

Greetings from Gjirokastra! We wish you all well in 2009 and hope that you will continue to support our work to conserve and regenerate the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Gjirokastra. In December Gjirokastra looked wonderful under snow: have a look at some of its photos in this link:

<http://www.gjirokastra.org/flash/gallery/gallery1>



Please find below news of our GCDO activities over the last 3 months. If you have missed our previous newsletters, you can find them on our web-site: www.gjirokastra.org

1. "A Chronicle of Stone" – the new Museum for Gjirokastra fundraising campaign starts successfully

Fundraising for the new museum which is to be located in Gjirokastra Castle, started in earnest in the last quarter of 2008. There has been much interest in the proposal (which can be viewed online http://www.gjirokastra.org/pdf_files/final_museum_proposal.pdf)



and a variety of donors, international organizations, Embassies and Albanian companies have expressed interest in being involved. The Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports (MTCYS) has pledged USD 200 000 for the repair of the castle roof after considering a technical proposal submitted by GCDO: this will give a boost to the future efforts for the revitalization of the Castle. Work is expected to start soon. GCDO regards

this as a good example of how Civil Society and the Government can have synergy in saving Albanian heritage.

The Philanthropic Collaborative New York and the Packard Humanities Institute have donated generously towards the project. Our well known writer Ismail Kadare has agreed to "gift" his book title "Chronicle on stone" as the name for the museum.

Phase 1 of the project, the restoration of several galleries inside the castle is expected to be completed by the end of 2009. For more information, or to find out how you can help please contact us here at the GCDO.

2. Restoration and Conservation of the Omarate Building in the Gjirokastra Bazaar

In November 2008, the National Restoration Council approved the proposal for the restoration of the Omarate House in the Gjirokastra Bazaar. The Omarate House, on the route to the Gjirokastra Castle, currently houses the Artisan Center (a GCDO project).



Now



In the future

The restoration of the building will make way for a “Craft Incubator” – a traditional craft training centre. The Artisan Center is happy to have contributed as much as possible in this project as well as in enticing artisans to open their activities in the Gjirokastra Bazaar (two new craft shops have been opened on 2008 in the Bazaar area). During 2008, AC welcomed 3123 clients 42% of which became buyers.

The project is being jointly financed by the MTCYS (which will restore roof and façade), UNDP and GCDO, and it is hoped that it will become a model for collaborative work between private owners of historical buildings and agencies helping to conserve and regenerate Gjirokastra. It can also show that revitalization can happen only when the use of the building restored is known before restoration is done.

The GCDO and UNDP would like to thank the Omarate family for their assistance so far. Just in recent days, a team from Swiss Contact visited Gjirokastra with the scope assessing the potential to collaborate in the making of the “Craft Incubator”.

3. Gjirokastra’s communist bunker - tunnel soon to be re-open to the public

The fifty room nuclear blast-proof bunker tunnel built especially for the communist party elite in Gjirokastra will be opened for tourist visits this summer. The GCDO has

completed the first phase of works – cleaning and illumination – and now efforts are being made to refurbish the command bunker-tunnel in the period manner.

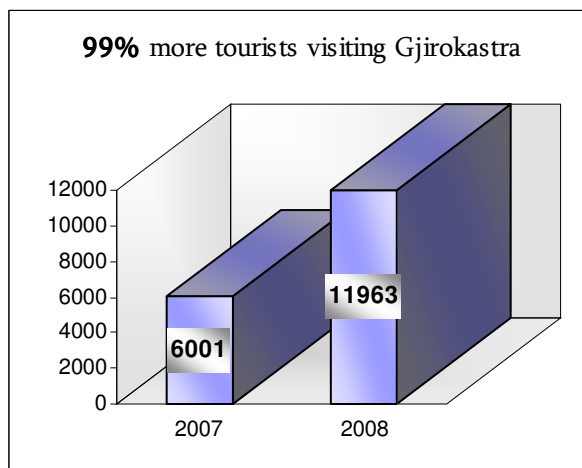
Interviews with people who constructed the buildings are taking place in order to get the detail right. The bunker - tunnel should prove a fascinating experience for those interested in Albania's communist and isolationist past. Data from the Gjirokastra Tourist Information Center last year, showed that tourists express a great interest in knowing the communist "life" of Albania.

