

Community-led Urban Strategies in Historic Towns (COMUS)

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Rehabilitation of Old Goris Cave town

Feasibility Study

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 The goal of the programme

The goal of the proposed programme is to ensure the protection and maintenance of Goris reserve (Old Goris) by rehabilitating the reserve territory including the old caves and the related infrastructure and turn it into one of the most popular touristic sites of Armenia.

1.2 The objective of the programme

The special objective is to improve the quality of life and opportunities for income generation for the inhabitants of Goris town, through the creation of new working places and business opportunity for the local population.

1.3 Background

Goris town is located in Zangezur, a historical district of Armenia that includes modern-day Syunik and part of the Vayots Dzor region. It is 250 km from Yerevan in south-eastern Armenia. There has been a settlement in a widening uneven, rocky canyon, full of conical rocks since at least the 13th century, occupying an area of 5.5-6 ha. It was adjacent to the commercial route (connecting northern Armenia to the south and southeast) with an interesting layout. Its folk houses were typical of Zangezur region, all of them were gradually abandoned. In the beginning of the 19th century the area still had 119 households living typically in cave dwellings, called krataker. These were excavated into the cone-shaped rocks on the slopes of the canyon and were mainly composed of one single large room, although at times adjacent cavity-rooms were added. Some caves had only a defensive role, and could be accessed by climbing up with ropes. There are also a few multi-story cave-houses connected with corridors whose upper chambers generally had wooden balconies over the cliffs. Over time the caves were extended and made more comfortable. Vaulted, arched porches were added as were various comforts such as warmed beds (tonir), ovens, cupboards, etc. From the 19th century stone houses began to be built in Goris and the Krataker used for storage.

The 19th century stone houses are mainly two-storied. The lower floor was used as a kitchen, larder, pantry and for other economic purposes, while the upper floor consisted of an entrance room and either one large or two small rooms. The houses are characterised by arched entrances and beautiful wooden balconies. They were built of cracked basalt and the roof was made of wooden tiles.

The highlights of the hills of the Gyune and Middle districts are Saint Hripsime church and chapel. It is assumed that Saint Hripsime was constructed during the 4th century and replaced a pagan temple. It was reconstructed during the 16th century. In the Soviet period, the church was turned into a club, but in 2009-2013 the church was restored and today it is operational.

In the northern part of the cemetery located in the eastern part of Mid-Goris is the 17th century Melik's Chapel; a vaulted basilica built of fractured basalt stone which served as a mausoleum for the princes of Old Goris.

The many water-mills of Goris can be grouped into two categories: one large group was located on the right bank of Vararakn river, opposite the Zopchun and Lasti districts of Old Goris; the second consists of a group of four mills using the groundwater on the road leading from Mirak bridge to modern-day Komitas Street. Only one of the water-mills has been preserved; 4x5 m rectangular structure with a gabled roof. There were many potteries in Goris but now only one, in Ghatrni canyon, still exists.

1.4 The current status

The preservation and maintenance of Old Goris, rich in historical-architectural monuments and traditions, is a priority. The area of old Goris has been inhabited since the beginning of the 20th century. Next to a commercial route, its layout is rather interesting, its folk houses – typical of the region of Zangezur – have been gradually abandoned.

Old Goris is historical-cultural monument of national importance, it is both a natural and architectural monument. The Ministry of Culture has approved the plan of protection zone, including practically all of the core centre of Goris town. The state register of Historical and Cultural monuments of Syunik includes: St. Hripsime Church; Melik's Church; 52 residential caves; the amphitheatre; the caravanserai; the residential rocky hill; the Dzagedzor castle; an oil press; a bridge over Vararakn river; the old cemetery; and, numerous tombs and stone crosses.

1.5 Proposed phases of the programme

Restoration and reuse of Old Goris is a long-term project that should be implemented in the following phases:

- rehabilitation of infrastructure including parking and access planning;
- road construction;
- rehabilitation of cave dwellings;
- restoration of ancient houses of 19th century (restoration of 5 to 10 caves and/or houses during each phase);

If this project is implemented according to general design principles over time the area will become a fascinating tourist and cultural centre for Zangezur.

