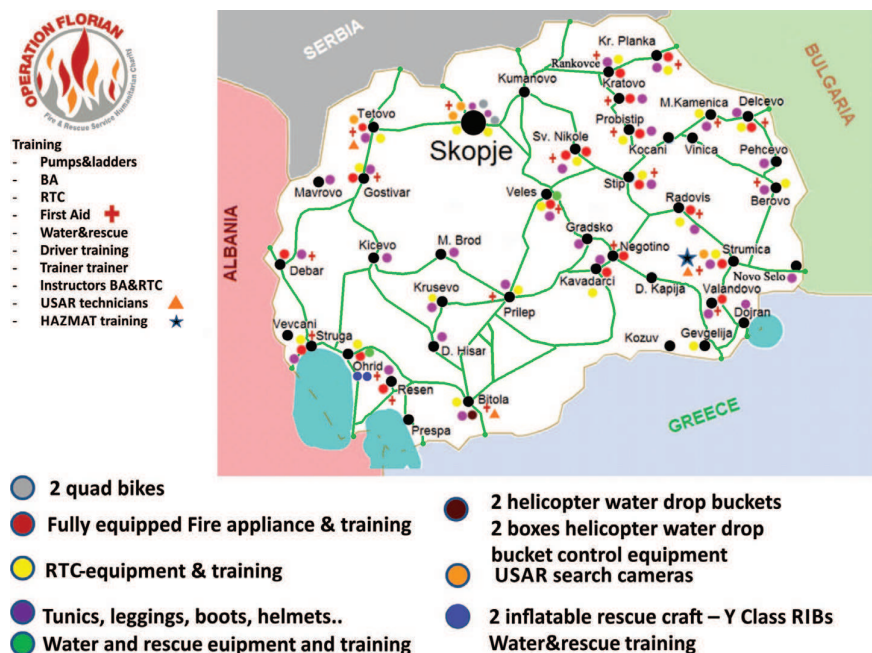
training centre, substantive national standards or a functioning fire service inspectorate.

Decentralisation and the resulting lack of national or regional coordination of fire services has led to 'friction, duplication, decision making problems and a lack of understanding of roles and responsibilities' (UNDP 2007:29) within the fire service as well as lack of coordination and misuse of resources. Salaries for firefighters employed pre-decentralisation (2004/5) continue to be paid by the national government, channelled through the municipality, whereas new firefighters are funded directly by municipal income, resulting in lower salaries. The withdrawal of central government responsibility has also led to loss of economies of scale in the procurement and maintenance of equipment, resulting in higher costs for municipalities, and greater reluctance to commit to spending. Municipalities are now responsible for the entire running of local fire services (equipment procurement and maintenance, recruitment, retention, funding, training), resulting in vast inequities in how fire services in different parts of the country are run according to location and therefore ability to pay for and manage these different functions. Under-developed local revenue systems mean that some municipalities, especially smaller, rural ones find it difficult to source their own tax revenue. In addition, the absence of a formula for central funding of municipalities according to size means that many smaller, rural municipalities struggle to fund local services, particularly fire and rescue services, of which they have limited understanding or knowledge.

Operation Florian has attempted to address the resulting gaps in equipment, training, and capacity of local fire services through its programme in Macedonia over the last 8 years, as well as drawing links with and attempting to address broader and underlying issues of policy and institutional change.

