



UNITED STATES PEACE CORPS IN ALBANIA

DESCRIPTION OF PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER SERVICE

Ralph M. Shinogle – Albania

After a competitive application process stressing applicant skills, adaptability, and cross-cultural sensitivity, Ralph M. Shinogle began Peace Corps training on March 15th, 2012, in Elbasan, Albania, and completed a twelve-week program. The training program included:

- **TECHNICAL:** The **Community and Organizational Development Project** training consisted of approximately 79 hours of training plus additional self-directed activities carried out in training communities, and a two-week practicum. The focus was on providing an Albanian context for understanding how local institutions work to serve their communities, with a focus on such topics as: the development of Albanian local government structures and their functions, the development of civil society, technical assistance skills, strategic planning, community assessment, community mobilization, project design and management, and resource development.
- **LANGUAGE:** Study of the Albanian language with emphasis on basic social communication using a community-based approach (167 hours).
- **CROSS-CULTURAL:** Instruction in communication skills and role as a facilitator in development. Exposure to community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, non-formal and adult education strategies and political structures (33 hours).
- **HEALTH:** Basic medical training and information. Preventive medicine, nutrition and mental health (14 hours).
- **SAFTEY:** Strategies to reduce risks at home, work and during travel (22 hours).

Mr. Shinogle successfully completed training and enrolled in Peace Corps on May 24th, 2012. He was assigned to be a Community Development Volunteer in Municipality of Himara, Albania.

Assignment After the Municipality of Himara expressed needs and requested assistance, Mr. Shinogle was selected to work with its Office of Urban Planning and Development.

Mr. Shinogle's primary assignment included working in the Municipality of Himara in the Office of Urban Planning and Development. He worked as an architect with a staff of seven employees that served approximately 12,000 permanent residents for twenty-three months.

The Office of Urban Planning and Development is a particularly critical department in the municipality at this moment considering that a new urban plan has been in the process of being set in motion since 2012. This is the first comprehensive urban plan implemented in the municipality since the fall of communism, and in many ways its first urban plan in its 3,000 year history. Considering this the Municipality has had minimal experience executing such a plan (at the time it was only one of two approved plans in all of Albania out of sixty-five municipalities); it sought insight from outside.

Mr. Shinogle mainly worked with his counterpart, Edga Rapo and under the office's director Gentian Stratobërdha (both architects). Though Mr. Shinogle worked with the office of Urban Planning and Development, his supervising authority was the mayor, Jorgo Goro.

The Municipality of Himara consists of the main town (Himara) of 4,000 inhabitants and seven other villages of varying populations that exist geographically isolated from the rest of Albania. Himara is particularly unique in that a majority of its population speak Greek as their mother tongue and often sympathize with Greece.

Achievements Mr. Shinogle worked in a variety of projects, working from a team of one other individual up to twenty:

- A NEW MEMBER IN A TIGHTLY-KNIT COMMUNITY– As the new member of the Municipality of Himara's team, Mr. Shinogle's first main projects were documenting the Castle of Himara and revisiting the previously drawn-up plans of Himara's town center with his counterpart, Edga Rapo. These served as quick introduction to the community and a fast-paced means to integrate.
 - HIMARA CASTLE PROJECT– Documenting the Himara Castle came to include building a photographic repository of its structures and breaking down the castle into three zones of need. The oldest zone (the original castle) and of the most significance, a surrounding zone that was built in the 16th Century, and the third zone, still significant and similarly old to the second zone, but in poorer condition in respect to its historical character. These zones were to simplify and prioritize needs on a basis of urgency relative to potential future projects and grants. Mr. Shinogle's work allowed the municipality to evolve its plans on what to do with this iconic castle of the region; how to preserve it and allow it to evolve in a manner that could serve future needs without marginalizing its historical integrity. Contacts with *Çati dhe Fasada* which translates to "Roofs and Facades" were established. This organization gained interest in helping to preserve the castle. Roofs and Facades is a program sponsored by the World Bank which encourages homeowners with traditional homes to restore them in a traditional manner through significant financial assistance. Roofs and Facades continues to be engaged in large amount of work in Himara.
 - HIMARA PROMENADE– Mr. Shinogle worked as a consultant for the redesign of the village center of Himara—a promenade defined by buildings facing the sea and a large open space built on top of much of the beach. The entire center of Himara has suffered from the previous implementation of a poorly designed (financially, socially, visually, and administratively). Mr. Shinogle facilitated identifying key issues with it and finding solutions with clarity and usability.
- PATRIMONY AND ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP– From nearly the beginning of Mr. Shinogle's service, he implemented the *Himara: Past. Present... and Future?* initiative to build awareness of the erratic development and foster community participation in planning. Underscored was the

