

Central Kars Strategic Plan

Strategic Planning and Local Development – Exercise 3

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Central Kars Plan

Context

The Municipality of Kars lies at the crossroads of ancient trade routes linking Anatolia through west central Asia to the Middle East and the Silk Route. It is of strategic importance as a gateway to the southern Caucasus Region. Kars' cultural heritage testifies to its long history as one of the oldest settlements in Anatolia and at the intersection of Ottoman, Persian and European cultures and conflicts. The region encompasses significant ecological and cultural assets and the natural landscapes and rich bio-diversity of the region attract some ecotourism.

Currently, Kars is faced with a depressed economy. The labor force of Kars is in lack of training. The former Old Kars is blighted and un-served by sewage. The whole city has been challenged with substandard health conditions. There is already a slum-clearance program on the way under the Central Kars Plan. Now Kars is largely ineligible for international funding due to its slum-clearing program and the closed border between Turkey and Armenia has stifled trade and migration

Agriculture is main sector of Kars's economy, where 33.8% of the total land area is used for agricultural purposes and 77% of employment is agriculture. Due to this fact, Kars has a lower GDP compared with the state and the country level. The education as well as health condition in Kars is also unpleasant.

With a population of about 80,000 people, Kars is the capital of a sparsely settled province of 9,594 square kilometers with an estimated population of 350,000. It is a remote predominantly rural province that is experiencing a large out-migration. Rural/urban migration to cities within the Province and elsewhere in Turkey started in the '60s. From the 1990s on there has been an exodus of both urban and rural populations as residents sought opportunities elsewhere. They headed for Turkey's major urban centers (predominantly Istanbul or Ankara) or emigrated to Germany (where a large Turkish community was already well-established) or to other E.U. countries. Kars is also a place with diversified ethnic groups: 50% of the population is Kurds, 30% of them are Turks, and the remaining 20% are Azeris.

Although Kars has many challenges to deal with, it also possesses certain strengths. It has a motivated Mayor as well as many involved citizenry to put a lot of effort in developing Kars. Also, Kars is the place with an abundance of historical / cultural assets, which can be leveraged for future developments.

Based on this contextual analysis of Kars and its existing and forthcoming needs, our vision for Kars is: To make Kars a world tourist destination, in order to improve the standard of living of its residents through social inclusion. We have developed a preliminary action plan to guide our efforts, divided into three targeted areas of focus:

Tourism and Preservation

- Develop plan to preserve local assets
- Link growth of tourism to economic development (job creation, construction, etc)
- Create marketing strategy to put Kars on the map

Community Development

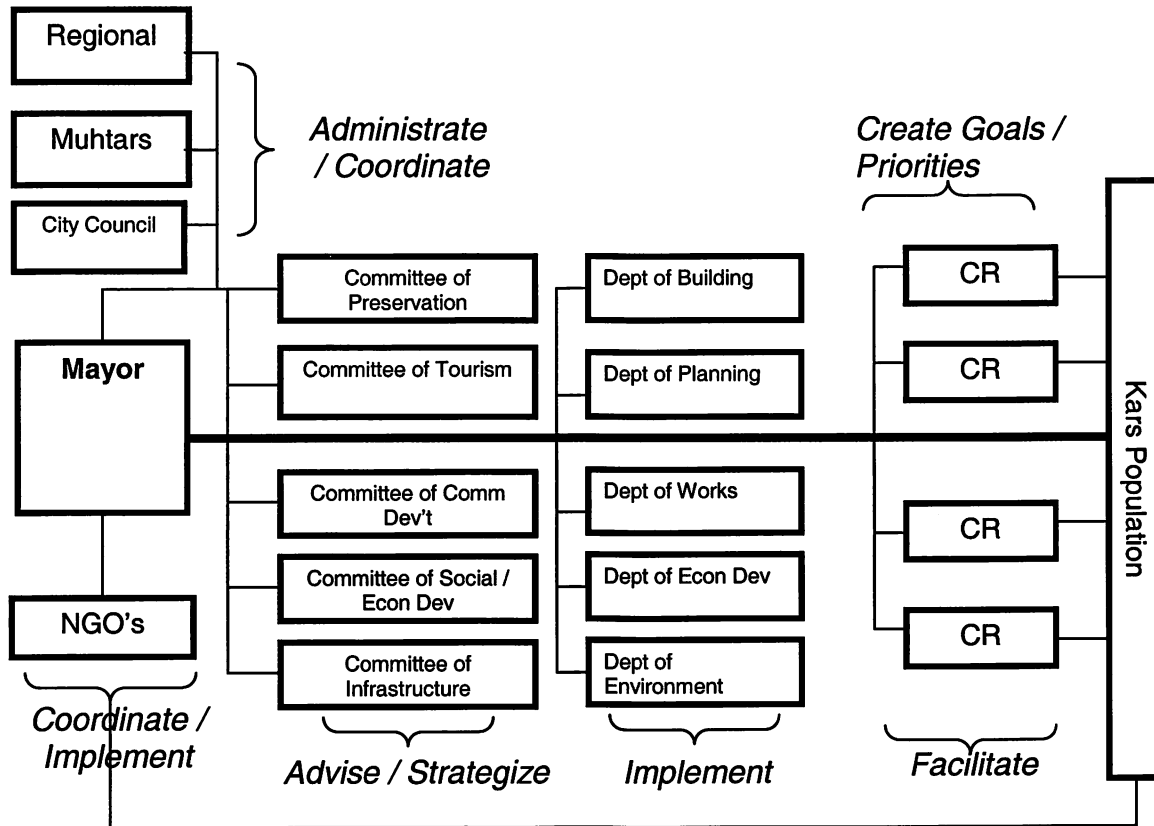
- Resettling historic Castle District
- Participatory Planning Process
- Creating local economic development