Operation Florian's involvement in Macedonia

The involvement of Operation Florian in Macedonia began in 2007 following a request for assistance in the form of fire appliances and equipment from the Sveti Nikole Volunteer Fire Department (DPD). Following vetting procedures, a scoping visit and viability assessment were completed. As a result, a three-year project was approved by the Operation Florian board to support



Macedonia showing Operation Florian training and donations throughout the country since 2007. (Source: Operation Florian)

capacity building processes of Municipal Fire Services, within a context of unfolding decentralisation, as described. Subsequent contact with the British Embassy was made in order to develop a formal relationship for advice and financial and in-kind support. British Embassy funding streams at the time gave strong support to projects which would assist in the integration of decentralisation throughout the country, and therefore the work of Operation Florian aligned with such interests. Funding also came from Operation Florian local fundraising activities in the UK, and beneficiary municipality authorities contributed to the transportation costs of equipment. Programme activities to date have included the following, across more than 20 municipalities:

- Donations of equipment, appliance and personal protective equipment, including 15 fully equipped firefighting vehicles.
- Comprehensive and specialist firefighting training on the use of donated equipment, including equipment maintenance training.
- Donation of equipment (quad bikes and specialist urban search and rescue equipment) to the Directorate for Protection and Rescue.
- Train the trainer training in community safety.
- Road safety awareness training (including supporting a fire service road safety initiative in schools and involvement in road accident extrication challenges)
- Water rescue training.
- First aid training for firefighters and volunteers, in collaboration with the Macedonian Red Cross.
- Exchange visits for the training of local specialist instructors and train the trainer courses in the UK.
- Support for the creation and capacity building of a representative body for Macedonian Fire Services through the Association of the Units of the Local Self-Government (ZELS) following an Operation Florian consultancy report on the organisation of Fire and Rescue Services in the Republic of Macedonia for the Department of Protection and Rescue.

Since May 2015, Operation Florian has been planning for its next programme phase in Macedonia. This is focused on

an emergency service inter-operability programme to improve response and operational effectiveness (communication practices, operations and division of responsibility) at road traffic collisions.

Fire service community engagement

In Macedonia, community safety engagement related to fire was historically coordinated by the Republic Fire Fighting Union (RFFU) and delivered by volunteer fire departments (DPDs). The RFFU retains this responsibility, and produces materials and runs young people's schools fire safety quizzes, based on firefighting and science rather than prevention. However, in conversations with professional fire services, many stressed their engagement with local schools on community safety and prevention work. This had been bolstered by the community safety programmes undertaken by Operation Florian, as described previously, as well as events such as public fire drills and extrication challenges. An extrication challenge in Skopje in 2014 drew in large crowds of schoolchildren, other emergency services and members of the general public, and anecdotal evidence showed an increased public recognition and appreciation of the work of firefighters.

Some fire services in rural municipalities, such as Probitip, had good relationships with agricultural workers and collaborated on preventing and managing forest fires using shared equipment and vehicles, and tactics in creating firebreaks, exchanging information as necessary. Prevention work in industrial zones of those municipalities which are home to heavy industry, such as Kratovo, Radovis, and Strumica, was also cited as another area of key community work. In the larger, more urban municipalities, cooperation with private companies in executing drills, and training on emergency exits, hydrants and hoses were given as examples of activities undertaken. However, in Radovis for example, this was not standard practice across the municipality, and only happened at the instigation of the business in question. This had only taken



