Partners in Progress 2024

Korça

"Old but Gold Bazaar" Project

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- DURATION

  Ongoing since 2018

- POPULATION 2024

  Korça: 60,754 (Growth rate -0.71%)

- URA SCOPE

  STRATEGY. Shared Vision
  ECONOMY: Urban Prosperity Beyond GDP

- TOPICS

  REVITALIZATION, HERITAGE, INVESTMENT, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, TOURISM, COMMUNITY

- MAIN ACTORS

  TID Korça (Tourism Improvement District of Korça)
  Albanian-American Development Foundation
  Municipality of Korça

TheBay Urban Visioning Awards

In the cobbled alleys of Korça's Old Bazaar, a quiet but powerful transformation is taking shape. Once a thriving 19th-century hub of commerce and culture, the bazaar has weathered decades of change, leaving its rich heritage underutilized and its economic potential largely untapped. Today, through the creation of the Tourism Improvement District (TID) Korça, that narrative is shifting—toward regeneration, opportunity, and renewed community spirit.

TID Korça is more than a tourism initiative. It's a collaborative effort to strengthen local enterprise, support hospitality and artisan businesses, and reinvigorate one of the city's most treasured spaces. By channelling funding into destination promotion, events, and cultural programming, the project motivates visitors to stay longer, explore deeper, and spend more—directly benefiting those who live and work in the area.

But the project's impact reaches further than economics. It demonstrates how cultural preservation, and development can go hand in hand. In a place where faded façades speak of forgotten glory, investments are now restoring historic buildings, improving business infrastructure, and drawing foot traffic back into the winding streets.

The approach is rooted in successful models such as AADF's Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), where every euro of support has attracted multiple times that in private investment. Korça is poised to follow that same path—with a distinctly local flavour.

Crucially, the community is not a passive recipient of change. Through the TID Management Association, residents and business owners play an active role in decision-making.

Their voices shape each step, ensuring that growth is aligned with local needs and aspirations. This participatory model strengthens civic pride and fosters a sense of shared ownership over the bazaar's future.

What makes this initiative truly pioneering is its novel application of the TID model to a heritage site—a rare move in Albania. In doing so, it not only preserves a unique urban identity but sets a new precedent for sustainable urban renewal.

With its clear structure and replicable framework, the Korça TID offers a blueprint for other historic neighbourhoods across the country, and perhaps far beyond, where history and progress can once again walk side by side.

Challenge

Korça's Old Bazaar, once a flourishing centre of trade and craftsmanship, has experienced a prolonged period of decline marked by physical, economic, and social deterioration. The aging of the city's historic fabric, including deteriorating roofs, façades, and undermaintained infrastructure, has diminished the district's functionality and aesthetic value. Many of the commercial buildings, once central to local commerce, have been left vacant or repurposed without regard for their heritage, contributing to a gradual erosion of the area's historical identity.

Simultaneously, the city has witnessed a steady loss of traditional businesses, driven by economic stagnation, limited market access, and the migration of younger generations in search of better opportunities. This trend has reduced entrepreneurial activity, weakened the local economy, and disrupted intergenerational knowledge transfer in areas such as craftsmanship and trade.

Tourism, once seen as a potential driver of development, has remained largely underdeveloped, with limited visitor infrastructure and low visibility of the city's cultural assets. This has hindered Korça's ability to position itself as a destination of interest. At the same time, regional and popular cultural expressions have lost ground, highlighting a pressing need to reinforce the city's identity and role within Albania's cultural and economic landscape.

Solution Proposed

The Tourism Improvement District (TID) project in Korça aims to preserve and revitalize the Old Bazaar, a historic commercial area designated as a state-protected Monument of Culture.

The initiative focuses on architectural restoration, including the renovation of roofs, façades, and select interior structures, with additional infrastructure upgrades funded by the Government of Albania and AADF.

The project focuses on economic revitalization by aiding local businesses with training and marketing support, projecting $2–$7 million in private investment over 3–5 years, and promoting entrepreneurship in tourism, crafts, and cultural products.

The project aims to boost cultural tourism through destination marketing, branding, and the development of tourist facilities like artisan shops and museums. Regular events and cultural activities will increase visitor engagement.

Sustainability is pursued by establishing a nonprofit TID Management Association for operations and funds management. Certification for local goods enhances quality and visibility, while community participation ensures traditional practices and local identity are included.

A long-term strategic plan underpins the initiative, including policy advocacy to institutionalize TID models within national legislation.

Impact

The revitalization of the Korça Old Bazaar has yielded measurable outcomes across economic, social, and cultural dimensions, confirming the effectiveness of the intervention strategy.

Economic Revitalization

Private investment increased significantly, with an estimated $10 million mobilized over 3–5 years. This was complemented by $3.845 million from partner institutions, $1.611 million from AADF, and $437,000 from the Foundation, which directly supported the launch of over 50 new businesses and generated more than $1.6 million in associated investment. These developments contributed to a notable rise in commercial property values.

Job Creation and Business Growth

The initiative substantially exceeded its targets, facilitating the establishment of 103 new businesses (target: 20) and creating 280 jobs (target: 100). Customer foot traffic in the bazaar increased by 70%, reflecting the renewed commercial appeal of the area.

Cultural Heritage and Tourism

The restoration of historic roofs and façades preserved the architectural character of the district. Promotional efforts repositioned the bazaar as a cultural tourism destination, enhancing its visibility and visitor appeal.

Infrastructure Development

Public infrastructure investments exceeded $7 million, covering roadworks, lighting, and fire protection. An additional $3 million was later approved, contributing to a 60% increase in property value (surpassing the 35% target).

Governance and Institutionalization

A Tourism Improvement District (TID) Management Association was established, providing an institutional framework and a strategic management plan to support long-term sustainability.

Local Economic Impact

Increased visitor stays, higher occupancy rates, and stronger business revenues were observed. Local artisans and entrepreneurs benefited from targeted support, including capacity-building programs.

Overall, the initiative demonstrated a scalable model for heritage-driven economic development.