

## Executive Summary

### Introduction

The Municipality of Kars, located in east Turkey near the borders of Armenia and Georgia, is strategically important as the gateway to the Caucasus Region. Although the area is struggling against a depressed economy and a high level of outmigration, the Municipality demonstrates potential for economic, institutional, and social growth.

As one of the oldest settlements in Anatolia, Kars' cultural heritage displays Ottoman, Persian and European influences. The Kars region also encompasses significant cultural assets including the City of Ani on the World Heritage list. However, economic and social change, vast improvements in communications, unprecedented mobility and the rapid pace of technological innovations together have increased the difficulty of preserving historic centers like the one in Kars. Moreover, as national governments have decentralized and local authorities have sought citizen participation, the number of stakeholders with different views on the use and value of historic centers has dramatically increased.

In Turkey, the Ministry of Culture is responsible for monuments and archeological sites while local authorities care for non-monumental architectural heritage. Many of these structures are under private ownership and have fallen into disrepair. Individual municipalities find it increasingly difficult to safeguard cultural and architectural heritage due to complex regional and urban dynamics, inadequate resources, and insufficient frameworks to facilitate change. The municipality of Kars is no different. Although projects to repair specific structures are underway, the restoration of individual buildings will not necessarily trigger renovation of the surrounding urban fabric or generate a much-needed permanent employment base.

The Center for Urban Development Studies at Harvard University undertook this project to assist the municipality of Kars in developing revitalization strategies and action plans to initiate the regeneration of its historic center. These strategies focus on valorizing cultural heritage, social inclusion, and economic impact, and aim to incorporate the perspectives of stakeholders with an interest in the historic center. Our work took place over six months and included site visits; meetings with the Governor, the Mayor, senior officials, and NGO representatives; community meetings; and a social survey.

### Revitalization of the Ottoman Heritage in Kars

The Ottoman historic center falls primarily within the boundaries of the Kaleiçi *mahalla*, a socially diverse but physically deteriorated neighborhood. Despite the recognizable historic character of Kaleiçi Ottoman houses, their cultural and touristic value has been underestimated. The public and private sectors have instead embraced the preservation of the nineteenth and early twentieth century Russian architectural heritage, a rarity in a Mediterranean country such as Turkey. Apart from the Ottoman houses, the old Ottoman District is home to a number of other historic buildings, including the tenth century Church of the Holy Apostles, a sixteenth-century stone bridge, and a citadel. Hammams, mosques, and other bridges, while not monumental, contribute to the general scenery and possess touristic value.

Most of Kaleiçi's residents have relocated from rural areas in the last 90 to 100 years, with the more recent settlers living at the top of the steep hill near the citadel. Although many have been granted *tapu* certificates from the government confirming their right to use their plots of land, the majority are still considered squatters. It has been assumed that Kaleiçi residents would be unable

to participate in revitalization projects in their neighborhoods. However, community members with whom we spoke expressed interest in investing in the rehabilitation of the district's Ottoman structures provided that they receive technical assistance and guidance.

The Global Heritage Fund has supported the preparation of a new plan to restore and protect the Ottoman historic center, known as "Kars Kaleiçi, Revitalization of the Ottoman Heritage, Master Conservation Plan." While broad in scope, this plan lacks key information to justify the proposed demolition of a substantial number of houses, some of them improved, and the displacement several hundred people. At GHF's request, team member Dr. Samir Abdulac met with Ali Nejat Sert to discuss the Plan and give comments and recommendations. These recommendations are discussed in Section 3.

### **Development Dynamics and Prospects**

Kars currently faces the interlinked challenges of a depressed economy and high levels of outmigration as young people leave the area in search of employment. Rural-urban migration has occurred in force since the 60s, and cross-border migration to the US and the EU have increased dramatically in the last fifteen years, compounded by the globalization of the world economy. The flight of Kars' affluent population has had a devastating impact on the economy as it has led to a loss in purchasing power and damaged the manufacturing sector.

