



CASE STUDY



Samoens village centre

Ski resort shows how policy and commerce can bring new returns for timber

Samoens is a small French village of about 2,300 full time inhabitants in the Grand Massif mountain range 45 minutes from Geneva.

Despite its relative accessibility, the village is quite remote with a small narrow road providing access from the nearest main town of Cluses.

Some five years ago the village council decided to embark on a scheme to bring more tourists into the area, putting in a new cable car lift which provides direct access to the slopes. Samoens itself is at the relatively low height of 750 metres, whilst the cable car station is at 1600m.



The new ski lift station

This new 8 minute service means that the village itself has become a much more attractive accommodation alternative to serious skiers.

At the same time as this development was taking place, more holidaymakers – in particular the British – had been buying into nearby sky resorts, purchasing apartments, chalets and small houses.

However the two closest resorts – Morzine and Les Gets – have limited opportunities for further development because of the topography.

But demand for a holiday home in the region is still there, and Samoens has begun to capitalise on this. New building has taken off, for example the La Grange holiday group has built a large holiday complex in a new area La Beule on the outskirts of the village, some 800 km from the cabin car station.

Many more individual chalets are under construction or have been completed, bringing new jobs and business opportunities to the village.



L'HABITAT TRADITIONNEL



À la fin du XVIIIème, et au début du XIXème, la situation politique et économique de la Savoie s'améliore, la croissance démographique est très importante et elle modifie l'économie rurale. Cela impose plus de bétail et plus de terres arables en culture. La maison change, elle s'agrandit pour loger "les jeunes".

- en pignon sud, on prend sur le fenil pour créer une ou deux chambres (A). l'escalier est remplacé par une lucarne, on allonge le fenil (B). On aménage deux salles par une coupure en bois, qu'on peaufine dans les années par un petit porche (C).



Policy

For the past 25 years Samoens Village Council has adhered to strict rules on construction of new buildings in the area. They all have to be built to a traditional pattern, with a stone or block ground floor and timber construction for any further floors.

The original purpose of this ruling was to avoid some of the design 'errors' of the 1970s and to maintain the traditional look of the village, which is the only mountain resort to have been awarded special status by the French Government.

By keeping this traditional look the aim was to ensure that holidaymakers continued to enjoy this USP, choosing Samoens in contrast to the characterless purpose built resorts which offer excellent skiing but little in social amenity.



One of the four small sawmills

Timber

The result of these two decisions – to bring in more property-hungry skiers, and to ensure that all new-build relies heavily on timber, has had a dramatic effect on work and business opportunities within the village. New building firms have been established, providing local work for local people – many of whom work in the tourist sector over winter and on building during the summer - with a focus on high quality traditional construction. And this has opened the way for the timber industry in the village to capitalise on a major opportunity. There are four sawmills in the village, processing locally sourced timber – mainly conifer – for the construction industry. These relatively small low-tech operations are still producing high quality construction grade timber, providing jobs for upwards of 12-15 people. More jobs have also been created in the woods, as felling has been increased to meet the new demand. And with somewhere in the region of 65 per cent tree cover in the area there is unlikely to be a problem meeting that demand.



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