

PROGRAMME ON:
CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF HISTORIC BUILDINGS

LUND, SWEDEN SEPTEMBER 24 – OCTOBER 12, 2007
SANTIAGO, VALPARAISO, CHILE 1 - 15 MARCH, 2008

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Albania

PART I

**A BRIEF HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE IN KORCHA TOWN
1496 - 2006**

Korcha, situated in an extensive and fertile plain against the first spurs of the Morava Mountains, is the largest city of Eastern Albania and a cultural and industrial centre of importance. The founding of Korcha has not any clear evidence, but is named as a “town” (“*la citta di Korcha*”) in the chronicles of the Musaka’s family, as a property belonging to Despot John Musaka since in 14th c.¹.

A further development of the town is closely connected with the actions of Myrahor Ilyas Beg, the “Master of the Stables” of Sultan Bayezid II, who is responsible for the construction in 1496 of the mosque that bears his name, one of the most important monuments of the Ottoman Architecture in Albania.²

The development of Korcha in the 16th and 17th century was not very spectacular³. The town was divided in three main districts: *Varosh*, inhabited by the Christians, *Kasaba*, inhabited by the Moslems and *the Market (Bazaar)*, used by both communities. *Varosh*, being the biggest one, with 2/3 of the population, had not so much distinction with the *Kasaba* from the architectural point of view: narrow irregular streets with small houses facing one side over the streets with big courts surrounded by not so high stony walls.

¹ “...*E piu possedi e signoriggio la citta de Corizza, per insino alla villa nominee Savoiana...*” in “Istoria e Genealogia della casa Musachia, scritta da D. Giovanni Musachia, Despoto dell’Epiro”, in Ch.Hopf, “Chroniques Greco-Romanes”, Berlin, 1873, p.280. The Albanian translation: Muzaka “Memorie”, TOENA, Tiranë 1996. John Musaka was the nephew of Despot Andrea Musachia II, an Albanian noble, who died in 1451. He had the title “Despot of Epirus” (Sevaston Kratos) and the flag with the two heads eagle given by the Byzantine Emperor.

² For the Ottoman architecture in Albania there are many scientific issues in the Institute of Cultural Monument’s review “Monumentet”, Tiranë 1973-2002. A very good study is also that of M.Kiel “Ottoman Architecture in Albania 1385-1912”, Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture. Istanbul 1990.

³ Hadschi Chalfa mentions it as an administrative subdivision of the sandjak of Ohrid. Hadschi Chalfa, Mustafa ben Abdullah, “Rumeli und Bosnia, geographisch beschrieben von H.Ch.”, aus dem Turkischen ubersetzt von Joseph von Hammer, Wien, 1812, p.141. Ottoman lists of the kadiliks of Rumeli from 1078 AH (1667/68) and 1203 AH (1788) mention Korche as the seat of a kadilik of a rather low order situated in the province of the Pasha (the Beglerbeg of Rumeli). Ozergin, M.Kemal, “Rumeli Kadiliklari’nda 1078 duzenleme”, in: Ibrahim Hakki Uzunçarsili’ya Armagani, Ankara, T.T.K. 1976, p.265 and 300. M.Kiel “Ottoman Architecture ...” p.163.

The dominant type of the house was that with *chardak*, or the open house, very popular in these centuries in the Balkans, typical for a population related to the agrarian economy.⁴

At the end of 18th century the development of the town of Korcha received a strong impetus through the destruction of the nearby trade metropolis of Voskopoja, or Moschopolis, (between 1768-1779) taking its the role as a productive and commercial center favored by the position at the cross of the important trade roads and by the rich agricultural hinterland around it.

The general developments of 18th and 19th century in Europe were reflected at different rates throughout the Ottoman Balkans. Many towns began to flourish helped by a calm period and by the Austrian-Ottoman treaties for a more liberal commerce between the (Christian) merchants of the two empires. The middle of 19th century finds the town of Korcha ready for a further jump in its development. Felix Beaujour and Leake, both writing in the first decade of the 19th century, mention 450 houses in Korcha and a total of 3000 inhabitants⁵. In 1859 the town numbered already 10 000 inhabitants.⁶ G. Han, the consul of Austria in Joanina, considers Korcha as “a dangerous concurrent of Joanina, for the trade with Northern countries”.⁷ The growing of the workshops’ production was gradually covering all the fields of economy. The trade relations were established with all other centers of the Balkans and with the mains of the Europe, like Venice, Trieste, Wien, Leipzig, Budapest, Paris, London, etc. The society’s structure was crystallized and organized and the town was gathering workers from the villages around. The existing town became very dense by the newcomers, while the former repertory of the house typology and its modifications were limited. So, the town began to explode in a new modern plan forming in very short time new districts with wide and straight streets, which cross at right angles and filled with new types of houses, after the European models.⁸

The grid-plan had an intensive use in the towns of the New World during 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. The increased European migration to the Americas, Africa and later to Australia brought the needs to expand the economies of the colonial territories and to fill the growing grid-plan cities of the New World. In Western Europe it had a limited use, only partially in the big cities, because by this time they already had stabilized their urban structure.⁹ Some rare exceptions, like Barcelona, show that the grid plan regularization of

⁴ P. Thomo, “Korça – Urbanistika dhe Arkitektura” Tiranë 1988, pp. 27-51.

⁵ W.M.Leake, “Travels in Northern Greece”, V,I. London 1836 p.337.

⁶ E. Riza, B.Strazimiri, “Vështrim mbi arkitekturën e qytetit të Korçës”, in “Monumentet” 3, Tirana 1972, p.119 with further literature.

⁷ G.Han, “Albanische Studden” Jena 1854, p.55.

⁸ M.Kiel dedicates the new grid plan to Ahmed Eyyub Pasha, who “rebuilt” the town after the fire “at the end of the last century” (M.Kiel, “Ottoman Architecture in Albania...” p.163). This “rebuilt” may be a reference to the Market, after its burning in 1879. The Market was outside of the both inhabited districts of the town Varosh and Kasaba. But there are proofs that the built of the grid-plan had began before the year 1879 even in the Market, while in the town the new grid-plan began at least since in 1858. See also: P.Thomo, “Korça ...”,p. 82, 113, 119.

