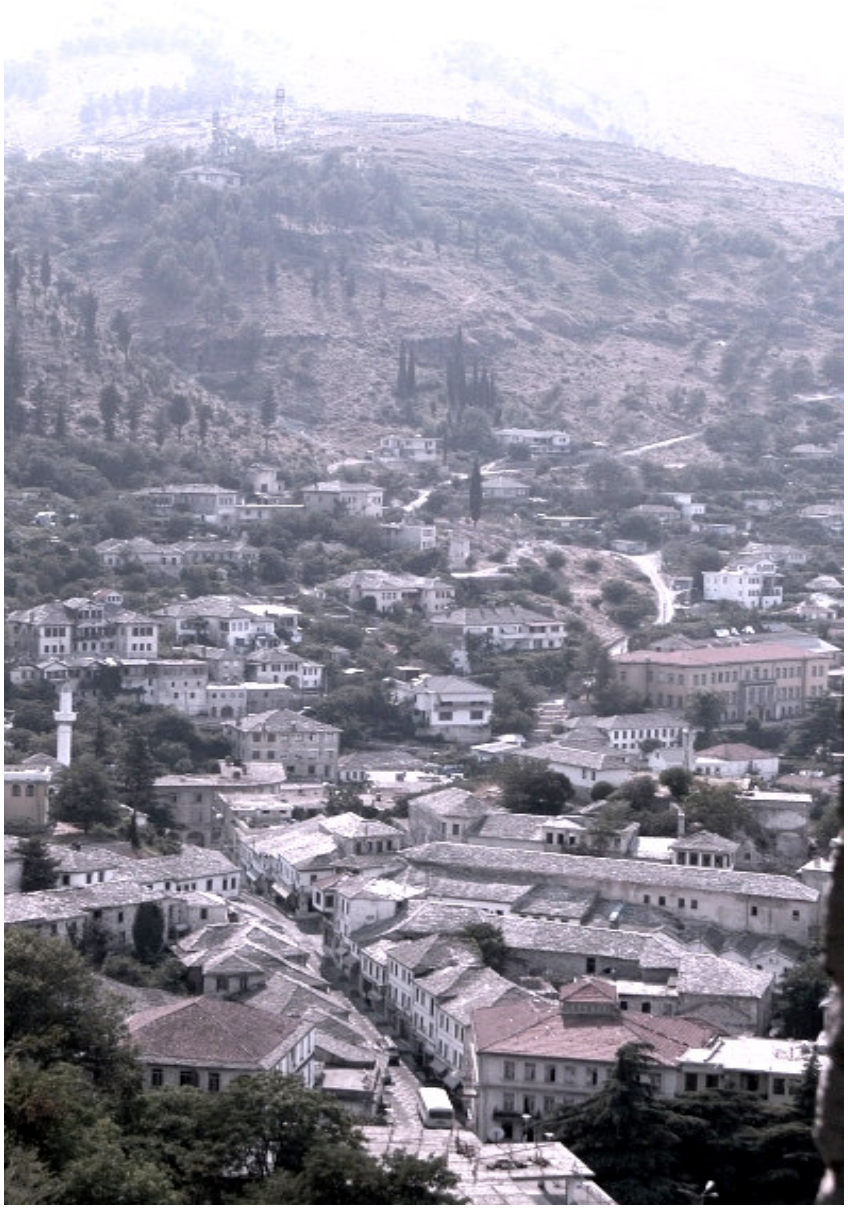
Gjirokastra Conservation
and Development
Organization



2007 Report
The Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization

If Gjirokastra was recognized by the "world" for its values in 2005, it started to be visited by the "world" in 2007. This UNESCO world heritage site welcomed not only a rising number of international tourists but also many researchers and conservationists keen to see and to understand the city better.

The Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization feels proud to have given its zealous contribution during 2007; a year we consider a turning point in the history of saving Gjirokastra - the city of stone.

In 2007, the GCDO focused its efforts on conservation and preservation of the city while also providing much needed tourist services and infrastructure to the growing tourist trade. It has also undertaken a wide diversity of activities to encourage a new sense of civic pride.

The GCDO acted as a catalyst to attract other donors and organizations to undertake much-needed work in the city. Wherever possible the GCDO works in partnership with local, national and international organizations. Our belief is that protecting the heritage of Gjirokastra is not only a matter for local institutions but a national and international challenge.

The GCDO became a registered Albanian NGO in 2007. It would like to thank its donors, in particular the Packard Humanities Institute and the Philanthropic Collaborative (New York); as well as its very active trustees - Professor Richard Hodges, Daniel Renton , Oliver Gilkes and Diana Ndrenika. We would also like to thank our collaborators - the International Centre for Albanian Archaeology (Tirana), The Butrint Foundation (London) and our many supporters and partners in Gjirokastra. Finally a special thank you to our hard-working GCDO team - Elenita Roshi, Alketa Qamo, Enkeleda Roze and Lubjana Baoja. A warm thank you also to David Bragg , Kate Yarhouse, (now in Boston, USA) and Margaret Sheridan, Peace Corps Volunteers from USA that have helped us immeasurably in 2007.