Infrastructure

- Keep major projects moving forward, to bring large numbers to the region
- Lobby TRICECA to create train stop at airport, with downtown connection
- Create a Tri-Regional council to open border

Organizational framework

The proposed organization framework is aimed at leveraging a dynamic Mayor. It focuses on implementation, and the strong community role in the decision making process.



Tourism and Preservation

As mentioned above, the main strengths of Kars is its abundance of historical and cultural assets; but at the same time, it suffers from a depressed economy and lack of human capital. Hundreds of high-end tour buses pass by Kars every year on their way to visit Ani and other sites in Eastern Turkey¹. It is a lost opportunity to not have those tourists come into the city of Kars. For this reason, tourism and preservation's main goals are to promote a tourism industry and generate jobs that directly benefits Kars' residents.

This task force decided to separate tourism from preservation endeavors, since there already is a lot of attention and institutions working on the preservation of Kars' assets. Historic buildings are a fundamental element of attracting tourism, but Kars also needs to create appropriate tourist infrastructure to accommodate visitors in the province. This is one of the first priorities in our action plan. The strategic objectives are:

¹ (http://www.globalheritagefund.org/where/kars_page2.html)

Tourism Strategic Objectives	Preservation Strategic Objectives
1. Develop a five-year, multi-season, tourism marketing strategy for Kars Province <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase visitor numbers and average length of stay • Increase awareness of Kars as a multi-thematic tourist destination (Kars Province-Ani-Sarikamis) • Built around three product clusters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Soft adventure and touring (historical & cultural heritage) - Skiing & winter activities - Rest, relaxation (eco-tourism & healing springs) 	Develop architectural and archeological cadastral survey
2. Develop a Tourism Strategic Plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate tourism resource base • Evaluate market potential • Develop schedule for implementation 	Define restoration priorities according to economic and social impacts
3. Attract investment to build tourism facilities in city center	Develop policies for protection of historic monuments and elements characterizing the urban fabric
4. Develop skills in the local hospitality industry	Promote Ancient City of Ani as World Heritage site

To implement the tourism action plan, we propose to form a Tourism Board to coordinate different initiatives, as well as the following three programs:

- a. Marketing program: starts promoting Kars Province as a destination point rather than a pass-through point. Priority activities are (i) develop and distribute multi-thematic tourist destination brochures (regionally, nationally and internationally, with especial attention in Turkish communities living elsewhere, i.e., Germany); develop a marketing campaign of Sarikamis winter center; and develop a visually stunning tourism website.
- b. Tax incentives program: directed mainly to Kars' residents to build new tourism facilities such as pensions, hostels, shops, restaurants, etc.
- c. Training programs for residents in the local hospitality industry.

This is the year of tourism for international funding sources and we propose to secure support from the World Bank, specifically targeting its Community Development Grant program. Other sources are the EU Regional Integration Fund; funds for monuments and cultural sites from Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism; and the GHF Kars Preservation Fund. The Private developers such as Sarakamis Winter Center should also be involved as a funding source, as well as Hotels in Kars City and business advertised by the marketing program.

A Municipal Historic Preservation Board will be needed in order to implement the preservation objectives. This board will coordinate the preservation initiatives in the Kars Province, ensuring the protection of Kars ecological and cultural assets. In addition, Vocational Programs related to Building, Preservation and Construction directed to residents might be another good source of employment for Kars residents.