⁹ L.Benevolo, “The origins of Modern Town Planning” 1967. “The History of the City”, 1980: encyclopedic treatment of the history of Western urbanism. “The Modern City: Planning in the 19th century”, 1969.

the whole city was a superior system of 19th century's *urbanization*.¹⁰ In the Eastern Europe the grid-plan had a wide extension, especially in Russia. In the Balkans, first was used in urbanization of Athens (1821) and after the decision of the Greek Government in 1835 the grid-plan was obligatory also for the other towns of Greece, Sparta 1834, Tebea in 1861, Corinth in 1858, etc.). In Serbia the first and one of the few towns was Uzicka Pozega, Loznica in 1832 (with author Franc Yanke). In Montenegro was the New Podgorica.¹¹ In Bulgaria the first grid-planned town was Stara Zagora in 1878 (with a Czech author Lubor Bayer).

Korcha represent one of the best of the few examples in the Balkans, where the town's urbanization after the grid schema began relatively early, since in 1958, while in the end of the 1860s and in the beginning of the 1870s the building was so extended it has finely determined the structure of the town. The grid-plan continued in practice for a century imposing modern standards of hygiene and circulation, even more a certain program for a further continuous growing of the town through the mechanical adding of new blocks. The grid plan was very liked by the new society because met the residential requirements of a growing urban middle class, which heaving nearly the same economical level was put in the same living standards.

Each of the orthogonal *quartiers* had a surface 2000-5000 m², which hold in two rows of houses built in the same size of land and placed in the same way inside it, facing mainly to the West. A new type of house with a symmetrical composition in plan accompanied this urbanization, showing that this was also a process of social unification, a typical characterization of the changes toward a new way of living.

The Neo-Classic architecture, which had predominated Europe for more then a century and had spread also in many towns of the Balkans, influenced also the new expansion of Korcha. The new bourgeoisie required useful structures of appropriate grandeur and authority, on the condition that they be achieved as cheaply as possible.

The Neo-Classical influences were achieved also through the presentation of new materials and new building technologies. The process of replacing old materials and technologies with new ones had begun before the mid 19th century and by the '60s and '70s the builders were familiar with the requests of the new typology. The social unification didn't last for long. In the last decades of 19th century new requests for e differentiation in the way of living were in evidence. First signs were shown in the transfer of several functions of the market toward the inhabited district of the town. Apart from the bakers, shops for food, workshops (like tailors, shoemakers, etc.), hotels, restaurants, bars, administrative buildings and above all luxurious shops with high standards goods began to be built in the special places and squares of the inhabited

¹⁰ The term *urbanization* was invented by the Spanish engineer Ildefonso Cerda, who made the project for the expansion of Barcelona in 1858 as a gridded city. Driven by industry and overseas trade, Barcelona filled out this American-scale grid plan by the end of the century.

¹¹ P.Lavedan, "Histoire de l'urbanisme Epoque contemporaine" Paris 1952, p.201; N.Dobrovic "Urbanizam kroz Vekove I Jugoslavia" Beograd 1950, p.58.

districts. A part of the high bourgeoisie began to live in these places, adopting a special building, with big shops in the ground floors and the living house in the upper ones.

During this time many changes were made also in the Market (Bazaar) district, which was outside of the inhabited parts of the town. The fast reconstruction or urbanization of the Bazaar was “helped” by three fires, which means that before that the shops were built mainly from wood.¹² The main urban schema of the Bazaar was made of a central area with different size of shops-in-blocks with big and small squares, surrounded by a half circle of inns (*Hann*). This urban schema shows a certain distinction between the production and selling function with that of the refresh one. The *hann*-s were of different types most of them composed around an inner court, where the ground floors were used for services, shops and stables, while in the upper floors were the sleeping rooms. The shops were built in blocks, several of them having the same function (as the street of tailors, that of the shoemakers, of ironworkers, of leatherworkers, etc.).

The fire hazards and the earthquakes forced a fast improvement of the new building technologies, like the brick, or stone vault systems, or the “Roussillon” vault, which was formed by replacement of timber beams with I-section iron beams, in each instance beams carried shallow brick vaults, the whole assembly being stiffened by an outer shell and by wrought-iron rods restraining the structure in a lateral direction.¹³ This type of vault has developed for several decades in Western Europe and being a practical solution, found a wide use in the new buildings of the second half of 19th century in Korcha. This wide use took place not only in the Bazaar, but in many houses of the town, too.

The new materials and technology determined also a new architectural style of buildings, giving access to differences in the general character of this Bazaar with those of other towns, like Berat, Argirocastra, Elbasan, Tirana, etc. Some similarities were with the Bazaar of Bitola, whose reconstruction begun only after the third fire of 1897, which means more than 20 years after Korcha’s Bazaar.¹⁴ So it seems believable when the contemporaries determine it “... smaller but more beautiful than Bitola’s Bazaar”¹⁵ A special element of the Bazaar was the Clock Tower near the Imrahor Mosque

The turning of the century raised the requests of new urban elements and communal facilities, making the local authorities legally responsible for the further extension of the

¹² The fires were in 1822, 1858 and 1879. The reconstruction of the Market after the grid-plan and with buildings of new technology had begun before the third fire. P.Thomo “Korça ...” p. 119.