1.6 Methodology

One of the most important issues is the restoration of the secondary roads with locally-sources cobblestones. Before rehabilitation of caves-residences commences, archaeological works should be conducted as Old Goris may still hold many surprises. Works on cave or residential houses should be only go ahead on an approved plan of overall works, as well as agreements on ownership, status and maintenance agreements. In each phase 5 to 10 caves and/or houses should be restored.

Another important element of the project includes the rehabilitation of ancient pedestrian bridges and construction of new ones on Vararakn river, re-creating the link between the town of Goris and the old Goris reserve. We propose that the right bank of the Vararakn river remain largely untouched, without major construction. In this are it is preferable that a number of sites are selected in order to establish view-points and in general the infrastructure is improved. The area is part of the protection zone approved by Ministry of Culture of RA and thus all interventions should be conducted according so as to protect its historical and cultural environment.

Buildings with cultural values that are well preserved should be restored, and residential houses renovated according to modern requirements and adapted to new uses.

The role of culture and crafts should be highlighted. Goris' ancient rock-cut amphitheatre is well-preserved but reconstruction would allow performances and other events to be organized there.

1.7 Overall assessment of budgetary needs and phases

No	Item	Unit	No of Units	Unit cost	Total cost	Total cost 1€=530AMD
1		caves	52	10,000,000 ₴	520,000,000 ₴	981,132 €
2	Rehabilitation of dilapidated facilities		50	50,000,000 ₴	2,500,000,000 ₴	4,716,981 €
3	Rehabilitation of roads	m2	3,000	40,000 ₴	120,000,000 ₴	226,415 €
4	Design and studies		1	100,000,000 ₴	100,000,000 ₴	188,679 €
5	Other expenses (ie. demolition of illegal buildings)		1	100,000,000 ₴	100,000,000 ₴	188,679 €
	Total				3,340,000,000 ₴	6,301,887 €

2. Introduction

2.1. Technical assessment

There are no major technical difficulties that can impede the implementation of the programme. The only issue may be the fact that new residential houses have been built in the area, many of which continue to expand into the reserve. Although the area is within the protection zone and most of the territory is owned by the Municipality, some houses and gardens are privately owned. Thus, together with the approval of the programme individual construction should be forbidden in the territory and those houses that are least in keeping with the area's character should be eliminated. This should be done sensitively and cause the least harm to locals as possible. Either they should be compensated for loss of property or be allowed to submit their own proposals for restoration. For example, they can propose to turn the house into pottery, carpet making or wood cutting workshops, etc. Thus, new employment for inhabitants will be created and local culture will be displayed, embodying the concept of cave-town.

2.2 Financial assessment

According to preliminary estimations for the implementation of the full programme, a total of AMD 13,617,000,000 (€13,617,000,000) is required. Obtaining this is a quite realistic objective, if the Government, NGOs and Foundations working in the field approve the programme and accept it as a high priority. Furthermore, the works can be completed in phases.

2.3. Existing fabric and conditions

The main restoration works will use local stones and materials. Fortunately, there are many experienced craftsmen with the required skills and knowledge both in the region and the Republic. Most probably they would benefit from additional training. All required materials are readily available in Armenia and there will be no problem in obtaining them.

2.4. Design (and drawing) proposals

The design and the drawings can be developed later.

2.5 Responsible authorities

Old Goris is a national monument. Monument no. (State Indicator) 8.3.2. The Responsible Bodies are: The Ministry of Culture, Syunik Marzpetaran (regional government) and Goris Municipality. Private owners also own residential houses in the territory of the reserve. Thus, we propose that a special legal entity be established that will be responsible for restoration and further maintenance of the area.

