

## **OPEN LETTER TO THE CLIMBING COMMUNITY,** *Dec. 2020*

### **Why we feel we need to explain a few things at this moment:**

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Last summer the municipality of South Kynouria announced plans to create a set of rules for climbing in Leonidio in collaboration with Aris T, including the publication of a new guidebook. In light of these events we, the Panjika Cooperative, would like to take this opportunity to share some insight into this situation.

### **Our motivation:**

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Since we started being active in the area in 2013, it has been our purpose to create an infrastructure for climbing and other activities that allows locals and people from all over the world to enjoy the exceptional rock in Leonidio, while also respecting the local community, preserving nature, and promoting an open and honest conversation between climbers, bolters and the local people. We have made every effort to keep the area safe, to develop crags to a high standard, and to reduce the danger of accidents.

### **Our obstacles:**

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Ever since we started developing Leonidio as a climbing destination, communication with the municipality has not been easy, mainly because the approach and the values they pursue are very different from those at the heart of the Panjika Cooperative. The main aim of the municipality and the developers they support is to drive tourism. When it comes to bolting this means favouring quantity over quality, which includes bolting an entire sector without testing or properly cleaning the routes, over-grading, grid bolting, chipping holds etc. However, while we share the wish to make Leonidio more accessible to visitors, this approach fails to take into account any concerns about sustainability, our impact on nature, and climbing tradition. Leonidio is already such an attractive climbing destination, with so much incredible quality rock. There is space for all types of climbers to enjoy what it has to offer and no need to grid bolt and over-grade to make it more appealing.

## Why we publish our guidebooks in the first place:

We never received financial support from the municipality, so publishing a guidebook would provide us with the financial independence to continue developing Leonidio in accordance with our values and ethics. Our vision was to create a climbing destination that did not follow the model of commercial tourism.

All the profits from our first Panjika guidebook were used to pay for the local infrastructure, bolting, and maintenance. Panjika and friends have contributed to the bolting of some 700 routes, financing around €53,000 worth of equipment. Much of this has been generated through the sales of our two guidebooks and some €10,000 came out of our own members' pockets. Not to mention the endless volunteer hours we have committed to bolting, cleaning routes, collecting information, and supporting the local community via social projects.

At no point in the process of the publication of their new guidebook has the municipality approached us, sought cooperation or communication. Instead, they took the information that we have provided, meaning our time and our labour, in an unethical way and used this information in the production of their own book.

It is not our intention to claim ownership. We have always been open with the information we have because we believe it should be shared, and ultimately it will only benefit climbing in Leonidio. However, the municipality took advantage of this to benefit just one person, not the wider community. Aris's guidebook promises to provide just €20,000 of funding, despite having all the financial support from the municipality and a large part of the information already collected by us. We, therefore, ask all climbers coming to Leonidio to be aware of this situation before making a choice to support the new guidebook.



## Regarding cooperation:

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The publication of the municipality's guidebook creates an atmosphere of unhealthy competition, instead of putting this energy into things that are really needed. To be clear, it is not our goal to work against any other initiatives. On the contrary, we are convinced that the broader the community of contributors, the more knowledge and experience is brought to the area, which is ultimately better for Leonidio. But we want to do this in a cooperative, not a competitive way. So far, every time the municipality has asked us for "cooperation", they wanted us to work for them and not with them\*.

The same goes for any rules around climbing in Leonidio. We don't want Leonidio to become a standardised climbing area governed by rules created by just one "expert". There should be room for all climbing and bolting styles in order to create a place for every climber with its own unique character.

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### **Important NOTE:**

In 2016 the municipality suggested us to "cooperate" in order to make a guidebook for the area. They suggested that we work as employees of Aris T. for a guidebook that would be the way they wanted it to be and signed by Aris T. The book would be created mainly for promotion. We suggested them that we work together with Aris T. and publish a more complete book signed by all the distributors (Aris T., Panjika Cooperative and the Municipality). They rejected our proposal!

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## to close this letter...

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Panjika is a substantial part of the climbing scene in Leonidio. We have poured our hearts and souls into the support of the broader climbing community.

The Panjika Cooperative already offers a high-quality guidebook, with a new and updated version coming very soon.

- Why did the municipality support the publication of a new guidebook, when there is already a complete, accurate guide available from the local community?
- How long can the municipality follow its own interests instead of cooperating with local residents, cooperatives, and initiatives on matters that concern them in the first place?

## **This letter is intended to become the beginning of a big open discussion.**

We ask for your support to spread the word by sharing this letter and helping us keep Leonidio a unique world-class climbing destination.

We are also happy to answer any of your additional questions!

Climbing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Panjika and friends have bolted around 700 routes</li> <li>- all in all the cooperative paid for around €53,000 of hangars and bolts and other equipment (excluding labour), with more than €10,000 offered privately by its members.</li> <li>- We have put endless volunteer hours into bolting, re-bolting, maintenance, correct grading, collecting information etc.</li> <li>-Members of the cooperative are also members of the local Mountaineering and Climbing Club(AOSL).</li> </ul>
Job creation	Panjika has created 7 full-time and 4 part-time jobs for locals and long-term residents at the climbing shop, the bar/restaurant, climbing courses and the creation of the guidebook.
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- On the 26 Nov 2019, Panjika organized a weekend for climbing for local primary school children in cooperation with the Parents' Club. Participation was free of charge.</li> <li>- It has also supported a circle of climbing lessons for refugees from ClimbAID in Athens.</li> </ul>
Arts & Culture	Since 2015, Panjika remains an open space for interaction and exploration. The cooperative has supported independent painters, musicians, performers, to present their work in intercultural exchange and organized several artistic workshops for kids.
In progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Panjika initiated a project for building ecological toilets at the most crowded climbing sectors. The project is in progress and is happening in collaboration with the municipality and the Association of business owners of Leonidio.</li> <li>- The 1st Panjika Climbing School is set to open soon, offering regular climbing courses for locals and visitors.</li> </ul>

## CONTACT INFO:

If you have any questions we will be happy to answer them.

Send us an e-mail:

[panjika.cooperative@gmail.com](mailto:panjika.cooperative@gmail.com)

under the SUBJECT:

**“Details on the Climbing Community in Leonidio”**

*Thank you in advance for your cooperation and support.*

**With warm wishes,  
Your Panjika Team**