¹³ This type of vault seems to have derived from the Roussillon, or Catalonian vault in France, which was first adopted there as a means of achieving a fireproof structure in Chateau Bizy, built at Vernon by Constant d’Ivry in 1741. A later development was made by Victor Louis at the Theatre Francais in 1786 and his theatre in the Palais-Royale in 1790, while in England by William Strutt at the six storey calico mill built at Derby in 1792. In the interim the materials of cast and wrought iron gradually became integrated into the general building vocabulary, where they constituted the only available fire-proof elements ...The typical section of the “railway” evolved during the first decades of the 19th century and from this section the standard structural I beam eventually emerged. (K.Frampton “Modern Architecture – A critical history” Thames and Hudson 1992, pp.29-32)

¹⁴ “Bitola, vçera danas i utre” p.77

¹⁵ Karmici, “Gjeografia e Korçës dhe e rrethit” Thessaloniki 1888, Albanian translation in the Archive of the Institute of History in Tirana, p.12.

town. In 1910 it was made a new regulation plan named “Chart of the Town”. From 1923 the Municipality of Korcha engaged three engineers to prepare a new regulation plan. Another engineer from Wien it was called here in 1928. The plan was finished by Kohler (Austrian) and Bertoldi (Italian) three years later, in 1930. The rectifications were made by an Italian engineer, Amenante, in 1931. It is clearly seen that the complexity of problems that the builders were facing out in urban planning, architecture and construction could not be solved as before, on empiric ways. It was requested a high educated professional thinking, which it was difficult to be ensured in the poor conditions of the country. Although the native engineers and architects were quite a few, they designed some of the most important buildings and most of the houses erected at that time. So, the church of St. George (1905) has as author Naum Trasha, the building of the Prefecture was made by Kemal Butka¹⁶. He designed also many houses and other buildings in the Town. Jovan Adam was another engineer with a high activity in the first decades of 20th century. He wrote also many articles in the Korcha’s newspapers, raising different problems of urban development and criticizing the mistakes seen in it.

During this time the Albanian State was created and some administrative buildings, schools, hotels, hospitals and a public library were built on in the town. The buildings of the Hospital and of the Public Library were financed by the philanthropist Th. Turtulli (1927-1930). Two cinemas were built one after another: “Lux” in 1926 and “Majestic” in 1927. The last one quoted as “the best building in the Balkans”. The cars and the electricity (1926) extended the frequency of the streets changing the means of urban access. Communal facilities, like sewerage, refuse collections, water supply, roads, inspection of slaughter-places and the burial of the dead led to the growing of hygienic standards, giving access to a further modernization of life

The grid-plan, apart of central squares of the town, was enriched and “ventilated” by small and large areas of public open space. The monumental sculptures penetrated into those urban elements. First to the centre and then to the Park in the front of the Public Library were erected two monuments, representing the National Heroes of the Albanian Revival.¹⁷ Those were cast in bronze in Italy with the expenses of the community. The park, the monuments, the houses with open wrought iron fences together with a street system of furniture – benches, fountains, shelters, lamp-posts, etc., became a civilizing influence for the newly urban masses.

Of course, the complexity of designs needed in this intensive building development couldn’t be realized by the native architects only. A part of the projects and designs were ensured by buying in other countries, or by inviting and commissioning here the foreign engineers, or architects. Many merchants when possible brought projects and designs of their buildings from the countries, where they had established the trade relations and, of course, a close cultural formation, education and mentality. This led to the penetration of

¹⁶ He migrated in USA after WWII and both with his wife were among the most important architects of New York until in the end of ‘60s. Their names were discussed recently (after 11 September 2001) with other architects and engineers as contributors at the Twin Towers.

¹⁷ Both monuments: that of the National Warrior (or the Unknown Soldier) and that of Themistokli G[amenji were made by Odise Paskali, the greatest artist of 20th century in Albania.

a great variety of inspirations in architecture from East to West. In a short time the old tradition style was replaced first by Neo-Classical style and later, by the beginning of the 20th, century we see the first elements of Art Nouveau, or Eclecticism. This was accompanied with Balkan countries influences, especially from Romania. Those educated in the Western countries, like Italy, Austria, Germany, France and Belgium brought the most recent fashion not only in the way of living but also in architecture and construction.

The development of cast and wrought iron in Europe (railways, ships, bridges, industrial and public buildings, etc) was accompanied with a great production and intensive exportation of this modern building material. Korcha being in close relations by trade with big cities of Europe had the right premises to adopt very fast the new technologies and materials. Therefore the wrought iron found a wide use in the modern architecture of the town. Except in windows, balconies, doors, stairs, etc. the wrought iron replaced the street walls. The transparent fences of the house's courtyards were not only a change in this urban element of the street, but also a change in a modern mentality and way of life, living behind the fanatic ideas of the last centuries. This transparency was achieved by a high level of working and combination of stone and wrought iron. Some examples show that the wrought iron was used not only as a decorative element, but also as a constructive material, applied after the most recent technology existing in Europe.

A house and a shop built nearly at the same time represent this avant-garde technology. The house is built in 1910 (only two decades after Victor Horta became the first architect to make an extensive use of iron in domestic architecture¹⁸). There is an excellent combination of stone, brick and iron in construction of this house. From outside views it looks like a usual three storey building. Inside we see that the first floor is covered by Rousillion vaults and supported in the middle by a two-storey-high iron column with cast-iron base and abacus. But from the elevation we can see how the first floor is suspended to the second and the stability of the last is ensured by loading the first (the ground and the first floor's function is for shop, or store, while the third's is for house). The same construction is used also at a big shop in the Market area with the only change that here the first floor is replaced by balconies suspended in the second floor. Both buildings are excellent examples of the elastic behavior of material under stress. This kind of construction, although in a smaller scale, recalls the brilliant works of Structural Rationalism of the time.

The production of this high quality, well designed objects was an expression that the builders raised the general level of a culture not only in building, but also in every aspect of everyday life. The rapid assimilation of every recent method, technology, fashion, or taste gave access to a cosmopolitan nature in the architecture of the town. The cosmopolitan tendency was expressed also in the cultural way of living and the

¹⁸ Hotel Tassel in Brussels in 1892. The next decade Horta continued the dialogue between the tensility of iron and the massiveness of stone in a number of other town houses in Brussels. Our house in Korcha recall this type of houses developed in Belgium in the first decades of 20th century having as predecessor Horta's Maison du Peuple, Brussels, 1897-1900.

coexistence of a tolerant community, respecting each one rights.¹⁹ This lasted until to the end of Second World War, when the communist regime closed the borders and interrupted the trade, commerce, the free movement of the people and ideas.