4. Cultural Heritage without Borders and other Swedish Partners for Gjirokastra

In early November, a delegation from Gjirokastra, Mayor Flamur Bime and GCDO Director Sadi Petrela visited Sweden at the invitation of the Swedish NGO Cultural Heritage without Borders and the Royal University of Fine Arts in Stockholm. Both organizations are partners in a three year long program in Gjirokastra which will restore two monumental houses but also will gather international students to learn about traditional conservation techniques in Gjirokastra. The purpose of the visit was to see the World Heritage Town of Visby and to gain experience in the management of historic towns. Visby, in particular, has important know-how in the field of cultural heritage tourism. A round-table was held with Swedish experts to discuss issues to do with sustainable tourism and the conservation and protection of monuments.



5. Gjirokastra tourism increases in 2008



2008 saw yet another big increase in the number of tourists visiting Gjirokastra. The Tourist Information Centre, which is visited by the vast majority of tourists coming to the old town, counted 11,963 tourists – nearly a 100% increase on 2007 figures. Most of the visiting tourists were from Greece, Czech Republic, Germany and Italy.

6. GCDO gains and shares expertise from ICCROM

GCDO's Executive Manager, E. Roshi was invited by ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) to participate in a month-long training session in November for professionals working in the cultural heritage sphere. Twenty one international students took part in the Rome based course, "Sharing Conservation Decisions". The training covered a diverse set of subjects ranging from conservation of small items to the management of historic cities and participatory consultative methods. An excellent group of best experts in the heritage field were lectures during the course which was masterfully combined with field trips and case studies. GCDO, following the philosophy of this training, will be sharing the knowledge and experience gained during this training to whoever is interested. If you want to learn more please do write to eroshi@gjirokastra.org For more please look at: www.iccrom.org

7. Capacity Building at the GCDO

As part of the GCDO's efforts to improve the capacity of its staff, last year the team undertook several training sessions with the British Council (Albania), USAID EDEM and the Regional Environmental Center (REC) in Albania. 3 members of the GCDO staff participated in a week-long training in Tirana. The training session - "Master Class - Strengthening the role and function of Civil Society Organizations (CSO) to Promote Change and Enable Action in the Urban Environment"- was organized in the frame of SECTOR program of the Regional Environmental Center and was supported by SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency). Environmental issues are an important element of the sustainable development approach that GCDO has for Gjirokastra, and this training was particularly useful.

8. Gjirokastra is promoted at the World Travel Market in London



The GCDO took part in the biggest annual fair for tourism: the World Travel Market (WTM) in London in mid-November. The participation provided an excellent opportunity to directly promote the cultural heritage of Gjirokastra and Antigonea. There was plenty of interest and the number of visitors to the GCDO's web-site www.gjirokastra.org increased significantly as a result.

The Mayor of Antigonea, Ylli Muho, was very encouraged and in 2009 Antigonea Commune hopes to work jointly with Gjirokastra to attract more tourists. The participation at the WTM was made possible thanks to the invitation of the Albanian National Tourism Organization with funding from the joint UNDP-UNESCO program: “Cultural Heritage for Social and Cultural Development”. This program is financed by the Spanish Fund for the Millennium Development Goals.

9. Gjirokastra and Sustainable Tourism Planning

On January 20-22, 2009 GCDO was invited to attend a conference on sustainable tourism planning in Albania facilitated by USAID that brought together major stakeholders from Gjirokastra, Korca and the Ionian coast to meet with international donors. GCDO’s director joined Gjirokastra representatives from the media, hospitality services and local government, as well as mayor of Asim Zeneli Commune and the director of Antigonea Archaeological Park,



in representing the city at the conference. Participants worked in self-facilitated groups, crafting long and short term plans as they presented their visions for sustainable tourism initiatives to interested donors. The conference invite came after a positive reception from visiting Global Sustainable Tourism Alliance members last fall, when the group discussed GCDO’s initiatives in promoting sustainable tourism development.

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.*