intention of building awareness of things that should be considered of intrinsic cultural value and to protect them.

This initiative centered on an exhibition that he and associates compiled that displayed photographs and drawings of Himara and its seven villages through time tracing their evolution starting from 1848 to the present. Working with the community, he collected historical photographs from the schools, businesses, and individuals to assemble a “time zone”. Mr. Shinogle obtained funding with a grant that he applied for from USAID for 3,000 dollars sponsored by the municipality and in coordination with its employees and other members of the community.

Working together, the grant came to involve solidifying an unused library for the exhibition, building awareness of the library and giving it greater purpose. The grant included financing for an industrial-strength sign for the library, minor improvements for it, as well as money to be used in future grassroots projects related to *Himara: Past, Present.... and Future?*

At the end, *Himara: Past, Present.... and Future?* came to have participation from all students in the municipality along with other community members totaling well over six hundred people. This project is ongoing as of Mr. Shinogle’s departure from Himara, Albania.

- STRATEGIZING FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE– A large portion of Mr. Shinogle’s work in Himara dealt with taking care of the environment. In October of 2012, the Chamber of Italian Renewable Resources visited Himara to discuss strategies to minimize negative environmental impact. Mr. Shinogle gave a presentation on strategies he had devised with his counterpart, in particular dealing with waste management and the creation of a recycling network in the Municipality of Himara.
- WASTE MANAGEMENT PLAN– This proposal for a recycling and trash collection network in Himara broke down the municipality according to contextual needs: beaches had seasonal requirements, the urban centers needed large bins, the villages needed special considerations that the bins did not contradict with the traditional character. What resulted was a comprehensive map detailing where trash bins should go, and what type would be most appropriate. This also involved planning a campaign to introduce this unfortunately, rather foreign idea. Resultantly, the municipality ordered an additional sixty dumpsters that were distributed throughout Himara and its neighboring villages.
- DEALING WITH WASTE MANAGEMENT– Mr. Shinogle’s commitment to his community was exhibited in September of 2012 when a special meeting was called to discuss the World Bank’s investment in Himara’s wastewater treatment facilities where it was divulged that it was not going to treat the wastewater but merely push it farther into the sea. Questions at the meeting seemed to bring no better answers and it became evident that politics were in play. Mr. Shinogle took the initiative to write to the a letter to World Bank calling to attention the problems of pumping wastewater into the sea in a beach community, he was able to convince the mayor and others of consequence to sign this so it would have some gravity.
- IPA GRANTS– Meanwhile, while Mr. Shinogle was pursuing the *Himara: Past, Present... and Future?* initiative, he pursued grants and potential urban projects with the municipality’s Office of Urban Planning and Development.

Some of the largest grants Mr. Shinogle pursued with his counterpart were the IPA (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) Cross-Borders Grants each worth on average 300,000 Euros and up. As

the name suggests these grants work to facilitate cooperation and development in countries adjacent to the European Union through partnership projects. For example, one grant sought out fire-fighting equipment (Himara currently has none—and typically has very dry summers). Another grant was to document the phonemics of the Albanian Language (as well as the unique dialects of the Himara region) relative to Greek and disseminate this information in Corfu, Thessaloniki, and Himara. This also involved documenting the soundscapes (sounds in different environments), which could have been used as a tool to determine the impacts of development in natural settings. The third grant had the target of increasing investment in the community for development. This would have been accomplished developing more information about the community and reaching out to developers as well as improving some basic infrastructure.