Like all the communist countries of Eastern Europe, the architecture in Albania was mostly influenced by that of the Soviet Union. Collective houses began to appear in every town and city, destroying the old “bourgeoisie” houses. Being a well organized town, Korcha had no need for collective houses for more than a decade. But the earthquake of 1960 destroyed many old houses and an urgent need rose immediately for sheltering many families left in open air. Architects educated in Soviet Union came and built the first collective houses along the central streets of the town. These 3-4 storey buildings, with very small unhealthy apartments, without decoration and even plaster outside were considered as “domination of the high socialist buildings over the capitalist small villas of the bourgeoisie”. These bared blocks surrounded the central district as a high wall neglecting nearly everything of the old urban core, sometimes even closing the streets.

Collective houses continued to be built in the old urban area of the town until in 1973, when studies resulted in the first act for the protection of historical monuments in Korcha; 14 buildings were proclaimed as “cultural monuments” and three small areas were under protection. Further studies concluded the second act in 1984, consisting in the protection of 23 buildings, two areas under strict protection and two others under a protective surveillance. Another act in 1988, this time from the municipality, put under protection all the old area of the town, nominating it as a “historical center”. This area was confirmed as “Historical Center” by an act of the Government in 2003, accompanied by a rule for the protection, administration, managing, and how to project the new buildings inside this area.

During this time many changes had happened. The decentralization of the economical system had begun after the change of the political system in 1990. The political parties were in a rush to stabilize a free-market economy, but it seemed that it was not so easy after half a century of self-isolated communist tradition. The destabilization of the State came year after year until it burst in March 1997, when revolts against pyramidal financial schemes ended in chaos. The military depots and bases were attacked and people were armed. Soon armed gangs took the control of the cities, towns and villages deteriorating the life into a nightmare for the very simple existence. It has so far never had a directing head. It seemed that immediately everything was turned at that low stage of animal development in which the brain is rudimentary and ganglia scattered throughout the organism stimulate such activity as serves to keep the creature alive. A year after were held general elections, a government was stabilized trying slowly to put order in the main cities or towns, but it took several years to control the situation all over

¹⁹ In the first half of 20th century in Korcha were in function several schools in Albanian, Greek, Bulgarian, Turkish, English, Italian and French. There were several diplomatic services (consulates) and some well-known diplomats (G. Sepheris – the famous Greek poet (Nobel price) among them, as the Greek Consul in Korcha)

the country. During this time a considerable percentage of the population had emigrated abroad. The old industries were destroyed and the main trends of economy were agriculture, commerce, textile and building construction. Another “branch” was smuggling, illegal traffic and money cleanings.

For towns like Korca the consequences of these years were fatal. Chaos and disorder began to attack the historical area. Many people had emigrated wishing not a return back. Being in a hurry they had sold their houses very cheap. The new buyers were newcomers from the villages around. Many of town’s problems stemmed from the too-sudden transition from mountainous peasant to a traditional urbanite. They began to reconstruct the houses, more to destroy them and built new buildings instead without caring for the values of the past. The sin lay not only in their designs, but in the mindless arrogance, neglecting the elementary laws of building and showing force superiority to the neighbors. The local authorities were unable to resist and the corruption came to light. It had began an age of blindness

By 2005 construction companies had became stronger and powerful. They and the speculators exploit this period in attacking the central old area of the town through their building activity. They began to raise demands on demolishing old houses and replacing them by high-rise towers. Underlying all this was an incompetent and often corrupt local government system, unable or unwilling to use the power it had. On the other hand the town administrators and planners found themselves increasingly involved in making money through giving the legal permeations to these companies. The needs of the moment are met without reference to the whole. It condemned the old houses as well as the last remaining piece of open space to be built over. The aim was to get the maximum number of dwellings units in the minimum possible time. They were destroying a uniquely rich pattern of urban heritage.

The owners of the construction companies and their crawling architects, leaded by the Mayer and the Prefect, succeeded in another act of the government in 2006, which was a step backward in the policy and practice of the heritage preservation. The 2006 decision reduces the protected areas in Korcha to only to four small ones, as in 1984. The rule of the historical area was changed, giving power of control to an uncertain commission near the municipality. The director of the Regional Directory of Historical Monuments²⁰ was discharged by the Minister of Culture and the way was opened for destroying the old houses and transfiguring the urban heritage of the town. That is the beginning of our concern and the starting point of our project.

* * *

²⁰ the author of this paper

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PART II

“Art was once the common possession of the whole people; it was the rule in the Middle Ages that the produce of handicraft was beautiful ... today, it is prosperity that is externally ugly ... we sit starving amidst our gold, the Midas of the ages.”

William Morris, *Forecast of the Coming Century* (1897)

**A MANAGEMENT PLAN
FOR THE PROTECTION AND CONSERVATION OF
THE HISTORICAL CENTER IN KORCHA, ALBANIA**

Cities and towns are problematic heritage sites. The dilemma could be described as the difficulty in achieving protection of both physical and the social context. A large proportion of the urban poor live in historic centers, and their living environments are threatened by strong economic pressure on the one hand and neglect and degradation on the other. The historical center of Korcha town in Albania is not an exception. In the long hard economical transition of the country, a valuable part of cultural heritage is suffering to the great risk of its existence.

The problem is not a simple management plan for protection and conservation of this historical center. As it happens always, a problem is compounded by another. In practice, the management planning of historical areas merges almost imperceptibly into the problems of towns, and those into economics and sociology and politics of towns and even of the country itself, and those in turn into the entire socio-economic-political-cultural life of the time; there is no end, no boundary to the relationship. The answer here is to tell just so much about what is needed as is necessary to explain the phenomenon of conservation and management.

As I have mentioned in the first part, the legal protection of this historical center came gradually to its peak in 2003 (the governmental decision) with the preservation of five districts belonging to the old urban core of the town. This was considered as a successful act finalizing many years' researches, studies and practice of conservation and restoration in this town. But the enthusiasm didn't last for long. A year after this governmental act, the construction companies, which were interested in high-rise buildings in this center, started their reaction. Step by step the conflict was turned in a relentless tension between protectors of the urban heritage and constructors. The leading

local authorities (Meyer and Prefect) very soon took the side of the constructors, framing very easily also the local society of architects, which seemed to be very greedy to the opened chance for profits.

