



Newsletter from the Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization

Issue [4] [6], August / October 2008

1. National Heritage Fair for Heritage and Artisanry



Gjirokastra hosted a national two day craft fair at the end of September which saw the Gjirokastra bazaar revert to a traditional bustling commercial centre, reminiscent of Ottoman times. The purpose of the event was to promote traditional Albanian handicrafts as well as trans-national craft links, and to encourage tourists to visit the Gjirokastra bazaar. Scores of artisans from Gjirokastra, Albania and Macedonia exhibited their crafts and hundreds of

people enjoyed the spectacle.

A roundtable was organized to discuss the state of Albanian crafts and a petition is to be sent to the Government requesting more assistance for the sector, including the making of a law that would provide support to artisans. A delegation from Kosova also attended.

This is the second year of the National Fair for Heritage and Artisanry which was organized by the Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization (GCDO) with the support of the Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports in partnership with the Municipality of Gjirokastra. The aim is to make this fair an annual activity and to use it as a forum to boost traditional artisan skills which benefit local people in a sustainable way. Immediately following the National Heritage Fair, the GCDO participated in International Joinery Fair in Tirana, organized by GTZ at the beginning of October.



2. Cultural Events in the Historic Town as part of the National Heritage Day



The Gjirokastra International Folklore Festival took place in the “Odeon” open stage at the same time as the Heritage Fair. Ten folk groups from Albania, Croatia, Italy, Greece, Kosova and Macedonia participated in the festival which attracted large audiences from throughout Albania.

Meanwhile the Argjiro Association organized “*The meeting of two worlds*”, a series of classical concerts in the Castle. In the Castle’s art gallery an exhibition of paintings by the well-known painter, Bashkim Ahmeti was hosted.



3. The 2nd international restoration camp in Gjirokastra



For two weeks in mid-September, 40 students from the Balkans and Sweden took part in a “restoration camp” in Gjirokastra. The camp aims to teach students how to conduct research into the history and construction of buildings prior to their conservation. This year the camp focused on 2 buildings (A and B category) of Babameto Family, preparing technical surveys for them. Prior to this, a great effort was made to clean these

two houses (and a third one of Shahu Family) by long-standing debris. This is the first step of a program which will ultimately see these buildings being restored. The restoration camp is a joint project of Cultural Heritage without Borders, the Swedish Royal School of Fine Arts and the GCDO and supported by SIDA – the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency. The Institute of Monuments of Culture presented in the camp by Professor Emin Riza is an active partner in the project.

4. The National Restoration Council has approved new interpretive signage for the castle as well as solar powered lighting

These important projects will see the vaulted entrance gallery of the castle illuminated by an array of photovoltaic lighting panels mounted on the castle roof (this project is being joint funded by the GCDO and **GEF**), as well as interpretive signage around the castle walls – both of which will vastly improve the visitor’s experience. Both projects, funded by the New York based Philanthropic Collaborative, are scheduled to be completed by the end of the year. Meanwhile the GCDO continues its program to remove damaging vegetation around the castle walls.

5. “A Chronicle in Stone” – A new museum for Gjirokastra Castle

A proposal to create a new museum inside Gjirokastra Castle has been finalized. The new museum, provisionally entitled “A Chronicle in Stone” aims to chronicle the fascinating history of Gjirokastra and the wider region in a modern and appealing way. It will serve as an epicenter of a tourist’s visit to the region and help inform the visitor about all aspects of its social, cultural and political history. A detailed proposal has been published and fundraising will begin this autumn jointly with the local and central government. Electronic copies of the proposal both in English and in Albanian are attached to the newsletter: hard copies available at GCDO.



6. Stairs restoration project

An important stone stairway next to Gjirokastra's Asim Zeneli High School is to be restored and re-cobbled. The project, funded by GCDO and the Municipality of Gjirokastra, will convert an area that has been formally strewn with rubbish, concrete and rubble. It will become an important new scenic route through the historical old town, and give access to the Zekate House and the Ethnographic Museum.