Despite not being awarded these grants, they served successfully considering cooperation with Himara and Greece prospered with a newly established dialogue between them.

About one month after the grants' submittals, the independent group *Impel*, reached out to build a new tourism website for the Municipality of Himara, without charge as a gesture of good-will and future cooperation. Mr. Shinogle accompanied the mayor of Himara and other related employees to a discussion in Janina, Greece for introductions in February 2013. Several weeks later Impel visited Himara to iron out the details of an agreement. At the same time, the Municipality of Janina reached out to key figures in the Municipality of Himara to learn how they might be able to collaborate in the future. After several smoke-filled meetings at the City Hall in Janina friendly contacts were established that have continued. These types of interactions are integral in Himara's development as it has few resources; Himara has always felt a strong connection with Greece, while Greece has been more hesitant to reciprocate the feelings. This was a healthy step.

- A NEW VILLAGE CENTER FOR PALASA– One of Mr. Shinogle's greater undertakings began after he was invited to redesign the village center of Palasa. Palasa is one of the seven villages of Himara, sitting over 600 meters above sea level. Palasa has an old history (Julius Ceasar landed his troops here in 48 BCE), but has diminished to become a sleepy village with a magnificent 400 year-old sycamore tree and a 200 year old church. With increasing tourism in the region, there are hopes that Palasa may become a popular destination with tourists.

A New Village Center for Palasa became an involved project that Mr. Shinogle led the way through the design process. Starting with a learning topographer Mr. Shinogle took a map of single elevation points, turned it into a usable topographic map and on that designed a functional village center. As Palasa has existed, it was a mish-mash of piecemeal projects with no connectivity to its most important attributes (it existed as different strata) and with no truly communal gathering space. He took this, and gave it a large central plaza, articulated movement, and produced secondary multi-use spaces that adjoined the plaza. These spaces included outdoor seating, a theater, and a garden. He produced construction documents totaling thirty-pages and other documentation outlining this project. This project was extraordinarily well-received by his office and the mayor.

Notable aspects of the project are use of almost only local materials, traditional building techniques, and regional characteristics of southern Albanian villages fused together in a contemporary/timeless manner.

- ENGLISH CLASSES– Amongst the many projects of Mr. Shinogle's, perhaps the most rewarding times were when he was asked to give English lessons to the students at Scholeio Omiros (School

of Homer). He taught students from 3rd to 6th grades, this was particularly appreciated as there was no English teacher at the time.

- ARTICLES FOR XIMARA PRESS– Mr. Shinogle worked with ximara-press.com writing articles about the community, from the point of view of an outsider. These discussed problems in the community and with the intent of bringing people together. Ongoing problems with infrastructure, land ownership, and civil society were brought into the open for discussion through this avenue. The articles have brought together approximately fourteen active people in the community who seek solutions together.
- ARCHITECTURE CONFERENCE– On the 27th of March 2014, Mr. Shinogle participated in a green architecture conference in Skopje, Macedonia organized by Peace Corps Macedonia at the University of Saints Cyril and Methodius. He led a discussion with approximately 100 students on green architecture, its challenges and how it might be viewed. He used two essays for the discussion's framework that challenged preconceptions of Green Architecture and offered alternative perspectives on it. He imparted new ideas upon the audience.

