

Newsletter from Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization

Issue [3] [18], July / September 2011

1. The Fifth Cultural Heritage and Craft Fair



The Fifth National Cultural and Craft Fair took place in Gjirokastra from 30 September until 2 October. For three days the cobbled streets of the Bazaar, free of traffic, were filled with citizens and visitors who became acquainted with the handiworks of 120 artisans from all over Albania and Kosovo.

The fair is the largest and longest running events for Albanian traditional

handicrafts, and remains an important event for the development of cultural heritage in Gjirokastra. A special portion of the fair was dedicated to local traditional culinary dishes, which support public interest in regional cuisine.

Each Craft Fair, an artisan is selected for their exceptional handicraft products. This year, first prize for the best artisanal product was received by Agron Brahim from Mitrovica (Kosovo) for the production of a dress with traditional motifs.

The fair was organized by GCDO in cooperation with the Municipality of Gjirokastra and supported by the Agency for Support of Civil Society.



2. Trends of increasing tourism in Gjirokastra - public debate



During the month of August, GCDO conducted a tourism survey in Gjirokastra, by gathering data from foreign tourists. The information gleaned from this survey was compared with a similar study conducted in 2007. The data shows that the number of tourists who visit Gjirokastra has increased, and the

amount of days visitors stay in Gjirokastra is rising year to year. This trend is very promising, but efforts are needed to sustain and foster this improvement. GCDO tourism coordinator Enkeleida Roze said that there is now a paramount need to develop a strategy to continue to encourage the increase of longer stays in Gjirokastra by visitors.

The survey results were utilized during a public debate organized by GCDO in cooperation with the Municipality of Gjirokastra, the event also included representatives from institutions dealing with tourism and business. After the debate, participants committed themselves for the coming year, to make a joint effort to collect regular statistics on tourism. This information will become the basis for a strategy on future development of tourism in Gjirokastra. A tourism conference will be held later in the year and is expected to confirm this initiative.

3. Key role of handicrafts in the revitalization of the historic cities – second workshop of EVAH project

In the second workshop under the European Values in Heritage (EVAH) Project, GCDO participated with its staff as well as 11 officials from Gjirokastra, Berat and Tirana. This workshop was organized by MATA, the Macedonian Artisan Trade Association, and took place in Ohrid, Macedonia.



GCDO introduced its multi-year program that has brought the creation of the Craft Centre in Gjirokastra, increasing and better marketing of the artisan production, training of artisans and the revival of the Gjirokastra Bazaar. Participants brought their experiences related to the revitalization of the three cities where the partner organizations in the workshop came from: Ioannina, Prizren, and Ohrid.

Meanwhile, EVAH consortium of partner organizations has already started preparation for other activities of the 18 month EVAH project. These activities include the publication of the guidelines for the management of historic cities, the production of an educational DVD and booklet about the values and challenges for the respective cities participating in the project, and also the opening of a traveling exhibition with works by four artists from the project cities.

4. New handicraft products exhibition inaugurated



An exhibition with new products based on craft traditions and motifs of Gjirokastra was inaugurated in the GCDO Craft Centre. The exhibition featured a collection of 40 new models that included various garments, accessories, and ornaments produced by 12 local artisans, during one month training under the guidance of a qualified fashion designer. These models will

be presented in a catalog and then will be part of an exhibition that will open in Tirana in the framework of the cultural activities at the "German October Days".

The project implemented by GCDO was supported by the Tirana office of the German Agency for Cooperation GIZ. Part of the implementation of the project was the completion and revitalization of the appearance of the bazaar Craft Centre in Gjirokastra, which was based on traditional Gjirokastra interiors.

This project and several projects that were developed in the last 2 years in the Craft Centre are also steps forward for the artisans to organize themselves. The goal is that soon there will be a crafts association in Gjirokastra. For the development of such, GCDO organized a round table with participation of artisans from Albania and Kosovo and their representative associations. The roundtable on "Self-organization -

chances and challenges" brought different experiences for cooperation in terms of production, product development and marketing. Groups of artisans in different districts of Albania have taken important steps toward self-organization, but still are missing a national craft organization.