Protective clothing donated to Rankovce Fire Station by Operation Florian

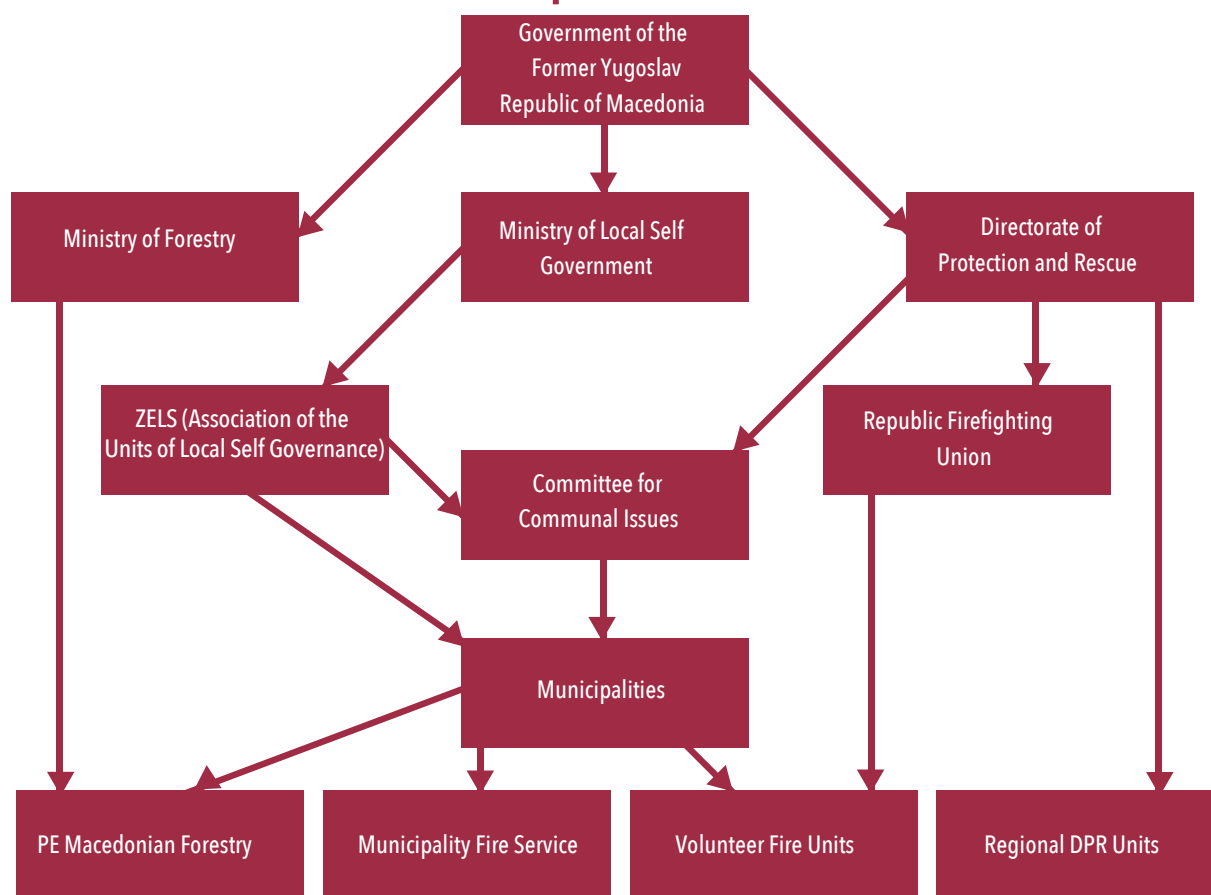


First Aid training delivered by Operation Florian and the Red Cross, Ohrid, 2015



Road Traffic Collision extrication demonstration 2015

Institutional relationships



Institutional framework identifying key actors and structure of responsibility for fire service functions in Republic of Macedonia. Source: Jordan [2010].

place with large industries and businesses, rather than at the level of small or medium sized enterprises. Risk assessments and community education were carried out on new, high rise buildings by some, urban, municipalities, such as in Veles and Strumica; however there was no equivalent practice for older buildings to be checked or equipped. In general, a good level of community relations was said by several fire services to be demonstrated through the willingness of the community to call on the fire service to assist with non-fire related events (locked doors, stuck elevators, lost animals, etc.). Aside from the above, fire and rescue services did not seem to be involved in any participatory governance mechanisms at the local level (community forums, committees, etc.) apart from direct appeals or budget meetings with the Mayor.

In terms of Operation Florian's engagement on community safety and prevention, the organisation has delivered pilot projects with the aim of encouraging municipal firefighters

to engage more proactively with their own communities, especially schools. In 2011 Operation Florian arranged for an exchange visit of community safety practitioners to deliver train the trainer programmes in the municipalities of Veles, Kriva Palanka and Stip. This was met by a certain level of institutional opposition from professional firefighters, as historically this had been the job of DPDs and municipality offices, not professional firefighters. However, subsequent safety programmes undertaken by fire services have been reported in Veles, and as mentioned, the majority of fire services visited reported undertaking fire safety and prevention programmes in local primary schools and secondary schools. Beyond schools and a limited number of company visits, there did not appear to be any other community engagement, for example with specific groups – the elderly, people with disabilities, home safety visits, partnerships with social services etc.