2.6. References

Practical research in Goris city was conducted between September-October 2016. The following materials and articles were used:

- Goris Historic-Cultural Justification Plan, the Ministry of Culture, Cultural Heritage Research Center, Yerevan 2011
- Hakhverdyan S., The history of Goris, Yerevan, 2005
- Orbelian S., The history of Syunik, Yerevan, 1986
- Abraham Cretaci, History, Yerevan, 1973
- Papukhyan N., Syunik folk architecture, Yerevan, 1972
- Lisitsyan St., Armenians of Zangezur, Yerevan, 1969

3. Outline of works

3.1. Description of investment / project

The project aims to restore and revive the Old Goris reserve. The area is in the protection zone and all interventions should be made with a goal of protection of made landscapes in a historical and cultural environment. The monuments of Old Goris that are valuable from a historical and epistemological point of view, as well as excavated and constructed houses, are fully abandoned and out of use at present. The general structure of the territory is irretrievably lost and the landscape's unique panorama is partly hidden (illegal buildings, fences, etc.) and cannot be perceived fully. It is for these reasons that the recovery of the Old Goris area and its reuse in accordance with the demands of modern life is vital. The proposed design aims to partly restore the old urban plan in order to create a tourist centre. Planned activities will not only guarantee the protection of the monument but also create new work-places and promote the development of tourism and strengthen civic life.

3.2 Programme implementation model and agreements

We think it is reasonable to establish a legal entity (foundation, or NGO, etc.) to implement the programme, from its design phase to the procurement of restoration/rehabilitation works and further operation and maintenance of the site. This will guarantee the success of this complex project, as well as ensure that project is sustainable. The entity will make framework agreements with all the organizations in authority (Ministry of Culture, Goris Municipality, etc.) as well as individuals owners of building or land in the area.

3.3 Inventory of the framework conditions

Old Goris is a monument of national importance. Land use in a historical and cultural protected area is only permitted in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Armenia. In protected zones, only excavation, restoration and reconstruction works are allowed. The list of historical and cultural monuments of Syunik region includes: St. Hripsime Church; Melik's Church; 52 residential caves; a rock-cut amphitheatre, caravanserai, residential rocks complex, a bridge over Vararakn river, the Dzagedzor castle, nine residential houses; a cemetery; tombs; and, stone crosses. If authorization is given, it is possible to build new structures in areas where there are protected historical and cultural monuments. However, both projects and designs should be approved by the authorized bodies.

3.4 Outcomes and benefits

The benefit from rehabilitation of Old Goris will be both social and cultural. Individual investors may also gain from the project. The establishment of a touristic centre will promote the development of small and medium sized enterprises. The restoration of the area will lead to the development of tourism, create opportunities for income generation and create new employment for local inhabitants. Most importantly, an environment will be created that will guarantee the protection of the monuments. A similar experience can be cited; Sharamberyan Street, in the town of Dilijan was restored and reused.

3.5 Legal framework

A strong legal framework is already in place for this programme. Great care should be made to ensure that framework agreements clarify the roles and responsibilities of all the parties. Urban development in Goris is regulated by the Government Protocol N 21 from 2012. May 31. All construction work is strictly controlled by the Municipality of Goris.

3.6 Social and Economic feasibility

Today, Old Goris is in a state of abandonment, decay and ruin. In contrast to the 19th-century houses, the caves are in far better condition. The houses have suffered due to climatic conditions and intentional damage by people. New burials continue to take place in the old cemetery. These should be forbidden and any new fences should be removed in order to improve the historic environment. If these measures are not carried out it is highly likely that the monument will soon be lost, along with any chance of restoring it. If the area is rehabilitated it will become both socially and economically profitable. The site is not far from the road leading to Stepanakert, as well as Kapan, Meghri and Iran.

According to unofficial data, about 35-40,000 tourists visit Goris annually, both Armenians and foreigners. The greatest group are tourists from France, followed by Poland, Belgium, Russia, and Asian countries amongst others.

Official data is only available from the data of the National Statistic Service of the Republic of Armenia, which records ten small hotels in Goris and around 12,000 tourists. However, the latter figure is very far from the reality of the situation.

