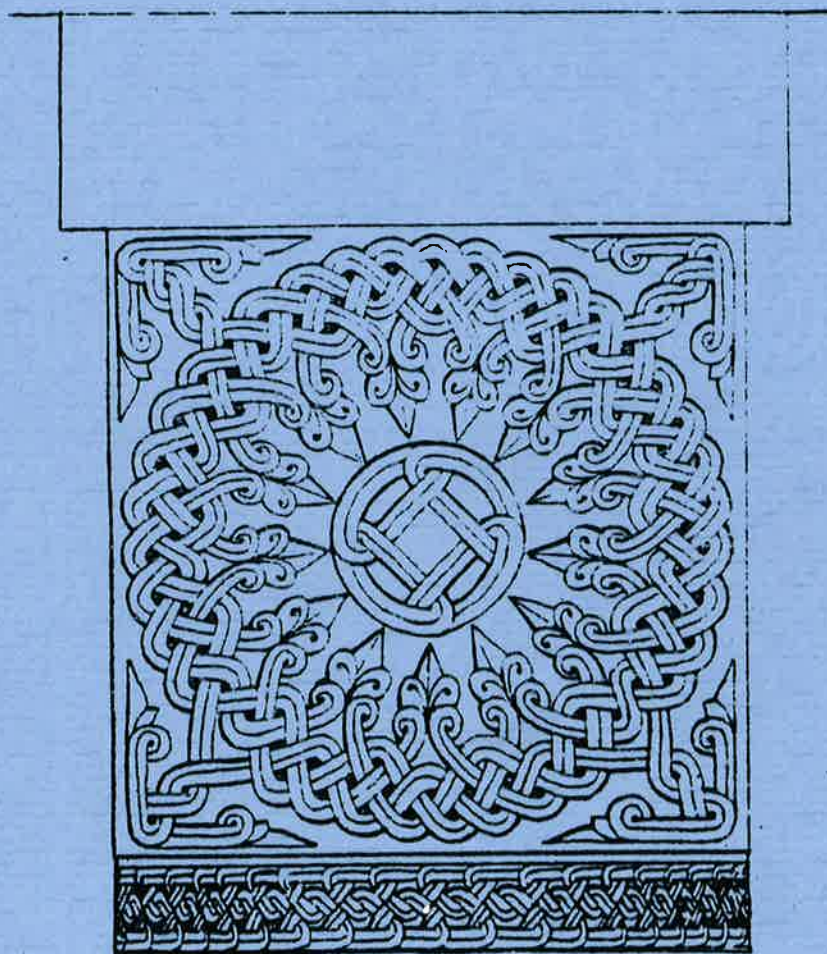


Georgia

Cultural Heritage Initiative IDF Grant Programme



World Bank, Municipal and Social Services (Dept. IV)

Mission report 20 October – 8 November 1997 by Flemming Aalund

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Introduction:

This third mission under the World Bank Cultural Heritage Initiative for Georgia took place from 20 October to 8 November 1997 under Trust Fund agreement with the Danish Foreign Ministry.

The Terms of Reference were mainly related to training and sharing experiences with the local consultants, who are currently recording historic and architectural qualities in the Zemo Kala area of Old Tbilisi, one of the seven pilot sites selected under the CHI. I was also asked, during the mission, to give a general assessment of this project and give recommendations for further strategies.

Report on the Zemo Kala Quarter of Old Tbilisi

Outline of main findings and proposals:

Zemo Kala quarter constitutes, together with Kvemo Kala quarter, the historic centre of the Mediaeval city of Tbilisi, originally surrounded by defence walls and boasting a number of historic monuments. Most significant landmarks are the Anchiskhati Basilica (6 Cent.) Sioni Cathedral (6 Cent., rebuilt in 12-13- Cent.) and the Surp Nishan Armenian Church (1701), the Patriarchs Residence as well as a number of caravanserais (19 cent.).

Dwelling houses are mainly dating from the 19. Century due to destructions of the town in the wake of the 1795 Persian invasion, but the previous foundations are most often reused and the town plan is mediaeval with a irregular street pattern. The townscape is characterized by the intimate domestic scale and the typical 'Tbilisi houses' with open courtyards and wooden balconies, which create a sense of visual unity. It is unfortunate, therefore, that poor examples of contemporary concrete buildings of bad design have been allowed to intrude and create a confused visual effect.