Relationships between fire services and municipalities

Conversations with a range of fire services revealed differing relationships with municipalities. In some municipalities, generally smaller ones such as Probistip and Kriva Palanka, meetings between the fire service and the municipality happened on an ad hoc basis, when something was needed (equipment, uniforms), or when a particular incident occurred. Stronger relationships and/or more regular meetings (in some cases weekly) between municipalities and fire services correlated with more affluent and larger municipalities such as Radovis, Strumica and Tetovo. The autonomy that municipalities had to add tasks to existing fire service functions (such as asking them to clean waterways and roads, provide refuse collection or security for events) as well as politicised appointments of fire chiefs led to some resentment by firefighters of municipal

Volunteer Fire Services (DPDs) in Macedonia



Sveti Nikole DPD



Volunteer firefighters participating in an EU accession IDP camp training exercise, 2015.

With reference to the fire service and community engagement, the volunteer fire service (DPD) is an important institution in terms of the position it occupies between civil society organisation and service provider, and the opportunities it provides for local participation and engagement of communities. In theory, DPDs work to support and cooperate with professional fire services. DPDs have traditionally been utilised as support for a range of emergency incidents, such as forest fires, flooding and in some cases, minor earthquakes. The DPD in Sveti Nikole was also recently requested to provide fire cover at a recent EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance training exercise which involved setting up an internally displaced persons (IDP) camp for local residents, illustrating recognition of their capabilities and position within local communities.

However, in some municipalities there is no link between the two services, and there is a perception among professional firefighters that DPDs pose a threat to their jobs. DPDs have traditionally taken more of a role in community prevention and safety, to the point that some professional fire services have been resisted the idea of incorporating community safety work into their own work. Some DPDs receive a small amount of funds from the municipality, as well as support in recent years from Operation Florian. In Sveti Nikole, a DPD has existed in some form or another since 1935, and today its headquarters function not only as a base for volunteer firefighters, and Operation Florian, but as a training and education centre, base for a young firefighters programme, and important community focal point for local activities including women's groups, and Peace Corps language training. In Cair municipality, in the city of Skopje, a local shift commander

created a volunteer group of firefighters and broad range of other community members (numbering approximately 150) to act as community safety advisors, and conducted a community based risk assessment with Operation Florian in 2011.

Whilst these two examples reflect the potentials of DPDs, they very much depend on the enthusiasm and commitment of volunteer leaders and as such, the intensity of their activities often varies over time according to the involvement of particular people. However, from a strategic perspective, DPDs would appear to be important entry points for community engagement for both professional fire services and Operation Florian, in terms of opening up space in their methodology to support local participatory processes with the aim of improving services.

authorities, and reflected and exacerbated issues around the perceived status of the fire service in certain municipalities. Firefighters are currently categorised at the lowest level of technical and support personnel within the municipality structure, reflecting a lack of recognition of status and professional capability. The positive aspects of decentralisation were broadly perceived in terms of financial administration; the regular payment of salaries was appreciated across all services, and was felt by many fire services to be the only positive aspect of the decentralisation process, despite

inequalities in pay between old and new firefighters.

Relationships between fire services and the DPR were mixed. Some services cited regular and thorough reporting agreements, but many felt the DPR to be passive in its approach to fire protection and the fire service generally. This was echoed by the DPR itself, who recognised a lack of specialist fire protection expertise (only two staff out of nearly 300 within the DPR currently have a firefighting background). However, the fire service

in Probistip reported relying more on assistance from their DPR regional office than their own mayor.