A mass destruction of the stone-paved streets, which had started by a big investment, financed by the German Government for the network of water supply and canalizations, helped the general opinion that the historical area could not be preserved. Although the project started as a valuable, a serious and a very helpful engagement by the Germans, soon it degenerated in an ordinary profitable under-work by the Italian construction company (from Sicily), which had won the competition. The Municipality, which had the role of the supervisor, did nothing to enforce the elementary discipline of the works and the least order in the streets, causing the devolution of the town in chaos. The damaged paved streets were covered with mud when raining and dust when it was dry. People get bored, many get angry, but the local authorities blamed the preservation law that didn't allow them to asphalt the streets and arguing their impossibility to preserve the historical area. At the same time, they gave permeation for several new buildings in the area and their constructions doubled the deterioration and reinforced the opinion that these districts could not be preserved and are nothing else but just slums.

The media encouraged by the local authorities forced a general thought that the whole area was a slum and many people began to think so because the press told it so.¹ The local authorities, the society of architects, the construction companies and the media were all in the same choir that they "...could not preserve the Historic Center of the town... the town must breath freely to new and modern constructions." The Institute of Cultural Monuments and Ministry of Culture were very clumsy in response. A weak government finalized the conflict between the protectors of the urban heritage and constructors with a decision that consisted in the drastic reduce of the area of Historic Center and in the change of its rule, giving power to an uncertain commission near the municipality. The discharge of the director of the Regional Directory of Historical Monuments opened the free way for every kind of construction in and around the Historical Center. In a short time the street-scape was transfigured from an orderly urban architecture to a disorder chaos of buildings and elements.

How is the situation now? What are the damages? Is there any chance for recovering? How could we protect it? Which are the ways for a good preservation? To these and to many other questions we will try further to give the appropriate answer.

Survey before plan

Our work began with a wide and careful survey. It was necessary to learn how well or badly the new and existing buildings worked; to have an understanding of "the active, experienced environment" and then to improve proposals.

The whole ex-historical center area numbers nearly 2,400 buildings with 20,000 inhabitants. 2,300 buildings are 2-3 storey traditional houses, which can be considered the architectural heritage of the town. Inside this area there are also 13 blocks of collective houses built during 1960-1975, after the

¹ The owners of two private TV channels in the town own at the same time construction companies; the third TV channel belongs to the state and is easily manipulated by the local authorities.

earthquake, influenced by soviet style. These stand like high walls around the old districts hiding their values of urban pattern and architecture. There are also 4 big official and institutional buildings (built during '80s). There are also 3 kindergartens, 3 elementary schools, a general high school and a professional one. There are nearly 20 other buildings to other social services like churches, public libraries, museums, hotels, shops, etc.

For a deeper survey, we prepared a questionnaire and gave it to the most of the families living in the old districts and to the district's authorities. The results gave answer to many questions showing that the situation is more alarming then we inspected.

Besides the German investment of the water supply and canalization network, in the old area of the town had been no investment for more then 60 years. The unemployment is at the level of 50%; 65% of the young people. 34% of the population of the area is in emigration. 60% of the families have very low incomes. Only 30% of the families have an average outcome. Only 10% of the houses are rented, or "occupied" by families. 90 % of the families, which have "occupied" the houses, want to change them with flats, because of the very poor conditions they have. They could not uphold the maintenance of their houses. 85 % of the families own their houses where they are living in, but still could not uphold a reconstruction, or restoration. In the legal market, people are paying a higher percentage of their incomes for worse housing than their grandfathers before World War II. The credits from the banks have very high loan mortgage: 12-14%. All construction loans are short-term, and are not refinanced through long-term mortgages when construction or repair is finished. The size of the investment is too big; the circles in the property market too short, the developers too depended on short-term money which could dry up as lenders loose confidence.

It was very important for us to notice that 85 % of the families think that the municipality must not permit the high-rise buildings and 52% of them like their houses to be preserved and restored. Only 35% like their streets to be restored with stone pavement, while the rest like them asphalted. The evidence of people's preferences was clear: overwhelmingly, they want houses, not flats. No one wants to change the house with a flat. They are against the high-rise buildings and they want their house to be protected. The remarkable fact was it didn't take long for the people to see that all this policy is wrong.

Nearly 75% of the families living in the area say they have no conditions for the education of their children. 65% say that they are disturbed by the neighbor's children, because there are no children's playgrounds. The traffic in the narrow streets is not heavy but 40% of the families are disturbed by parking of the cars in front of their houses. 72% of the families say that their children don't feel safe to go to school, because of the uncontrolled traffic and they are forced to accompany them.

There is not any activity for the inhabitants in the area; not for the youth; not for the women; not for the children. There is not any society, organization, institution, or university active in the area.² The district's authorities have no real authority in the area. A minimalist staff of only 3 people is responsible for the whole districts of the old area. They have no funds; no power and no legal ability to manage the area. All decisions for the area are taken by the municipality. The Municipality has given not any cent for restoration or even any maintenance in the last 40 years. But they have given 120 permeations for new buildings inside the ex-historical area in the last two years. 95 % of the

² There were two mayors in the last decade coming from the academic staff of university in the town

new constructions had started conflicts as soon as they have started. Most of the new collective houses built there have no courtyard, no parking, not enough space around, or other facilities. The streets are cleaned by the rains, because the company responsible for it gathers only the garbage in open vehicles. Although this company is paid well enough, everybody complains for its failing work.

The most alarming evidence is the great number of 16 new collective houses which are built in the midst of the old area during the very short period (last two years 2006-2007) with permissions given by the Municipality. There is also a number of nearly 75 new houses two - three and some four storeys high, which have altered the architectural and environmental quality of the historical area. Nearly every street has 1-3 new constructions, strongly changing their architectural features. In some streets there are more than 4, or 5 new buildings. Some of them, especially the collective houses, look like dinosaurs in the town-scape, or brutal destroyers of the landscape. Most of the new buildings have disorganized the regular architecture of the districts, giving to it a wilderness feeling. Each building is treated in isolation; nothing binds it to the next one.

This “new architecture” is boring, highly monotonous, with little attention to the quality of the surrounding environment, and built sometime at too high density. Usually they are built too quickly, sacrificing quality to quantity, producing social disaster areas. If I add the very bad condition of streets and the interruption of electricity for long hours, these areas are nothing else, but new slums.