Plenty of historic background information exist, including 18th century plans and old photographs, providing excellent chronological documentation of the urban development that testifies to the national importance of the site.

The condition of houses are generally poor and the majority of houses lack standard basic amenities. During a considerable period of time, there has been only little house improvement activity. Compounded space problems and severe structural problems in foundations due to leaking and blocked sewers, further aggravate the problems. Also the many unused open areas, which are turned into scrapyards, add to the degradation.

Considerable efforts of preservation were carried out in the late 1970s, when part of the town wall was cleared and partly rebuilt together with a number of new buildings along the perimeter of the old town towards the north-west and along the embankment of the Mtkvari River without much care of the historic authenticity of buildings. From 1987 to 1989 the Area of Bethlehem was heavily restored and much efforts were made for recording buildings of high preservation value. Altogether about 150 houses were measured in scale 1:50 by the architects at the Preservation office for Old Tbilisi, providing a valuable source of documentation. No building activity took place during the intermediate period of political instability.

Part of Old Tbilisi is included as one of the seven pilot projects under the Cultural Heritage Initiative due to the obvious national importance of the site and the possibility to attract considerable attention to this particular area in the heart of the capital. The limitation of the area has already enlarged from the initial proposal of the Sioni area to include the whole of Zemo Kala. As the project gains momentum it will be logical also to include the Kvemo Kala area and develop the whole of the originally fortified, mediaeval city into one preservation district.

The complexity and scale of this project alone will soon necessitate that Old Tbilisi develop as an independent entity. If such development gains momentum the Cultural Heritage Initiative will be a success.

The Cultural Heritage Initiative focus especially on six areas of concern and they are commented upon to the extend they concerns the project on Old Tbilisi under the following headings: (i) Legal and institutional dimension, (ii) Resource Mobilization and Financing, (iii) Community Participation and (iv) Technical survey.

Legal/institutional dimension:

The revision of the Act on Preservation of Cultural Heritage is underway. A committee under the CHI take part in this work and receive assistance from the Council of Europe. This law concerns the protection of historic monuments as well as movable and immovable objects of art.

The possibility for designation of General Improvement Areas does exist in the former Soviet Union legislation, but is *de facto* no longer in force. Revision of the legislation on Housing and Urban Planning will be needed. Through amendments and adoption of this law local authorities should have powers to obtain, not only improvement of all substandard houses, but also of the physical and social environments. The aim is to assist the residents to improve their own houses and, together, the whole area.

Shared ownership to houses pose a problem for the maintenance of the exterior of buildings. A new Act on Condominiums has just been passed by the Parliament, but the text is not yet translated to English. It is told by planners that the content of the Act is very theoretical and practical implementation will be difficult. In such case an amendment may be considered together with the legislation on Housing and Urban Planning.

It appears that cooperation with the Municipality and representatives of the local population is scanty. Lack of communication is a current problem to the current building survey, as the most basic information on housing, ownership, etc., is missing and coordination of registers has not yet been discussed. Also the lack of a precise Land Register is evident. At this early stage of planning, involvement of all actors is important for success. Also the scope of work has to be clearly defined and enlarged to include concrete plans of action.

The setting up of a reference group for the Old Tbilisi preservation and rehabilitation project with representatives of the Municipality, CHI, ICOMOS, local NGO's and community leaders or interested individuals, will overcome this immediate problem of communication. This informal discussion forum can call other people for consultations and later turn into a formal body with statutory powers.

Resource Mobilization and Financing

These activities have not yet been started. The formation of a special 'reference group' for revitalization of the area can be but one initiative to help coordinate activities.

No 'Special Orders' or statutory lists can prevent the growing problems of a deteriorating physical fabric, unless the area will develop into an attractive place to live, to work and to do shopping. Potentials for economic revitalization needs to be scrutinized and active policy needs to be adopted. Developed into a pedestrian precinct in the very heart of Tbilisi, there are all the best prospects for a revitalization of the area. These options have to be analysed and actively promoted.

