



The Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization (GCDO) summer newsletter

Issue [3] [5] May-July 2008

1. The President of the Republic, Bamir Topi welcomed the invitation to support the activity “Days of the Cultural Heritage and Artisanhip”

The President of Albania, Bamir Topi, responded positively to the request of Gjirokastra Municipality to become the president of honor of this activity. In his letter the President expressed “his agreement to be part of this important event”. Meanwhile the organizing committee, which is compound by representatives of Gjirokastra Municipality, GCDO and “Miqësia” association continues their efforts on fundraising and organizing such a big event which will be held in **Gjirokastra from 27 -29 September 2008.**

2. The Artisan Center’s first birthday. 18 May, 2008

The Artisan Center, established in 2007 with the support of the GCDO, has had a busy and successful year. The number of craftsmen selling their products has increased from an initial 24 to 45, with an increasing diversity of materials including stone and wood carving, cotton and wool crafts and silver and copper ware. 25 of them are local artisans from Gjirokastra. One thousand two hundred and fifty nine foreign visitors have visited the Center and 1/3 of them have bought products. The center aims primarily to promote Gjirokastra craft traditions and to support local artisans.

3. The GCDO promotes Gjirokastra at tourist fairs

The GCDO has been continuing its efforts to promote Gjirokastra as a tourist venue. A promotional stall with publicity materials formed part of the fair to open the tourist season in Saranda as well as in Tepelena where the bottled water company “Uji i Ftohtë Tepelena” organised an open day for its 10th anniversary. At the Invitation of the Foreign Investors Association of Albania



(FIAA) and Elida-Co, GCDO participated in the fair “Albania – a good destination for investments” (27-30 of May) also followed by a workshop. The consensus of participants at the fair was that while Gjirokastra has a lot of tourist potential, much investment is needed to protect its heritage.

4. Four Peace Corps volunteers deployed to Gjirokastra

In mid-June, four new volunteers arrived from the American organization Peace Corps to live and work in Gjirokastra. They will be working in the health, language-teaching and conservation sectors for the next two years. According to Tara Durham, the community development volunteer assigned to GCDO and the National Park in Antigonea, she is “pleased to be working at GCDO, in a structured organization engaged in worthwhile projects aimed at saving a historic gem.”



5. A visit from the *American School of Classical Studies at Athens and Gennadius Library Boards of Trustees* in Gjirokastra



A visit to Albania by the *American School of Classical Studies at Athens and Gennadius Library Boards of Trustees* included in their itinerary a trip to Gjirokastra. Invited by the Butrint Foundation and the International Center for Albanian Archaeology, nineteen Board members visited the centre of the bazaar, the Castle, the National

Museum of Armaments and the Zekate House in Gjirokastra. They were welcomed by the Mayor as well as the host organization, the GCDO. The purpose of the visit was to explore the challenges facing Gjirokastra's built heritage.

6. Cleaning the Gjirokastra Castle



Before the cleaning

The GCDO undertook, with the collaboration of the Regional Directorate of National Culture in Gjirokastra, the cleaning of long-standing debris in various parts of the Castle including the Bektashi shrine.



After the cleaning

The clean-up will be followed by vegetation clearance and the installation of garbage bins. Public awareness to stop the repeated dumping of rubbish in this area is a necessity.

7. Gjirokastra.org

A bi-lingual web-site (Albanian and English) dedicated to promoting Gjirokastra to the outside world was launched recently by GCDO. Browsers can read about the history of the town, the sites worth visiting, and acquire useful information about visiting and staying in Gjirokastra. The website is the result of a year long collaboration between Peace Corps volunteers, academics and GCDO staff. A part of the web-site is dedicated to the work of the GCDO in Gjirokastra. For more information, please visit www.gjirokastra.org.

8. A Communist shelter as a tourist attraction

A whole system of refuge in cases of war (including atomic attacks) built during communism in Albania, is aimed to be, by the end of this year, another tourist attraction in Gjirokastra. The Municipality of Gjirokastra invited GCDO to turn these 50 rooms into a visit able area. The news has attracted a lot of attention both locally and nationally. The goal is to have a local Museum on the Cold war: by doing so another layer of Heritage is made present in the Ottoman town.



9. University of Pennsylvania in Gjirokastra

Four Faculty and students from the Department of Landscape Architecture at the University of Pennsylvania were in Gjirokastra to propose an urban landscape master plan. Their work focused on utilizing and improving the existing historic pedestrian path system to create a series of linked public open spaces that will improve the urban experience for local residents and visitors alike. In addition, the team is developing a preliminary design to suggest conceptual open space improvements at the Castle and Ceriz Topulli, and creating a pedestrian walk to unify the two places.

The team has also walked the trail from Asim Zeneli to Antigonea, and will offer suggestions for its development and improvement.

10. Gjirokastra's tourist numbers increase

So far, according to the GCDO's Tourist Information Center, around 4431 tourists visited the town this year, April, May, June and July being the busiest months. This is a 37% increase on last year's figures. Based on a UNDP/GCDO 2007 survey, tourists are satisfied with their visit in Gjirokastra and they would recommend friends to come. They think Gjirokastra has friendly people, nice landscape and architectural

heritage, yet, it is not so likely they will return. They don't have access to many different activities, except walking in the city and visiting museums, so this can be a reason why they wouldn't return. They tend to not spend a lot of money, but would have been willing to spend more.

Activity	Percentage
Museum visit	70.0%
Photography	57.0%
City tours	46.5%
Hiking/walking	39.0%
Other	14.5%
Local musical/cultural event	7.5%
Picnicking	5.5%
Bicycling/Mt. Biking	2.0%
Horseback riding	0.5%

11. Youth of Gjirokastra in the International Museum Day

On the 18th of May, international day of Museum, GCDO and “Friends of Monuments” association, from the Asim Zeneli High School Gjirokastra, gathered for the “Chronicle on Stone” Museum expected to be created soon in the Castle by GCDO and its partners. The project idea of the museum was shared with “Friends of Monuments” and afterwards there was a nice debate on the role the Museum will have to unite the Gjirokastra youth with its heritage. Based on a GCDO survey a lot more is required to do so that the city of stone and its youth are brought closer.



- Gjirokastra youth is not sure for their future in Gjirokastra. Only 16 % of interviewees see their future in Gjirokastra, 20 % answered negatively and 47 % answered “maybe”.

- Only 39 % of the interviewees answered positively to the question “Do you like living in Gjirokastra?”, meanwhile 38 % are unsure and the rest, 23 % are sure they do not like it.
- Gjirokastra youth believes that Gjirokastra has values and tourism potential (79%) and they think that their greatest attractions are the “Characteristic Tower Houses” (80%). Although sceptical of their future in Gjirokastra, they are considering as their future professions being tour guides, architects, engineers in Gjirokastra.

**Thank you for taking the time to read this
newsletter.**

** If you would like more information about the GCDO and our efforts to help Gjirokastra, please contact the Director, Sadi Petrela on spetrela@gjirokastra.org or telephone 00355 6920 78767.*