Some new buildings, “megalomaniac” estates belonging to rich “Nouveau”, are extravagant, but to lazy and unimaginative, standing as architectural monstrosities over people’s heads. What is common for all is that they have no urban feel and they have no respect for the environment in which they stand. The mixture as a whole is indigestible and tasteless, in short - a disaster. That is building without planning and without social purpose - or even with a regressive one. How could it go so wrong?

The social result is a disaster, too: the inhabitants have begun to notice the fast deterioration of their town, for which they were so proud until the recent decade. Now they feel neglected and incoherent. No one really knows how to achieve anything. They also became more concerned about earning a living. They feel pressed between the forces of conflicts, often sordid everyday life and the forces of chaotic disorder of state and municipality. There is a fear of social decomposition, suggested by the evidence of a great number of fortune-games and casinos (nearly 40 in this center) and a lack of a general political stability. The town itself is seen as a place of decay, poverty, social malaise, and civil unrest. Such developments are almost analogous to a cancerous growth

Culturally, they are in a way optimistic and aspire to better education for their children and to improving the condition of their house. **Economically** they work hard, and they build. Their first priority at home is to defend the quality of their very own immediate environment. **Socially**, they are not cohesive and not well organized. **Politically** they are neither apathetic nor radical. They still have not forgotten their tradition when they could make use of the urban milieu and its institutions. What they do not have is an opportunity to fulfill their aspirations.

The “magic” recipe for urban revitalization

will present the concept of “conservative surgery”, or in the today jargon, the urban rehabilitation.

Values of this area can be categorized as:

1. Emotional values:

- Identity
- Continuity
- Respect and veneration
- Symbolic and spiritual

2. Cultural Values

- Documentary
- Historic
- Urban and architectural
- Aesthetic values
- Townscape
- Landscape and ecological
- Technological and scientific

3. Use values

- Functional
- Economic (including tourism)
- Social (also including identity and continuity)
- Educational

OBJECTIVE OF PRESERVATION

- Architectural heritage
- Urban heritage
- History and documentary heritage
- Symbolic and spiritual heritage

Key elements for **development of tourism** are:

- Possibility of a suitable environment for visitors
- Possibility of reasonable sustain
- Possibility of unique and quality
- Offer marketing
- Safety and relax for visitor

Management plan should consider:

- **The knowledge of cultural heritage**
- **Unity and diversity of cultural heritage**
- **The role of the community and of local authorities**

Other factors

- **Heritage and identity**
- **Heritage and society**
- **Heritage; information and formation**

Programs taken in consideration:

- A. Regional planning as part of social reconstruction**
- B. Preservation of historical heritage in Korca**
- C. New housing policy**
- D. Character Preservation**
- E. Relationship of buildings and spaces**

A. Regional planning as part of social reconstruction

Heritage is an important reason to plan the future. It concerns the meaning of that highly elastic phrase - **historical-town planning**. No town planning scheme can be satisfactory which is not prepared with due regard to the regional development surrounding the town. Almost everyone would agree that it has to include also the planning of the region around the town; many would extend that out of embrace the natural region, such as unit with a particular regional culture. And virtually all planners would say that their subject includes not merely the planning of one such region, but the relationships between them: It immediately embraces regional economic planning, and thus from general question of economic development; again, the spreading circles threaten to embrace the whole discourse. But where, then, does the subject stop? I shall draw it to include general discussions of local urban and regional conservation policy, but to exclude questions of pure economic planning.

Our approach is made by an ambitious survey for the whole region. In the general view of the investments and policies made in the region of Korca during the last decades, what has remained unconsidered is one of the most promising fields of the regional development – tourism. This region is still “hiding” rich resources not only of nature and climate, but history and culture, also. The region of Korca is a part of big region of Ohrid and Prespa lakes, formed 2 million years ago, and now divided by Albania, Macedonia and Greece. These lakes are considered now as very important areas for Europe for the great variety and values of habitats, biodiversity and a particular ecosystem with very rare birds, fishes and plants. A history of more than 4000 years survives in many ruins, castles, Byzantine and Post-Byzantine churches, and traditional architecture. There are more than 200 historical monuments listed under the state protection, most of which with importance exceeding the national ones. Apart of this, through this region pass the main routes connecting the three countries.

The lack of an appropriate infrastructure and knowledge of the values has not taken the attention of the authorities that plan and attend the economical development. Bringing in evidence the great natural and cultural potential of the region and a better politic of the investments, aiming tourism, will follow a rapid development and economical growth, not only in the big inhabited centers but in the very small ones, too. The development of tourism consists in building the appropriate infrastructure to the most attractive historical, cultural, and natural points, which has to be done according to a strategic program, who will determine the politic of short-term and long-term investments in the region.

Competitor analysis- SWOT

Advantages

- Mountain and hill places very easy for walking and other recreational activities
- Lakes and beaches for fishing and swim
- Forests
- Very good climatic conditions and more than 300 sunny days in a year
- Cold water springs
- Resources for hunting
- Rivers for fishing
- Available places for camping and picnic
- Archeological sites
- Churches from 5th to 18th century
- Castles with its surrounding landscapes
- Very good communication between communities
- Hospitality of natives. Families offer hospitality to tourists
- Traditional food and other local specialties
- Quiet and sustainable situation in region
- Possibility for use of old private buildings
- Interest in buying houses in villages
- Forestry and rural development Ministry
- Institutional support for tourism development

Disadvantages

- Weak promotion (marketing) for rural tourism
- Lack of public transport
- Low organization of cultural activities
- Low possibly of inhabitants to invest on development of rural tourism
- Maintenance and cleaning of garbage is not satisfactory
- Incapable municipalities sometimes with a small number of population
- Lack of protection and restoration of cultural, archeological, religious buildings
- Environmental pollution is increasing
- Not enough protection of forests
- No infrastructure in some villages
- Not enough municipal funds for investments to tourism
- Damaging of buildings from irresponsible people looking for treasures
- Illegal building activity

This will need attempts to plan such an area so that all its sites and resources, from forest to town, from highland to water level, may be soundly developed, and so that the population will be distributed to utilize, rather than to nullify or destroy, its natural advantages. There should be also a program (probably spreading over many years) for restoration of churches, castles and archeological sites. Regional planning will be the New Conservation – the conservation of human values hand in hand with natural resources: permanent agriculture instead of land-skinning, permanent forestry instead of timber mining, permanent human communities, dedicated to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness instead of camps and squatter-settlements, and to stable buildings, instead of the scantling and false-work of “go-ahead” communities – all this is embodied in regional planning. It sees people, industry and the land as a single unit.