Cooperation with Care and other organisations presently working for improvement of job opportunities and helping launce new business initiatives can be beneficial for the improvement of the physical fabric of the town through economic revitalization. Identification of possible investors for restoration of empty or ruined buildings need to be intensified, but this can only come about through an active policy for revitalization and who cares ?.

Community Participation

The Community Participation Group consists of the following members: Paata Chakhnashvili, Head of the group, George Otkhmezuzi, interviewer, David Shvangizadze, interviewer, George Siradze, interviewer, Kakha Koiava, fasciliator, Mzia Ganjalia, interviewer.

The sociological and demographic sample survey suggests that out of a population of 799, a total of 485 are unemployed and 117 are pensioners. The average income per family is 30 Lari per month (!).

The questionnaire reveals two main issues of concern:

- (i) Generally, the inhabitants express appreciation of the historic environment (87% want to remain in the district and 75% evaluate 'oldness' as a positive quality of the area),

but this statement is modified - and somehow contradicted - by the fact that the large majority of the inhabitants (72,4%) are in favour of new constructions in replacement of the present dwelling. This attitude indicate no specific appreciation of the authentic qualities of the place and obviously, there is a need of information about these architectural and historic qualities in the environment.

- (ii) The poor conditions of the environment and the low income (50% live from pensions and average monthly income by family amount to 30 Lary/ 19.3 Lary by person) create a feeling of apathy. Positive expectations need to be created and some immediate and visible results are required to meet these expectations in order to break the vicious spiral of apathy.

The survey shows a high degree of ethnic and religious tolerance among the population in the area. The feeling of identity is closely related to the historic area and the intricate network of family and social relationships is strong. This sense of unity is most important to any debate about an appropriate 'conservation policy'.

The general information on attitudes to heritage values are important, but there is a need of more specific information, which can be instrumental to planning. For example, coordination with the Municipality Housing Registers, car ownership and attitudes to traffic, information about household size, housing standards and public services as well as expectations of the future, which can be formulated as a vision of future development.

To this end informal discussion fora are needed, and stimulation to all kinds of interest groups in the area can help initiating a local debate about appropriate conservation policies. This movement can be stimulated through publication of leaflets on different subjects related to all subjects of public concern.

A publication about building style and building techniques, or for example about treatment and maintenance of facades would perhaps help to avoid plastic paint or spray plaster (squirt plaster) on historic houses, which will cause a further degradation to the area.

Public participation is a lingering process.

Technical survey:

Started in April 1997 the CHI building survey in the Zemo Kala area is well underway spearheaded by a group of four local consultants: The architects Leila Tumanishvili, Maia Bukhaidze, Giorgi Gogolashvili and art historian, Maia Mania.

The current work is centred on the survey of individual buildings and the information is continuously being computerized, including scanning of one or more photographs of each building, which is being described according to the outline established in the 'Cultural Heritage Identity Card'. This effort provide important historic information and evaluation of preservation values of individual buildings with proper references to existing documentation in archives.

However, the 'Identity Card' has been designed mainly for the purpose of documenting individual historic monuments and may show less appropriate in the context of historic towns and districts. Individual buildings may still qualify for listing, but the majority of 'lived in' heritage pose quite different problems and the information on basic standard amenities are essential for planning purpose. Likewise building density, compounded space problems and vacant, unattended land, etc., needs to be recorded and analysed.

The survey already make it clear, that leaking water pipes and insufficient and blocked sewers generate severe structural failures in buildings, which will literally undermine any other efforts of building preservation, if these general infrastructure problems are not dealt with. The area is situated on sloping ground towards the Mtkvari River and topographic conditions aggravate the situation. These problems have implications on a much bigger scale, that require coordination with the City Architect's Office.

Additionally, street levels are raised considerably above the original level due to repeated macadam surfacing with the result, that many windows to the cellars are blocked and courtyards are situated well below the street level.

Lack of appropriate heating possibilities likewise pose a severe problem in most houses and offices during winter.

The Old Tbilisi is facing the problems of a deteriorating physical fabric and the increase of visual eyesores. There will soon be a growing traffic problem will make things worse. And these are not the only problems. In common with many other historic towns, not enough attention is being given to the social and economic needs of its residents.

Urban environmental assessment

In discussions with the architects group it became clear that the purpose of the survey of historic and architectural qualities in the environments need to be clearly defined.