At the time of Mr. Shinogle's departure, he had utilized his grant Himara: Past. Present.... and Future? to print off brochures and disseminate information to all the students in the Municipality (over 500 brochures) leading discussions on environmental stewardship and the importance of taking care of the environment. It was very well received by students and teachers alike and triggered many discussions at home. The community library in Himara is now more firmly established, and is seeing its numbers pick up. Upon Mr. Shinogle's departure, Himara: Past. Present.... and Future? was an ongoing force in the community. Mr. Shinogle will be missed in his community, he was involved and cared deeply about his community, Himara.

Of Interest Peace Corps volunteers need to wear many hats. They represent Americans, and their communities scrutinize their interactions heavily. In such regard, the relationships Mr. Shinogle built living abroad warrant mention:

- FAMILY IN LIBRAZHD, ALBANIA– Mr. Shinogle was first introduced to Albanian culture when he moved into the household of his Albanian host family: a grandmother, the two parents, and their children; Orgesi was a boy of fifteen years and his sister Orgita was of thirteen years. Mr. Shinogle moved in with complete strangers and ten weeks later left as a member of their family. He would make meals with the children, play infinitely long card games, and help the children with their English assignments. Not knowing Albanian and with the children's limited English, communication was a humorous challenge at first that was overcome finally as Mr. Shinogle's Albanian improved. They maintain regular contact and he visits them whenever he has the chance. (For Christmas 2013, they sent with him many socks that they had knitted, a pair for himself, his mother and another two pairs for each of his future wives!)
- HOME, HIMARA– Mr. Shinogle carried his care from his host site, Librazhd to his home of two years, Himara. He was quickly absorbed into the community in part by his commitment to it and in part to the memorable people he met. His counterpart, Egda Rapo and her mother quickly became another family to him. Egda Rapo's mother, Enriketa Rapo taught him a significant amount of the Albanian language he learned and proceeded to teach him the basics of the Greek language (which is dominantly spoken in the region). Mr. Shinogle's relationship with the Rapo family led him to opportunities in Himara and became an introduction for some of Mr. Shinogle's friendships that will

likely endure long past his time in Himara. Mr. Shinogle made many good friendships in Himara, some were built from taking photographs at a baptism, others were built listening to others' ambitions for Himara; caring and helping whenever the opportunities allowed. Mr. Shinogle "Rralffi" built many ties that reflect highly on the United States.

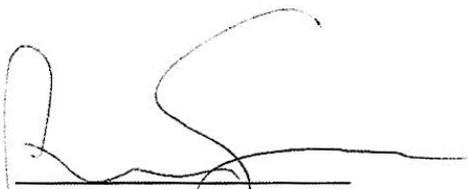
Specialized Training Mr. Shinogle completed the Project and Design Management training in May of 2012. He achieved a rating of Intermediate in Albanian language proficiency interview at the Close of Service Conference held February 17-20, 2013.

Leadership As a Peace Corps volunteer one always must exhibit leadership. Of particular note were *Himara: Past, Present.... and Future?* and A New Village Center for Palasa which he led.

Certification

This is to certify that in accordance with Executive Order No. 11103 of April 10, 1963, Ralph M. Shinogle served satisfactorily as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Mr. Shinogle's service ended on April 30th, 2014. Mr. Shinogle is eligible to be appointed as a career-conditional employee in the competitive civil service on a non-competitive basis. This benefit under the Executive Order extends for a period of one year after termination of Volunteer service, except that the employing agency may extend the period for up to three years for a former Volunteer who enters military service, pursues studies at a recognized institution of higher learning, or engages in other activities that, in the view of the appointing agency, warrant extension of the period.

Pursuant to section 5(f) of the Peace Corps Act, 22 USC 2504(f), as amended, any former Volunteer employed by the United States Government following his Peace Corps Volunteer service is entitled to have any period of satisfactory Peace Corps Volunteer service credited for purposes of retirement, seniority, reduction in force, leave, and other privileges based on length of Government service. That service shall not be credited toward completion of the probationary or trial period or completion of any service requirement for career appointment.



Ralph Shinogle
Peace Corps Volunteer

Group 15



Earl Wall
Country Director