Despite the rural to urban movement of the 60s, Kars remains predominantly rural with 77% of the population working in the agricultural sector. New business development in other sectors is not an easy task. Established business owners cite harsh climate, remoteness, high cost of transport, lack of skilled labor, and difficulty in accessing credit as factors threatening their financial viability. Unemployment is high as a result.

Sectors with development potential despite these obstacles include agro-processing, ecological and cultural tourism, and manufacturing for the purpose of exporting. For these sectors to develop further, however, the municipality must invest in two key growth areas. First, resources must be channeled toward improve the marketing of potential exports. Local entrepreneurs note that a marketing strategy for the province's and the region's products is sorely lacking. Second, transborder relations must be improved and the border must be opened to trade. One of the impacts of the closure of the border between Armenia and Turkey a decade ago is that fuel carriers can no longer travel through Armenia to arrive in Kars and must follow another, more expensive route raising fuel prices significantly and hindering development potential. Opening the border to trade would also provide a more extensive regional market for Kars' products.

### **Institutional Assessment**

The purpose of this assessment was to direct the attention of the Mayor and Senior officials of Kars Municipality toward building a strategic planning capacity and introducing modalities for community participation, especially in light of the new Municipal Law passed in Parliament in July 2005. This law mandates that each local authority create a development strategy and plan for the municipality including performance targets for a three-year time period. It also requires that municipalities develop methods to increase citizen participation.

Kars is in a unique position to serve as a model for introducing new concepts of participation and partnership. It has a progressive mayor who is actively promoting economic and social development and establishing links with regional, national, and foreign partners, but who also

actively listens to the concerns and grievances of citizens through regular open meetings. In addition, Kars has a dynamic advisory council comprised of local stakeholders working to promote principles of sustainable development, human rights, pluralism, participation, and accountability of local governance.

#### Kars Municipality

The existing municipal organizational structure includes 17 departments under the Mayor and the Municipal Council, with 16 directorates and four chief offices. This framework is unwieldy because of the wide span of control and vertical hierarchies without formal horizontal links. The Municipality is also working under a very tight budget that has very little revenue for discretionary expenditures. In light of the current situation and the recent passage of the Municipal Law, our recommendations to improve the efficiency of local governance were guided by seven considerations:

- Avoid changes requiring lengthy approval processes
- Refrain from requests for new financial commitments
- Establish channels for horizontal communication
- Allow for the progressive build up of capacity
- Introduce strategic planning and management concepts independent of the passage of the Municipal Law
- Institute a capacity for community outreach and participation
- Foster an understanding of the importance of monitoring and evaluation of municipal projects and programs.

We propose the addition of a separate strategic planning unit and an external relations unit directly under the mayor, three standing committees composed of department heads from the existing 17 departments and a local initiatives team responsible for engaging in community outreach and fostering community-based development projects. Finally, we have asked TESEV to consider funding the purchase of equipment and the cost of training needed to develop a MIS/GIS capability needed to monitor change and development in the Municipality. These changes to the organizational structure will expand the strategic planning capacity of the Municipality, ensure some horizontal coordination at a managerial level, and facilitate community participation in municipal initiatives.

Kars has an opportunity to secure funding for projects in its low-income neighborhoods through the World Bank social mitigation project initiated in Turkey in 2003. Municipalities can apply for a \$500,000 Community Development Grant to be applied toward projects involving microcredit, employability training, community employment, community social services, infrastructure upgrading, or the provision of social facilities. When we met with the director of this program and presented to him the work accomplished in Kars so far, he recommended that the municipality apply for this grant.

#### Civil Society in Kars

Kars currently has no community-based organizations representing citizens' interests; the only NGOs working in the Municipality are branches of national organizations. The most active of these are:

- Anadolu Kültür, an organization helping to restore Ottoman cultural heritage and planning cultural activities in the city;

- The Foundation for the Promotion and Protection of the Environment and Cultural Heritage (ÇEKÜL), which fosters nationwide awareness of and builds a social network for the preservation of Turkey's environmental resources and cultural heritage:
- The Association for the Promotion of Modern Life (ÇYDD) which focuses on providing scholarships to children from poor families and promoting employment generation.