Preservation of the architectural and intangible historic qualities in the urban environment involves much more than the preservation of the individual historic monument. The general condition of most of the dwelling houses in the area make it relevant to define an urban renewal scheme, which goes beyond the preservation of a limited number of historic monuments. An integrated approach is required, which also consider socio-economic conditions in the area and analyses of development potentials. Improvement of living conditions is a prerequisite for appreciation of the historic environment and the success of any preservation scheme.

With this aim in mind the current study of the Zemo Kala area is readjusted. The aim is to provide more basic information and analysis of the physical fabric as well as on the socio-economic conditions as a prerequisite of integrated planning for preservation and rehabilitation. During discussions in the architects group, the following main components has been listed as essential parts of the survey:

List of headings for analysis of present condition:

1. Analysis of topography, townscape and urban tissue from a historic and architectural point of view, including open space, planting and landscaping.
2. Listing of individual buildings according to the 'Cultural Heritage Identity Card'.
3. Analysis of architectural style, construction methods, materials, colour schemes, special features and characteristic details in the architecture.
4. Estimation of the historic importance of the area and its potential development.
5. Research and analysis of the population composition and building fabric in cooperation with the sociologist group, including public amenities and services, job opportunities, building economics and investment possibilities as well as interests for future improvements and development.
6. Record of existing legislation and planning and discuss legal aspects on future building preservation, town renewal and urban development, including by-laws, zoning, building permits and building control procedures.
7. Survey of infrastructure, including water supply, sewage, solid waste management, electricity and telecommunication.
8. Survey of building installations, including toilet facilities, bath, kitchen and heating.
9. Analysis of risk factors, including failures in infrastructure, danger of disappearance of characteristic architectural features, weakness in foundation and building construction.
10. Analysis of pedestrian and vehicular traffic patterns, conjectured numbers of private motor-cars, car parking and access, etc.
11. Record and analysis of public budgets, business activities and manufactory production in the area and potentials for economic revival.

This survey of the present conditions in the environment may constitute the first section of a report in two parts. The second part may include a policy for integrated preservation and development, including proposals and projects. The exact content and scope of this part need to be defined along the development of the programme. At a start, it may involve a feasibility study, providing an outline of development potentials and possibilities, which can evolve into an integrated preservation and urban renewal plan for the whole of Old Tbilisi, including Zemo Kala and Kvemo Kala in agreement with the Mater Plan for Greater Tbilisi.

A possible extension of the pilot site to include the whole of Old Tbilisi within the Mediaeval boundaries will be logical from a planning point of view. The selection of part of Old Tbilisi as a CHI pilot site is only a small beginning.

The following 13 points outline suggestion for immediate action:

13 points of view for action

Management and planning initiatives:

- 1 Set up a reference group for the Old Tbilisi preservation and rehabilitation project with representatives of the Municipality, CHI, local NGO's and community leaders or interested individuals, who can form an informal discussion forum and call other people for consultations. This group will later be formed as the Old Tbilisi Conservation Committee, a representative committee with an independent Chairman, who can be delegated powers on planning, transport, housing and conservation policies. The representative of the Municipality shall have power to act with direct reference to the City Architect.

This is an important step for disseminating information and broaden the scope of the project. The City Planning Office is responsible for the preparation of the Master Plan for Greater Tbilisi and planning for Zemo Kala area cannot be taken serious without a formal correlation of interests and responsibilities.

- 2 Ensure that the different Municipality Departments cooperate with CHI in all aspects of planning and development of the Old Tbilisi District. This active cooperation can be channelled through the Reference Group mentioned under para. 1.

Immediate cooperation can involve the infrastructure study on water and drainage as well as different social initiatives and immediate improvements of eyesores and derelict sites. Appointment of a social worker/facilitator can help initiate action.

- 3 Conduct study on the present water and drainage system and determine the main reasons for the general foundation failures and structural problems in buildings. The study shall define possible strategies for improvements on a short as well as in a long term perspective. The central gas heating system is no longer functioning and it would be relevant to include a feasibility study on heating. These investigations may in fact have much bigger implications and do again relate to the Reference Group as mentioned under para. 1.

