



Newsletter from Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization

Issue [1] [16], January / March 2011

1. The Inauguration of European Values in Heritage (EVAH) Project



GCDO GCDO organized the inauguration of the European Heritage Values (EVAH) project in Gjirokastra. The project funded by the European Union, is a joint collaboration with several regional NGOs. The list of NGOs includes the Academy for Training and Technical Assistance (ATTA) in Prizren, Macedonian Artisan Trade Association (MATA) in Skopje and Egnatia Epirus Foundation (EEF) in Ioannina. The

EVAH project will help to increase awareness and improve capacities in the management of historic cities. Furthermore, the project will create synergy between participating NGOs based on European values and standards.

For more information, please visit the website: <http://sites.google.com/site/ipa129799/>

Guests invited to the EVAH inauguration included local deputies, representatives of parliamentary committees and ministries of cultural heritage, local administration and the diplomatic corps in Tirana, guests from partner countries of the project, and representatives of NGOs and citizens of Gjirokastra. Stefano Calabretta, Program Manager of Civil Society and Human Rights in the European Union Delegation in Albania, highlighted the important role that civil society organizations play in the stabilization of democracy and European integration process.

Important European initiatives such as "A Soul for Europe" and "Heritage as Opportunity"(HerO) are supportive partners of the EVAH project. Their representatives Bernhard Schneider and Matthias Ripp shared interesting insights from their own work about important European initiatives which involved civil society in conservation and revival of Cultural Heritage.

2. Revival of Craftsmanship in Gjirokastra

Ten youth from Gjirokastra, are being trained as woodcarvers and stonemasons through a project implemented by GCDO with the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. Woodcarving and stonemasonry are two locally based occupations that have contributed to the extraordinary heritage construction of Gjirokastra. The aim of these four month courses is to instill a revival of traditional crafts; by supporting the growing demand for skilled craftsmen for restoration work and artistic souvenir manufacturing.

The courses are being taught in the Craft Center.



The Craft Center was previously an abandoned building, but was restored by GCDO, and is now used as a venue for events related to craftsmanship.

Meanwhile GCDO has completed the **construction of the vocational training building** at the Regional Directorate for Vocational Training in Gjirokastra. Professional trainings for stone masons, carpenters, welders, etc. can be held in this building.

3. The Revival of Cultural Monument Houses and the Role of Citizens

"Built Heritage - privilege, obligation and development opportunities for our citizens" is a two-month long project implemented by GCDO, to build awareness and to inform citizens about their role in the revival of irreplaceable historic buildings. The project will focus on Gjirokastra and Berat, cities of the World Heritage List of UNESCO and collectively have over



Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization (GCDO), supported by Packard Humanities Institute 2

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1000 historic buildings, declared as cultural monuments. Surveys and workshops will be implemented in each of the two cities.

In addition, published guidelines will be created to address problems related to coordination efforts by citizens and institutions working with heritage in local government and business.

It is accepted and demonstrated in worldwide practice and in Albania, that only the revival and the reuse of historic buildings for the purpose of everyday life, can enable the preservation of these buildings from the degradation that extinguishes their authenticity.

The program is supported by the Joint United Nations "Culture and Heritage for Social and Economic Development" and funded by the Spain Millennium Development Goals (MDG-F).

4. Iso-polyphonic song: The Voices of Children



“Obelisk” the recently named children’s group of iso-polyphonic singers, has become a very popular group in Gjirokastra. However, the group’s success has spilled over into places outside of Gjirokastra as well. EU invited “Obelisk” to Tirana on the occasion of the first anniversary of the opening of the Information Office of the European Union. The

group performed admirably in front of the dignitaries who attended the event. The children’s effort was rewarded by the overwhelming applause and praise bestowed by the dignitaries.

14 school children from middle schools are trained by the master of the iso-polyphonic singing Roland Çenko through a project funded by Vodafone Foundation and supported by the Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization (GCDO).

5. Participation in activities to develop the sustainability of Civil Society Organizations

GCDO participated to the regional conference "Civil Society Organizations and sustainability in the IPA countries" which was held in Belgrade in late March with the participation of eight countries of Western Balkans and Turkey.

The conference organized by the European Union project TACSO (Technical Assistance for Civil Society Organizations) discussed important issues of strengthening the role of these organizations by increasing their financial sustainability, organizational development, and networking relations. A visit was organized at the European center for culture and debate GRAD, which is located in an old customs warehouse built in 1884 on Sava river coast. Revival of such abandoned buildings is one of important directions of GCDO's heritage work in Gjirokastra.



GCDO attended another meeting with European Commission officials in Brussels with about 20 NGOs of the countries of Eastern Europe. The meeting is part of the "People to People" European Commission Programme.

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.*