The Kars City Council, an active advisory group composed of representatives from civil society, the private sector, and local government, was set up under UN Local Agenda 21 and has special importance in Kars because of the lack of community-based organizations. Some of the Council's activities include promoting the conservation of Kars historic and cultural heritage and fostering opportunities for citizen participation in Kars' development. The Council currently comprises 15 commissions, only two of which are active: the Commission on Commerce, Industry, and Relations with the Caucasus Countries, whose views were significant to the discussion on development and transborder relations in Section 4, and the Youth Commission.

The Youth Commission holds particular import given the rapid outmigration of young people from the region. This commission is composed of students in high school and university who often stay in Kars for only a few years before relocating to other urban centers with greater opportunities for employment. Though they serve as part of the City Council, the youth often feel that they have no voice in the activities of the municipality and were surprised at the importance we attached to their ideas.

A small participatory project completed with the Youth Commission demonstrates the potential benefits of soliciting their opinions on municipal projects. The group was given a digital camera and told to photograph Kars' cultural heritage. The commission members then presented their selections as well as their reasons for choosing certain structures. Their presentation was creative and their sensitivity and attention to detail were remarkable. The value of their insights supports our contention that the Youth Commission should play a more active role in advising on municipal initiatives.

## **Social Assessment**

A key goal of this assessment was to solicit information and opinions from members of the communities most affected by the changes proposed in the Master Conservation Plan to demonstrate to the Mayor the importance of creating a community outreach committee within the municipal government structure. Meetings were held with residents of the Kaleiçi *mahalla* as well as with community members from Üçler and Sukapi, two of the most underserved *mahalle* affected by the revitalization project. Initially, we met with the *Muhtar* of each neighborhood, elected representatives that serve as liaison officers between the people and the central government. With the assistance of the *Muhtars* we organized well-attended community meetings to discuss the needs and desires of *mahalla* residents.

We asked to meet with men and women separately so as to allow the women to speak more freely, and the concerns that surfaced from the men's and women's meetings were indeed different. The men tended to express their anxiety over issues of employment as the majority of the men attending the meeting were unemployed. The other predominant concern was the lack of infrastructure and services in their neighborhoods. They mentioned the need for improved roads and new schools for their children, and Üçler residents in particular complained about inadequate running water, sewerage, and solid waste management.

The women spoke primarily of the lack of financial security. Most were anxious that their husbands find secure employment, but many also wanted to use their skills to bring in an independent source of income. They cited the need for workspace to produce handicrafts and other saleable items as well as daycare services to give them more time to invest in income-producing activities.

The community meetings were supplemented by a survey of 50 households, the bulk of which were done in Kaleiçi as it holds a substantial part of the Ottoman historic center. The surveys showed that overall, residents of Kaleiçi are better off than those living in Sukapi and Üçler, but community members of all three *mahalle* are largely dissatisfied with the lack of services in their neighborhoods. Regarding individual houses, Kaleiçi residents were far more likely to like their houses and to have invested in housing improvements than residents of Sukapi and Üçler, largely because of land tenure issues.

## **Evaluation**

The challenges we faced in completing this institutional assessment stemmed mainly from the competing demands on the time of the Mayor and senior officials. Although the Mayor and senior officials gave generously of their time, the time frame for the project was still longer than expected. Another challenge is the concept of participation. Kars will have to determine what methods it will use to fulfill the participation mandate of the municipal law, and the development of CBOs in Kars will be vital to that process.

In the end, the best evaluation of this project's accomplishments is the outcomes we are beginning to see in Kars Municipality. Our community work in Kaleiçi, Sukapi, and Üçler has laid the groundwork for securing a World Bank grant while demonstrating the benefits of community outreach. The revitalization project proposal will be revised to include ideas garnered from our activities. We have helped enable the Youth Commission to express their views and have offered recommendations to the municipality to improve its strategic planning capacity. Finally, because of our work, Kars has been included as a pilot site in a World Bank funded TESEV initiative to guide municipalities in the implementation of the new municipal law.