- 4 Urge the Municipality to issue a 'Special Order' for the Zemo Kala quarter to the effect that no new building permits are issued before consultations with CHI and all existing permits will be scrutinized. This order shall be in force up to end of 1998, when the completion of a preservation plan is stipulated, including zoning and by-laws regulating building development.

It should be considered if the boundary of the preservation area is appropriate in view

of the possible subdivisions of the ten Districts of Tbilisi into smaller units with more distinct character and identification. In that case both Zemo Kala and Kvemo Kala areas should be included in the preservation district, which should include the whole area of the fortified, mediaeval city.

The Order should follow a public announcement that explains the background and the reason of the Order and provide an outline of the immediate actions as well as the long perspectives of development.

The Special Order shall also be considered a testing ground for revision of legislation on Housing and Urban Planning, which need to include provision for the creation of General Improvement Areas.

- 5 Prepare statutory powers for the establishment of an Urban Renewal Company - one or several, which can administer all technical and economic matters related to urban environmental improvement. The Company can have major shareholders made up of the City Council, banks and insurance companies. (The organisation can possibly be set up along the lines of the Amsterdam Company for Town Restoration Ltd., and work on an independent, nonprofit basis).
- 6 Office for administration and public information can be established in the premises of the existing Preservation Office for Old Tbilisi on Leselidze Street after restoration of the building, which is in a deplorable condition. Landscaping of the area surrounding the Djvaris Mama Church and the Nozrashen Armenian Church is likewise needed.

The active cooperation with this office will be an important step for integration of the Cultural Heritage Initiative in the existing administrative structures and prevent possible adversity.

Information about the project needs to well communicated to all residents of the area. Community participation and transparency is important measures to overcome suspicion and adversity. Public debate meetings create possibilities for a dialogue with local residents that can help define problems and bring about possible solutions, which are based on local needs.

Leaflets and information on the correct use of building materials and crafts for maintenance and restoration of historic buildings is needed, especially with regard to avoiding cement plaster and the popular use of squid plaster.

Project proposals for immediate action:

The suggested lines of action include a variety of projects that will show immediate visible results, create jobs and involve a wide spectrum of different problems in the environment, while preparation for large scale housing improvement scheme takes place.

- 7 Immediate visible results will help combat apathy and get residents to feel positively about future development. The new concrete buildings, alien to the otherwise harmonious townscape of the area, are adding a sad contrast to the shabby condition of the majority of houses.

Revivify the drab environment and dull appearance of the nursery school. A new external plaster with a lively colour wash (choice of colour based on the historic colour scheme of the area) would have a tremendous visual impact on the environment and give much psychological stimulation. If this would be considered extravagant for a building only ten years old, at least revitalization of the dreadful tarmac playing ground with new pavement and playing facilities, will be much appreciated.

8. Improvement of public amenities: There are a serious number of eyesores in the form of derelict sites and pockets of neglected land in the area, which add to the feeling of apathy and create health hazards.

The vacant land surrounding the Djvaris Mama Church and the Nozrashen Armenian Church in front of the Preservation Office for Old Tbilisi on Leselidze Street is but one of these eyesores, which should be included, although it is just outside the present boundary of the action area (refer also discussion under succeeding para. 9).

Start an immediate programme for landscaping and improvement of vacant open space in cooperation with local community groups. A social worker or facilitator may help promote implementation and community participation.

9. Urgent repairs to historic monuments: Many buildings have severe structural failures, roofs, gutters and down pipes are leaking etc., and these problems are most serious, when it concerns unique, historic structures. Obviously the Armenian Church, Surp Nishan, is a major landmark and among the most endangered historic building in the area. It is now closed to the public, serving as a store house for the National Archives. The building is badly maintained and trees are growing on the roof. The building is state property, but it would be a remarkable gesture to give the church back to the Armenian community, thereby also corroborating the assurances by Mr. Eduard Shevardnadze, at the recent summit of the Council of Europe, that ethnic, cultural and religious tolerance in Georgia has a long tradition.