As for preservation funding resources, the GHF is already investing in the development of architectural and city planning drawings for Kaleici Riverfront, Topcuoglu Hamam Kars Visitor Center, and Namik Kemal House Community Center. However, although the Municipality of Kars has already committed to help fund these sites' restoration, we recommend applying for

alternative funds such as The Crest Foundation, the EU, and Andolu Kultur, in order to leave more resources available for other community programs. Finally, involving Kafkas University and other academic institutions that support technical aspects is also an important opportunity.

Community Development Plan

1. Strategic Objectives

We propose to resettle the Castle District, to restore a historical residential character; to maximize community participation in future planning processes and to bring economic opportunity to residents (urban and rural job creation)

2. Community Development Plan

Our community development plan has following components. First, stop current policies of slum-clearing and relocation. The clearance of slums economically, socially damages neighborhoods, and destroys lively urban character of cultural sites. Also, it hinders ability to be supported by EU funding. Second, we propose to identify buildable areas by limiting construction on steep cliffs and preserving historical / cultural sites. Yet, build densely is preferred as it restores the original character and fills in planned "cultural corridor". Thirdly, we propose to invest in neighborhood infrastructure. By creating enhanced roads, not wide open spaces and developing community facilities for resettled residents, we would like to see the improvements in the infrastructure. Also, we propose to give incentives for auto-construction by laying basic infrastructure such as water, sewerage, and streets. Lastly, we recommend that development be done in scale with Kars, in order to preserve the important small urban, granular fabric, of the significant distinct characters of different districts: Ottoman, Russian and others as needed.

3. Community Programs

Our community programs are composed of two aspects – social and economic. Socially, we suggest promoting Community Investment and a Participatory Process in Kars. It includes establishing Community Based Organizations and investing in Human Capital.

By establishing community based organizations, the liaison between the community and the municipal government will be created. Also, it helps to facilitate NGO's operating in Kars, and oversees and coordinates with Kars expatriates, and to help oversee the allocation of remittance funds as well. The CBO will be the instrument of participatory involvement in the planning of future initiatives.

In order to make the investments in human capital, we propose to pair with municipality and NGO's to create job training centers in agriculture and service and pair with NGOs to improve education of women and youth. Also, it is needed to build capacity for women to home based enter the business realm in the sectors in which they are involved (e.g. Crafts and Cloth making).

Economically, we propose to promote agricultural industry and small business by the creation of a business enterprise center. The center will include a business incubator, and it will provide management training, administrative support and technical support. Also, the center can serve in connecting small business entrepreneurs with micro-finance institutions. We also propose to scale up the agriculture. By creating producer groups and cooperatives, it will help to centralize, streamline, and modernize agricultural activity. And given the fact of the importance of marketing, we propose to put more emphasize on marketing the distinctive products of Kars to the greater Caspian area and global population.

4. Implementation

In terms of funding, the municipal government will be responsible for the neighborhood infrastructure since resettlement is necessary to secure other int'l funding. We also propose to leverage high private investments as burgeoning tourist trade should attract private developers of hotels and retail establishments, fostering job growth. World Bank could also offer Community Development Grants in training, community employment, and social Services. European Bank

can provide economic development technical advice and Other NGO's can provide micro credit initiatives. Also, Hometown Associations could be used to fund neighborhood upgrades.

Infrastructural Development Plan

Under our infrastructural development plan, we propose following actions in trains, planes and automobiles. Currently, the proposed TRACECA will create rail connection to EU and across Asia. The train which links to Europe underway will have a stop in Kars. The future train will follow the existing ROW, although we propose a new stop to create a central inter-modal rail and highway station. Also, the airport connection made to link to inter-modal (downtown connection) is crucial. Presently, Turkey is 4 hrs from most of Europe. Since there are plans underway to upgrade airport to accommodate international flights, Kars should become the Anatolian hub. In terms of automobile transportation, EU Highway is parallel to the train but follows the Black Sea yet Kars is not on the direct route. Therefore, we propose to open the border to Armenia. It needs the pressure from a regional authority and currently it is harming trade and seasonal migration

Priorities for phasing

The top priority is to stop slum-clearing, in which international funding is contingent on resettling the cleared population. After this comes with reestablishing trust with the community, acknowledging the fact that genuine participatory planning and a new CBO can leverage the strength and entrepreneurship of the Kars residents. After the trust building process, we propose to develop Tri-City Council to open the border. Currently the major border crossing with Armenia is closed; this will increase regional trade and migration, which is vital to the success of this plan. The actions we propose as continuous are to establish 3-year milestone for assessment and redirection if necessary. Also, the changing conditions and availability of funding could lead to new strategies.