Relationships between fire services

The relationship between regional fire services was generally a positive one, with mutual aid agreements reported to be in place between neighbouring municipalities in case of disasters beyond the capability of one municipality. Whilst



**Extrication challenge coordinated by
Operation Florian, Skopje, 2014**



Young Firefighters drill 2011



**School evacuation drill in Gorobinci
with professional firefighters
from Sveti Nikole, 2012**

there is a statutory responsibility for these kinds of agreements, in practice most happen informally and this has been supported through Operation Florian. Operation Florian has also been instrumental in setting up a National Fire Service Network, a representative body of the Fire Services, which sits within ZELS and provides professional guidance to ZELS (for example on amending fire service legislation, most recently around the municipal status of firefighters), as well as articulating fire service needs in appropriate forums.

This was as a result of an Operation Florian consultancy report on the situation of Fire and Rescue Services in Macedonia that identified governance shortcomings as a result of decentralisation and a resulting lack of effective leadership at local and national levels. In 2009 Operation Florian facilitated a series of workshops across the Republic which culminated in bringing together municipality fire chiefs in a forum at Mavrovo for the first time since decentralisation. Priorities as expressed by fire chiefs included the need for the fire service to develop a strong professional voice to enable its leaders to articulate its needs and the need to develop a forum that was capable of representing the needs of the fire service to national institutions. Operation Florian encouraged the fire chiefs to form themselves into a network and to establish their own leadership and communication structures. By facilitating further workshops, and through further consultancy work, this was achieved, but due to the complexity of Macedonian legislation, this organisation could not legally exist unless it was absorbed into

an existing government structure. After protracted negotiations, in 2011 the ZELS organisation agreed to formally assimilate the Fire Services' Network into its structure, thus securing legitimacy for the Network. The Network has gained recognition amongst national institutions and government, to the extent that a working group is currently helping to develop the new law on firefighting and rescue. Engagement of some chiefs has been difficult but in a follow up workshop in 2013 a majority of chiefs viewed the formation of the Network as a major success. Their priorities continue to inform Operation Florian's future project plans.



**Goce Jakimoski, President of the
Volunteer Fire Service (DPD), Brvenica.**

Operation Florian and local fire services

Operation Florian has had an impressive impact on the capacity building of Macedonian fire services, not only through its technical support but also by developing national level partnerships, visibility of fire services and networking opportunities. Feedback from fire services was universally positive and emphasised the mutual learning aspect of Operation Florian's involvement in the country. Whilst it is recognised that Operation Florian's attempts to incorporate community safety programmes into the work of professional fire services have been difficult and faced considerable institutional challenges, there is a tendency by Operation Florian to treat community engagement and participation as a stand-alone strand of work rather than a two-way approach to be mainstreamed into every part of their work. For example, the recent proposal of joint interoperability training for road traffic accidents focuses only on the training and involvement of blue light services but fails to properly acknowledge that one problem at the scene of road traffic accidents also relates to the behaviour of members of the public trying to give inappropriate emergency help. A citizen perspective is thus missing from the current Operation Florian proposal. In this particular case it could be an opportunity to discuss strategies to incorporate education for the general public on such matters into any project proposal. Similarly, general community prevention training strategies appear to be one-way, imparting knowledge and expertise rather than using perhaps more participatory approaches to foster joint learning and collaborative community risk reduction.

Conclusion and recommendations



Decentralisation in Macedonia has been implemented in a delegated manner. Financial and technical responsibilities have been assigned to municipalities without sufficient support in terms of capacity building and finance, and without institutionalised provision for participatory mechanisms to fulfil the increased democratic potential promised by decentralisation. The fire service has felt the full force of this process, with responsibility for management delegated to often under-resourced municipalities lacking experience in fire service matters and the ability to sustain and maintain services.