We believe that the newly established touristic centre may become a frequent and popular stopping point for travellers. Restored caves-residences will give a provide the space for more than 50 small businesses (B&Bs, restaurants, souvenir shops, crafts shops, etc.). Thus, new employment will be created and the local culture will be displayed.

3.7. Implementation strategy and sustainability

Below is the proposed plan of action:

- restore the road leading to Old Goris and rehabilitate the engineering infrastructure;
- at the entrance to the district, an informational panel-map should be installed including information on all public institutions, monuments, touristic sites, and routes, also explanation of the cultural values;
- target groups of potential tourists should be selected. Considering their creditability and interests. In the touristic area, three types of accommodations are proposed:
- Accommodation – “Qratak” (ethno-tourism) – this is aimed to those who are interested in the habits and traditions of old Goris. These “Qrataks” will be restored and furnished with traditional furnishings and equipment. The accommodation will have shared bathrooms, toilets, kitchens that could be built outside the “Qrataks” in the restored folk houses “Gharadams”;
- Accommodation – traditional house (ethno-tourism, eco-tourism) – this lodging will be arranged in the folk houses “Gharadams” of the 18th and 19th centuries. The folk houses of old Goris will be restored and renewed with modern facilities.
- Accommodation – Modern and comfortable lodgings – restoring and renovating the 19th and 20th century buildings of the city of Goris, as well as by new buildings constructed in keeping with the main architectural traditions and principles (scale, stylistic characters, etc.) of Goris.
- a tourism information centre can be constructed in the former place of the caravanserai, in the outskirts of the settlement. Some of the “Qrataks” and “Gharadams” districts should be restored and preserved and transformed into ethnographic museums. Some may be provided to craft workers.
- Some areas of old Goris can be set up as campsites as well as venues for open-air local and international events (“Baze” Pan Armenian youth camp, scout camps, etc.).

3.8. Sustainability

The future owners of restored houses and caves will take full responsibility for operation and maintenance of rented or purchased sites. A tourist tax could be established to provide funds for the maintenance of the whole site. This will ensure the programme's sustainability.

4. Risk Assessment

4.1 Old Goris is listed as a protected monument and all interventions should be carried out under the control of authorized organizations.

4.2 A general development plan should be developed and consistently followed in order to avoid errors. Otherwise, even if individual monuments may be protected, the environmental overview and panorama may be lost.

4.3 Another issue is changes in the livelihood and way of thinking of the local population over the last few decades. In Soviet times Goris was a modern industrial centre, but now there is practically no industry in the city.

The official rate of unemployment in the urban area of Goris is 16.5 percent and the number of recorded unemployed people is 1,660. It is most probable that the real number of unemployed greatly exceeds the official data. People are mainly involved in farming and livestock breeding. Therefore, the renovation process should be organized so as to ensure that there are high levels of participation and that inhabitants benefit from the project.



Fig.1. The protection zone of Old Goris (approved by Ministry of Culture of RA 2012)



Fig.2. Panorama of old Goris (19th century)



Fig.3. St. Hripsime Church



Fig.4. Goris, Cave town, amphitheatre

5. Recommendations

5.1 Some of the proposed restoration works, particularly those related to infrastructure, can be carried out under state-financing. Non-governmental organizations and individual donors can also be involved. Some organizations, particularly “Yerkir ev Mshakuyt” (Land and Culture) are already carrying out some activities related to monument protection and restoration works. They are strong candidates as potential partners. Goris and French Vienne have been twin towns for more than 20 years and it may be possible to involve the Municipality of Vienne in these activities as well.

6. Activities and responsible persons/organizations

No	Description of activity	Responsible entity	Timeline
1	Formation of the project management team (Legal entity)	Local Government, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Armenia	Month 1 > Month 2
2	Procurement of design works	Legal entity	Month 2 > Month 4
3	Procurement of restoration works	Legal entity	After Month 6
4	Development of framework agreements with related organizations	Legal entity	During the construction period
5	Operation and maintenance of the site	Legal entity	After the end of restoration

7. Development of the FS

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