7. A better year for tourism in Gjirokastra: 135% more tourists in Gjirokastra during the month of September



Over 10,000 tourists visited Gjirokastra during the period, January – October 2008. According to the TIC and Castle's data, September had the highest number of tourists for this year - an increase of 135 % on last year's September figures. This photo, taken in the Art Gallery inside the castle, shows the expanding geographical origin of visitors to Gjirokastra. Here visitors from Japan perform a traditional dance during a castle visit.

Meanwhile, the restoration of the bazaar and other important houses in Gjirokastra will hopefully increase the attractiveness of the town. A good sign of this is the opening of a new shop of the Antigonea Artisan Association in the Bazaar of Gjirokastra. This association manages a small wool processing workshop established with the support of a Norwegian association, and sells carpets, shawls, sweaters, and bags produced by traditional techniques.



8. Favorable foreign media coverage and better promotion of Gjirokastra

As part of their efforts to promote Albania and especially Butrint and Gjirokastra as heritage Centers, the GCDO and the Butrint Foundation welcomed the British journalist David Aaronovitch to Butrint and Gjirokastra: The visit which was coordinated with USAID/EDEM, was a big success and resulted in very favorable coverage for Albania. URL link

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/travel/destinations/europe/article4782605.ece>



Also in cooperation with USAID/Albania, GCDO met with members of an assessment team from the Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance (GSTA) who visited Gjirokastra and the surrounding region to develop a more thorough understanding of the tourism and private sector development context in the area and the local needs for improving the tourism system in Albania., the GSTA team's assessment includes an in depth

examination of governance, economic, civil society, and environmental issues affecting Albania's tourism development. Gjirokastra and its surrounding areas such as Asim Zeneli, Antigonea, and Saraqinisht were visited and identified as destinations with considerable potential for tourism growth. The GSTA team integrated by Jim Phillips, Gary Lazor, Juan Luna and Nevila Popa were extremely grateful for the assistance provided by GCDO.

In addition to that, in 18 October, GCDO welcomed a 35-member group of geographers from Holland who visited Albania in order to update the "In your pocket guide" for Albania. The City of Stone was one of the more special and attractive cities of their Albanian tourist itinerary. *" All participants thoroughly enjoyed the visit and I am sure that they will all recommend a visit to Albania to their friends and family. It because of the input of you, the local contacts, that the trip became such a success - so thank you for taking the time to help our group understand Albania better "* Jeroen Van Marle the leader of the group wrote to the GCDO and Tourist Information Center in Gjirokastra.



9. A Gjirokastra - Antigonea hiking trail.

Members of the GCDO have embarked on a project to create a hiking trail, approx. 2 hours in duration, linking the UNESCO site of Gjirokastra with the archaeological national park of Antigonea. The trail is being mapped with GPS and will be marked with interpretive panels at key points. The aim is to provide a trail that can be enjoyed both by members of the community as well as tourists. The trail is part of the GCDO's efforts to integrate sustainable and eco-tourism development in the area.

10. New Peace Corps Volunteer arrives at GCDO

The GCDO is proud to announce the arrival of a new Peace Corps Volunteer, Allan Zaretsky, who joined the GCDO staff in early October. The Peace Corps is an initiative by the United States government to deploy citizen volunteers to work as teachers, health care professionals, and organizational development consultants in developing countries. Allan will be with the organization until the summer of 2010. He had originally begun his service in the Republic of Georgia, but due to the conflict with Russia was evacuated and reassigned to the GCDO in Gjirokastra. Originally from New York City, he completed his studies in political science and international relations at Northwestern University in Chicago in 2005. Before joining the Peace Corps he had been working as a community organizer in New York and Connecticut. He is excited to be helping the GCDO with its goal of conserving and promoting historic 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.*