Of course, the “*metropolis*” of the region will be its center - the town of Korca, where the most attractive part is the historical area of urban heritage – the big market of cultural tourism. The town and region should be viewed as a complex system. Domestic and foreign tourists will bring in immediately revenue and directly benefit shopkeepers and hotels. Parts of the historical area of Korca will serve as hotels, restaurants, bars and taverns, for which this town has an old tradition. This is the focus and the starting point of the whole region under development.

B. Protection of the urban heritage

1. The legal framework

What is proposed to do I am in no doubt: We shall be pointed to the fact that without State’s interference nothing effectual can be performed upon any large scale. And it is a fact. The state must be a key player on the management scene. Planning here becomes not only ours but estate management, also. The starting point is the legal framework of the area that is valuable for protection.

Fortunately a hopefully premise for a change is the recent action of the Institute of Cultural Monuments and of the Ministry of Culture for a renewal of the governmental decision and the rule of preservation of the Historic Centre. This is the first and the most important step to establish a legal framework of this area. Without such decision and the willing power of the government, every attempt toward protection and preservation will fail. The **local authorities should discontinue this form of constructions** inside the protected area and they must stop all new constructions that disfigure the traditional characteristic of the historical area. A team of inspectors and specialist should be active for a continuous and permanent control of every building activity in the area. Careful plans and studies made by professionals should follow the strategy.

2. Preliminary Investigation and Listed properties

The second step will be a careful investigation of the whole area, with the aim to collect and adapt available information on topography, history and architectural characteristics of the buildings. An important element will be the increase of the number of listed buildings. Today there are nearly 25 buildings in the list. The fact is that the most valuable buildings inside the historical area numbers more than 200. Other 1500 buildings have fewer values, but they have still qualities that need preservation and protection.

This careful investigation will consider the three levels:

- Dominant architectural features,
- Building patterns and
- Selected urban elements qualified by Architectural observation, historical analysis and Topographical investigation.

This information will be presented in a report under headings corresponding to the headings in the final product, the preservation atlas.

All these data should be **recorded** and **registered** by preservation officers, taking proper account of the actual condition and use of the building and adopting a pragmatic approach that ensures

conservation rather than preservation. To this purpose, a thorough knowledge of building history is providing the background for maintenance and restoration of buildings with proper respect of authentic building qualities.

3. Restoration strategies

3.1. Practice of Preservation, Conservation and Restoration

After the legal framework is insured, Conservation and Restoration should be seriously planned and start in practice. A **selection** of the most dangerous and valuable buildings exposed to the risk of destruction and disappearance of the values should take on and serve as restoration priorities.

3.2. New uses for valuable buildings have to be found for many of the old buildings in the center of the historical area. Many of them could be hotels, restaurants, bars, café, taverns and shops, which activities are essential for tourists.

3.3. The works of establishing these preserved areas should be tackled, sector by sector, as part of a carefully tailored comprehensive plan. There will be plenty of demand for houses to be restored and renovated, and subsidies will be requested.

3.4. Funds will be insured by a more and specific engagement of all participants; local authorities, central government, foreign sources and native individuals.

- The municipality should generate the modest **public funds** and promote projects concerning restoration of urban heritage. It should have the initial and the leading role to take under its care the protection of the heritage values.
- Positive actions of the Ministry of Culture, who recently doubled the **budget funds** of the restorations inside the historical area of Korca, should be encouraged.
- Other **projects** and **grants** should take place gathering funds from government, nongovernmental organizations and abroad. Actually there are many projects under development, but no one concerns restoration or rehabilitation of urban heritage. It is the role of municipality to focus these projects and grants to the urgent needs.
- A much larger amount of **private investment** should be directed in restoring their houses. Business and professional people, who prefer to buy or rent offices and living accommodations in the historic quarter, should be encouraged. There are many good examples that the individuals have undertaken restorations themselves, engaging even specialised architects for a more professional result. This tradition should be renewed and openly supported.
- Considering the actual relatively high average number of inhabitants to a building a better policy will be needed to insure **housing of the families** who will prefer to move out. This action will be necessary in order to dispose their houses to new uses and better preservation.
- A better policy by the authorities of the municipality will be needed to produce **residential tracts** stable property values; and government-guaranteed mortgages that will be affordable by families of modest incomes.
- **Tourists** should have comfortable access to shops, restaurants, cinemas, theater and other spare-time activities and to various kinds of collective household services.
- **Inhabitants** will begin to feel that something could be done to change their surroundings.

3.5. The engagement of a number of specialists for restorations will be needed. All this process of restoration of the buildings and the rehabilitation and recycling of old physical structures to new

uses will need **trained people**. That is one of the most delicate problems that local authorities have to solve.

3.6. Media. It will be necessary to follow a tirelessly **campaign** against the high-rise flats inside the historical area. The politics should be against them; the government should support the urban containment and inspire the municipality to prepare conservation plans. Another campaign should take place at the same time for the preservation of heritage values. People should be aware of their cultural heritage.

C. A new housing policy & a large scale of town-planning

As I said before, the management planning of a historical area merges almost imperceptibly into the problems of the town, and those into economics, sociology and politics of the town, and of those into the region of the town. Sometimes it is even impossible to bring a better quality of life, at every point in the region (especially when there is no form of industry and no type of economical development) without building a wider management plan for the whole region. And if the regional planning provides the framework, the management of a protected area of the town provides the “civic objective”: not as a temporary heaven of refuge but as a permanent seat of life and culture, urban in its advantages, permanently civilized in its situation. That explains also, why the management of the historical area of Korca town could not be fulfilled without a much wider planning, where all parts and districts of the town will be included.