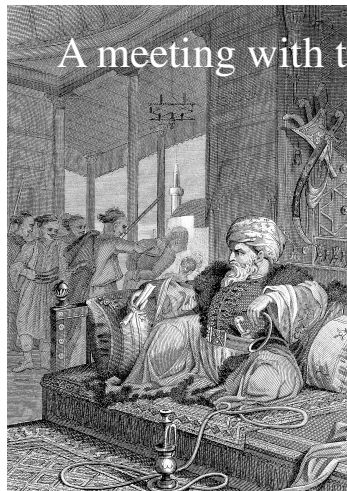
5. New steps for creating the museum Chronicle in Stone



The project for the creation of the Museum "Chronicle in Stone" has entered its final phase. Work is being conducted on a first draft design of the look of the museum. The draft will provide a proposal of the contents, collection of photographs, and documents from archives. All three of these elements constitute the "raw

material" that will be subject to review by specialists and specialized institutions in Tirana, Gjirokastra.

The museum proposal should also be discussed by locals in public consultations. The first consultations were made with local journalists and children of elementary schools and were very useful and informative. GCDO in cooperation with the Municipality of Gjirokastra, which will be the administrator of the museum, invited the public to contribute with suggestions, comments or objects that can be used for the new museum. The working group intends to inaugurate the new museum in early 2012 on the eve of the 100 year jubilee anniversary of National Independence.



A meeting with the Pasha

The Vizier was a short man, about five feet five inches in height, and very fat, though not particularly corpulent. He had a very pleasing face, fair and round, with blue quick eyes, not at all settled into a Turkish gravity. His beard was long and white, and such a one as any other Turk would have been proud of; though he, who was more taken up with his guests than himself, did not continue looking at it, nor smelling and stroking it, as is usually the custom of his countrymen, to fill up the pauses of conversation. He was not very magnificently dressed, except that his high turban, composed of many small rolls, seemed of fine gold muslin, and his attaghan, or long dagger, was studded with brilliants...

John Hobhouse (1786-1869), British writer and traveller.

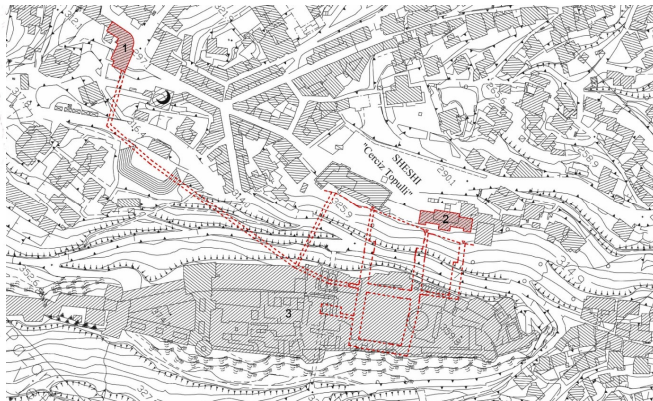
By CR Cockerell

6. The museum project in the Cold War tunnel under the Castle of Gjirokastra

The first phase of the tourism project to use the tunnels built during the communist system, located under the Castle of Gjirokastra, was completed in September.

This phase included a geological and topographic study, and the preparation of plans for a water and ventilation system. GCDO, in cooperation with the Municipality of Gjirokastra has already completed the restoration of the lighting system, which has enabled visits to the tunnel by tourist groups. There is great interest for this project,

because it will immerse visitors into the period between 1970 and 1980, the height of communist Albania's isolation.



The second phase of the project begins with the preparation of the draft proposal to turn the tunnel into a Cold War museum. A community survey, carried out for the Gjirokastra population and local decision makers will help to understand the local community's opinions and expectations for such a museum.

Jonathan Eaton, a young Canadian with a Masters degree in Anthropology, has offered to work as a volunteer to assist GCDO in the preparation of the project proposal. In the illustration you can see the tunnel extension (with red stripes) as it is located under the castle and near the main square of 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.*