A possible choice of this Armenian church for restoration should be measured against the current strife between the Armenian Church and the Georgian Orthodox Church concerning the future of the Nozrashen Church. This Armenian church has recently consecrated by the Georgian Patriarch and a new alter screen has been put up without prior notice. The Armenian community considered this a provoking act, and four Armenian archbishops protested. As a result, an intermediate compact has been reached, by which neither will held services in the church, and the National Archive will still have the right to dispose of some area of the church. The surrounding area is

deplorable and the building has severe horizontal cracks, almost from ground to top, at three gables. The interior was not accessible. Obviously, it is no lasting truce. At the time being, restoration of the Surp Nishan Armenian Church could be considered a consolidating act of good will.

Restoration of the roof at the Surp Nishan Church. This unique and remarkable building constitutes an important landmark in the centre of the Zemo Kala quarter. A project for restoration of the roof and external facades as well as improvement of the surroundings would be a great asset to the environment, ensure that no further damage will occur to the monument due to percolating water and help preserve an important historic monument. The project shall be carried through in cooperation with the Armenian community, on condition that, on their side, they restore the interior, secure the continued maintenance and keep the building open to the public as a historic monument .

10. Culture: Cultural events and activities considerably add to the vitality and attractiveness of a city, because amusement and pleasure create a positive prospect for the future. There is a long tradition for performances by puppet theatres in the area, but sadly the theatres have been closed and the buildings allegedly belongs to the Municipality. These days negotiations are taking place at the Ministry of Justice concerning the future of the buildings. According to information from the administrative director of the theatre, functions will be divided. The one building may be used as a cultural centre and the other for a new theatre. The situation is unclear and some encouragement may be needed for revitalization.

Reopening and revitalisation of the theatre on Bara Tashvili Street and the marionette theatre on Shavteli Street.

11. Integrated rehabilitation of historic structures, including housing improvement and commercial development: Programmes for subsidised housing improvements may be premature, awaiting more public participation and involvements in decision making, not to mention available funds.

A feasibility study and programme for rehabilitation of the large caravanserai on Leselidze Street would entail all components of urban revitalization: restoration of a historic structure, improvement of housing, improvement of working condition for employers at the dress manufactory, enhancement of commercial conditions for the private shops and cafes at the front. The building is in late 'Russian classicistic style' with the facade on Leselidze Street relatively well preserved, but the remaining parts are heavily rebuilt during the Soviet period and the courtyard is turned to a scrapheap. How exactly the rehabilitation can take place with a view to existing laws need to be scrutinized, unless a volunteer agreement can be reached with owners and users alike. The process could be started simply through the improvement of the common open space in the courtyard.

There are other important caravanserais in the area apt for restoration, but these buildings would not involve the same integrated approach to conservation. Especially the caravanserai on the Irakli the II Street has high preservation value, but 20 Armenian refugee families need compensation or substitute dwellings.

Through an active policy for town renewal, potential investors should be identified and encouraged to invest in the restoration and adaptation of these large commercial buildings.

Rehabilitation of the caravanserai on Leselidze Street as a testing ground for rehabilitation and town renewal with participation of owners and users.

12. Alleviation of health hazards: Several houses in the area pose a direct danger of collapse with possible detrimental consequences. Shavteli Street no.22 especially, has very high preservation value due its location and traditional open courtyard with wood balconies towards Shavteli Street. Two flats are evacuated, but three families are still occupying the house. The precarious condition requires a partly reconstruction of the house after demolition. The Society for the Protection of Cultural Heritage (NGO), could perhaps be the executing organisation and the new owner of the building ? Or a more visionary prospect: part of the building could give room for a new Housing Bank Institution after restoration.

Restoration of the traditional Tbilisi dwelling house on 22 Shavteli Street.

13. Measured drawings in scale 1:50 were prepared in the 1991 of a total of 150 houses within the preservation area, all of them considered of high preservation value and prone to restoration.

If preservation value is a measure of priority, about ten dwelling houses could easily be designated for immediate restoration. The house on Alexandre Dumas Street no 13 would then rank very high among likely candidates for restoration due to its poor condition and high preservation value. However, restoration of this type of house with its intricate woodwork and decorations will far exceed the cost of demolition and erection of a modern building. Under the present circumstances individual owners can hardly be expected to secure restoration of such dilapidated buildings.

Preservation of heritage values will be costly and the formulation of a common conservation policy for Old Tbilisi is urgent.