Over the last eight years, Operation Florian has delivered an impressive set of technical and capacity building programmes to the fire services throughout Macedonia, filling gaps in equipment and appliance provision, national standards of training as well as building visibility and recognition of the service. Community safety work has also been piloted into the country programme, with a focus on road safety and schools. They have also made important progress in working at the national level on the institutionalisation of the fire service, in terms of promoting partnerships and facilitating national forums and debates on the status, problems and future of the fire service, through the creation of the National Fire Service Network, its work with ZELs, the DPR, and government through the Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Health. This is very promising and shows that through its long-term involvement, Operation Florian has made considerable progress in engaging in national policy-level dialogue. Some work has also been carried out on community-based disaster risk reduction in the Municipality of Cair, Skopje, working with local volunteer and professional firefighters to identify local risks and DRR strategies. Generally, there is a high and impressive level of partnership commitment from all sides involved, and recognition of the transparency, openness and honesty about the aims of Operation Florian, as well as its limitations, and awareness of where it can find new spaces for engagement.

Whilst this work has had undoubted impact in terms of material provision, in the take-up of some community safety work, and ultimately in increased safety and rescue provision in municipalities, Operation Florian is aware that in order to avoid over-reliance in the future on its presence for any continued focus on the fire service (a matter also raised by some stakeholders), there is a need to strategically plan future operations. This raises issues of ownership of projects and the way knowledge through Operation Florian projects is produced and transferred, particularly in a case where a strong sense of national leadership on fire and rescue services is required. It

would be interesting for Operation Florian to therefore reflect on how now feels it can make the greatest impact in improving fire services and community safety. This could mean complementing its material and technical assistance by supporting and using local democratic processes and spaces to advance the status of the fire service and community safety in the future.

The findings from this report show that there is potentially scope for Operation Florian to bridge or support the intended aims of decentralisation - effective, expanded local service delivery and democratic participation. This could be through championing projects that provide a space for citizen participation, an expanded space for fire service participation and recognition at the local level and thus support for wider developmental goals of deepened democracy and access to services for all. Closer work with volunteer fire services (DPDs) could be one way of doing this, and can be conceived of as a form of co-production, whereby communities engage with the state to produce basic services.

In recent years, co-production has been applied as a way for communities to communicate and negotiate with the state as well as an extended means of local governance of public services, potentially deepening democratic practices at a city level. The volunteer fire service can be viewed as a form of co-production - existing literature has shown that when strategically positioned, this can not only enhance the capacity and safety of communities, but could potentially be used to stimulate further support from municipalities and in this case to foster more substantive collaboration with professional fire services.

Continued support to the community-based disaster risk reduction project as facilitated by the DPD in Cair municipality could be one way of supporting co-production processes and deepening democratic participation at the local level. It would also expand the scope of the limited safety and prevention work that is currently being carried out by fire services. This kind of process could be used as a pilot and opened up to include a more diverse range of community members in a series of participatory planning exercises to gain a more contextual, grounded understanding of the hazards, risks and vulnerabilities to be addressed. This could be followed by community strategising around *how* these can be addressed, what current services communities and fire services can provide and what is still needed, in terms of both technical assistance and community safety and prevention work with partners. Participatory action planning of this kind can aid in mobilising and conscientising local citizens, and if coupled with a local

understanding of spaces for participation that exist locally (such as through municipal community forums, committees, *Mesni* or *Urbani Zaenici* or DPDs), could raise community-based awareness and community risk reduction. It could also mobilise citizens alongside fire services to use decentralised systems of governance to put upwards pressure on local municipalities to uphold their end of the bargain in looking for solutions (either locally, or through advocacy nationally) to adequate service delivery through investment, resources and development of professional and volunteer fire services. At the same time this could raise more awareness around vulnerabilities of particular communities (beyond working with schools and local businesses) or neighbourhoods from a socio-spatial perspective and improve mutual understanding and recognition between fire services, community groups and municipalities. In a context like Macedonia, where municipalities are highly politicised and embedded within an ethnic context (in addition to the tensions mentioned between volunteer and professional fire services), this would of course need to be carried out with a great deal of sensitivity and local collaboration through partners. However, the success of DPD Bajram Miftari in Cair municipality in mobilising community volunteers from a wide range of backgrounds,

ethnicities, and professions shows that this is possible. Such an approach may also open up wider funding opportunities by linking to other organisations working at the same level, as well as by broadening the scope of Operation Florian.