Please find below a summary of the GCDO's main achievements in 2007.

Sadi Petrela,
Director of the GCDO,

1- Tourist Information Center (TIC)

The Tourist Information Center – a GCDO initiative in partnership with a local businessman - was opened on March 18, 2007, just in time for the tourist season. Located in the Old Bazaar area it has become a popular drop-in for all passing tourist traffic. During 2007, open 7 days a week, the centre welcomed and served more than six thousand tourists and provided them with information leaflets, maps, guides as well as walking trail routes around the city. A special thanks is owed to the peace corps volunteers for helping with this important initiative and the "Old Bazar Travel and Tour Agency".

2 – Craft Shop and Fair

When the shop was inaugurated on May 18th in the Old Bazaar neighborhood, a local vendor said that it was the jewel of the Bazaar area. He was right! The shop is located in an old building which was refurbished by the GCDO specifically to house the new venture.

The shop, along with the tourist information centre, has provided a real boost to local trade and the tourism experience as well as generating new interest and activity in the local craft trade. The Centre not only sells local crafts thereby creating new revenue but it provides craft manufacture and marketing training. It has proved very popular

with tourists and local citizens who can now buy local crafts as well as handicrafts manufactured in other regions of Albania.
A local artisan fair held in September in the old bazaar re-created the bustle and colour of an Ottoman street bazaar. This popular event will be repeated in 2008.

3 – Restoration and Volunteer Camp

With so many traditional houses abandoned and used as dumping grounds, and with the increasing need to clean-up the old town, volunteerism is a MUST. Local initiatives received a great boost when the GCDO organized for thirty one young people from fourteen different countries to spend a month in Gjirokastra helping with the effort to clean and restore the city.

The first "volunteer camp" in July was organized in partnership with Civil Service International. It saw volunteers opening a tourist path to the town's Castle; cleaning vegetation from the castle's open air stage (where the famous Albanian
Soprano, Inva Mula, gave a concert) as well as around the Zekate House, one of the most important "fortified tower houses" in Gjirokastra.

In September, the GCDO, in conjunction with the Swedish NGO, Cultural Heritage without Borders, organized a "restoration camp" where sixteen students from the Balkans learned building conservation skills. Under the tutelage of international trainers, the students repaired woodwork and plaster at the Zekate house and in a traditional shop in the Old Bazaar. These skills are essential for the on-going conservation of the old town and it is hoped that more restoration camps will be initiated in the future.

4- A museum for Gjirokastra

Gjirokastra has been a Museum town since 1961; the town deserves this title but it also deserves to have a proper museum that fully reflects the rich history of the town, the Drino Valley and the many important archaeological sites that lie in the environs.

Thanks to the Philanthropic Collaborative of New York, a project to research and design a museum started in late May 2007 and it is still under way. The work focused around a building survey undertaken by a team from Siena University and an investigation of all known historical archives in Albania to compile material which will be of use in a modern and popular museum. The Museum will be called – *A Chronicle in Stone* – and aims to fully interpret the rich city of the region for Albanians and foreigners alike. It is planned that the museum should be located in tall vaulted galleries within the heart of the castle. The Albanian government has pledged significant sums to re-roof part of the castle as co-funding for the project.

5- The Castle – improving the visitor's experience

The Gjirokastra Castle is an extraordinary historic monument with nearly 2000 years of construction phases and history. In 2007, with funds from the Philanthropic Collaborative (New York), the GCDO worked to improve the visitor's experience and appreciation of the monument. Early in 2008 illustrated interpretive panels will be erected at key points around the castle, while new security grilles will be placed in areas of unstable masonry. In addition a major project to install aesthetic low energy lighting in the 30 metre vaulted entrance of the castle, using roof-mounted solar energy is close to completion.

The project will be the first of its kind in Albania and will provide uninterrupted green energy and considerable financial savings, in addition to lighting the vaulted gallery with its impressive array of 20th century field guns. The lighting project is funded by the Packard Humanities Institute, the Philanthropic Collaborative and the Global Environmental Facility.

6- Gjirokastra promoted internationally

The GCDO helped with the promotion of Gjirokastra in many important international events including the Tourism Fairs of Berlin and London (thanks to support of USAID/EDEM), the Mediterranean Archaeological Tourism Fair in Paestum, Italy; the tourism fair of Tirana and "Business to Business" meetings in Macedonia, Montenegro, and Kosova as well as in the World Heritage Site of Safranbolu, Turkey.