The town would embark on an **active housing policy** standing as a protest against the form, which has been given to our town, on the ground that it was too business orientated and that has failed to sufficient protection of urban values. Is it inevitable or basically sound or desirable that larger and larger crowds be brought into the city’s center; do we want to stimulate housing congestion along main streets of the core of the town and develop an intensive rather than an extensive city; is it desirable to have an area of abnormally high land values with its consequent demand for the removal of building restrictions for urban heritage preservation; must all large business, professional and financial operations be conducted in a restricted area? If Korca’s persistent housing problem is as bad after more than half a century, and if the evident mistakes of recent years will not be repeated, then some very tough and resilient machinery must be provided, capable of rolling roughshod over local special interests if needs to be. From our point of view the other essential is an **integrated plan** for the development of the whole built-up area of town.

1. New planning areas with villas. The object of this planning is to provide a domestic condition for the people in which their physical health, their morals, their character, and their social condition can be improved. The aim in broad outlines at, and hopes to secure, the home healthy, the house beautiful, the town pleasant, the city dignified, and the suburb salubrious. This would be complemented by introducing the concept of “garden villages” around the town and creating at the same time the proper areas for collective houses, or high-rise buildings. They would attract hundreds of people from the old town. A whole new district was built from the ground 15 years ago. Although it had not the strong control of the municipality it resulted in a new area tempted to reach the “garden village” concept. The municipality should think seriously in introducing this scheme of housing, which will be very preferable to the inhabitants of Korcha.

2. The objective is to plan for it by gaining **agreement between the public and the private sector**; to get them to turn together towards one outlook with one scheme, instead of mutually fighting each other to each other's detriment. It needs imposing and managing the system to make it acceptable; new districts of the town should be an essential part of that welfare-state management:

- *First*, the local authorities must chiefly build on cheap undeveloped land on the outskirts of the town, carefully phasing the plans in with bus transport development so that they will not have to pay enhanced value. It is more desirable that, in order to avoid further overcrowding in the built-up areas, the new schemes should be provided in the outskirts and the first step in this direction is to speed up the town-planning schemes coupled with foresight in bus transport extension and other means of transit. A better urban transit, coupled with private house-building, will offer another route to the eventual solution of the problem.

- *Second*, on "garden villa's" sites it is both possible and desirable at maximum densities of 30 single-family houses to the hectare (could be justified on cost of grounds), each with its own garden, securing economies in land use by skillful design – of which will be given numerous examples. It should be respected a minimum distance between the houses to guarantee winter sunshine, the use of short terraces the garden of every family, the use of spare backland, as recreational space, the emphasis of culs-de-sac for safe children's play.

3. The high-rise building areas. It is an accute task to create one or several centers dominated by high-rise buildings. In fact they are created spontaneously, but they need to be reshaped professionally and architecturaly. These districts will sutisfy the private sector and should be an essential part of the welfare-state convenience. The local authorities must provide also housing areas for low-income existing residents, to built low-income units.

These are solutions that impose order, but in a way so natural. It is a job of making the ideal credible and the main task is to master the **political methods** that will most effectively translate it into a reality. By this way we are forging an urban renaissance, which would restore the town's health and produce new, compact, efficient urban forms.

D. Character Preservation

This part of the program means the preservation and additions adopt to the order of the context; or what is necessary to repair in order to establish the qualities. One of the positive and optimistic facts during our survey was that these new disfigured buildings are still few in comparison to the number of old buildings inside the ex-historical center. They number around 2-3 % of the all houses in the area. Another positive fact is that most of the new buildings have the abilities to make changes (with very few expenses), with the intention to integrate them in harmony with the whole nature of the historic area and establish its qualities. It is our aim to preserve the ancient note in the architecture, and to make a clean old Korca out of a dirty.

E. Relationship of buildings and spaces

Some buildings, like the massive collective houses, it is nearly impossible to integrate in the traditional architecture. If they are destined to survive or not will be depended by deeper professional studies which should take place in time.

To have a better understanding of the relationships of buildings and spaces inside the historical area we will suggest a certain amount of clearance and a little additional building preserving the character of the area. Clearing a few of these derelict buildings and extending some open spaces will be needed especially for children. Planting trees should accompany all the program of the rehabilitation. The town should be developed as a single integral unit

Difficulties

It may be more effective, as well as more clear-sighted and honest to say that no comprehensive planning for the preservation of urban heritage and the improvement of living conditions can be done as long as local authorities have not the will, not the capacity to guide the movement, but on the contrary, by existing bureaucracies, to dust down existing programs. Than it is to draw projects for restoring buildings destined to be ruined, to make programs of rehabilitation that will never start, to draw pictures of parks that may never be built, playgrounds that may never be opened to children, and “garden districts” that never be realised. That is the most difficult and delicate point to solve the problem. In fact, it is the key, which will open the door to intervene in order to correct the grosser inefficiencies of the system.

Except the local authorities' good will the whole plan must be realized with the **real and active participation of the citizens** and by involving the local community in this process of change. In each target area, there should be a Community Development Agency representing the widest possible citizen participation and local initiative. The local communities should have greater to say in the shaping - and especially reshaping - of their own neighborhoods and protecting their heritage. People will become more in control of themselves and more aware of each other. People would still need help, for they did not necessarily have the skills to build themselves. It needs also a **centralized management** and regulation, because making of the plan is half the planner's job; the other half consists of planning, that is implementation.

Planning provides the framework, within which people should be left to go on. It imposes duties on each local authority to survey all needs and to make and carry out plans. Government should be promoter and coordinator, to provide means for restorations, to provide advance infrastructure, and to legalize the necessary framework.

The restored town would actually become a major attraction to tourists, providing a new economic base to the city, would gentrify the residential areas of historical center, and inject their money into restored boutiques, bars, and restaurants. This will transform the image of a rundown urban area and rebuilt a new economy on the ruins of the old. A way of restoring the quality of urban life, thus guaranteeing a harmonious moral order; the city's physical appearance would generate an economic boom. Once again; things would look beautiful because they were made right.

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