The division of responsibility for community safety and prevention activities between DPDs and professional fire services could be addressed through building on previous Operation Florian workshops to help understand responsibilities and the benefits of collaboration and perhaps repair previous tensions between the two groups. Whether community work should solely be the preserve of DPDs is a matter for discussion.

This kind of community-based engagement could provide evidence and information on local, municipality-based need beyond statistical data collection, and allow for the identification of common needs, and aspirations. This could be fed upwards to municipalities but also to national networks such as ZELS and the National Fire Services network for wider advocacy and lobbying processes. At the same time, participatory processes may contribute towards engaging constituencies at the local level to apply political pressure and advocacy for service delivery.

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Appendix: Fieldwork schedule (November 2015)

Date	Activity
Saturday 7 November	Travel to Skopje, Sveti Nikole
Sunday 8 November	Sveti Nikole
Monday 9 November	<p>Skopje:</p> <p><i>AM</i> observed meeting at DPR with stakeholders on Road Traffic Accidents and inter-operability (representatives from Ministry of Health, ZELS Fire Service Network, Ministry of Interior, DPR, Municipality of Skopje, Municipality of Tetovo, Municipality of Valandovo).</p> <p><i>PM</i> Meeting with Liljana Ristovska, Program Officer at British Embassy for briefing on decentralisation in Macedonia.</p>
Tuesday 10 November	<p>Site visits to fire services in Probistip, Kratovo, and Rankovce.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kratovo: Meeting with Davor Trajovski - Kriva Palanka: Meeting with Ile Kocevski, Chief of TPPE, Kriva Palanka - Rankovce: Meeting with Rade Ivanoski, Chief of Rankovce Fire Service
Wednesday 11 November	<p>Visit to Skopje:</p> <p><i>AM</i> meeting with Viktor Arnaudovski, Head of Legal Department, Association of Local Government of the Republic of Macedonia (ZELS), for briefing on activities and decentralisation.</p> <p><i>PM</i> meeting with Vlatko Jovanovski, Head of Sector for International Cooperation, Directorate of Protection and Rescue and Ivica Naumovski, Assistant for Operations, Directorate of Protection and Rescue.</p>
Thursday 12 November	<p>Site visits to fire services in Radovis and Sturmica.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Radovis: meeting with Gerco Kocov, Chief, and Ace Spaskov, Shift Commander. - Sturmica: meeting with Aleksander Gudev, Deputy Commander, Vernen Stoilov, Chief of Shift, Goran Tomov, Dejan Ristov.
Friday 13 November	<p>Site visits to Brvenica, Tetovo and Gostivar.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Brvenica: meetings with Ender Pajaziti, Mayor of Brvenica and Goce Jakimoski, President of Volunteer Fire Service (DPD), Brvenica. - Tetovo: meeting with Burim Mustafi (driver), Bajram Rexha (administrator), Faris Xhemali (firefighter), Uka Aliti (Commander), Boban Trpkoski (deputy chief commander), Luan Pajaziti (firefighter), Riza Mukati (firefighter), Todosija Damjanoski (firefighter) - Gostivar: meeting with Njoma Selimi Osmani, Head of Sector for Legal Issues, Municipality of Gostivar.
Saturday 14 November	<p><i>AM</i> Sveti Nikole</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Meetings with Aleksandar Danev, Sveti Nikole DPD, Kristijan Atansaov, Young Firefighter, Sveti Nikole DPD, Dario Panev, Young Firefighter, Sveti Nikole DPD. <p><i>PM</i> Travel, Skopje to UK</p>