

Daniela Baçe

**TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS WITHIN
THE BUILT HERITAGE
CASE STUDY: CITY OF GJIROKASTRA, ALBANIA**

MA Thesis in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management.

Central European University

Vienna

May 2024

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by

Daniela Baçe

(Albania)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy,
Management.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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I, the undersigned, **Daniela Baçe**, candidate for the MA degree in Cultural Heritage Studies: Academic Research, Policy, Management declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree.

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Signature

Abstract

Nowadays, people's lifestyle is greatly affected by accelerated technological innovations. They provide many opportunities to improve structures, create amusement, and invent new machines/devices to facilitate everyday routine processes. For instance, they assist in designing contemporary buildings, as well as the renovation of the old ones. Technological innovations such as audio-visual and light systems, Virtual Reality tours, 3D models printed to showcase replicas of special and important artifacts, or extra structures that enable wheelchair access have recently been introduced worldwide and partly in the built heritage of Gjirokastra in Albania. Such innovations create better opportunities for people to access these spaces, grasp the exhibitions' content in the museums, and interact with the community. Hence, the inclusivity that these museums offer to their visitors seems to be a pivotal point, especially when the focus is on people with disabilities, their desires, and community engagement. Additionally, the respect for human rights and especially the right of each person to access places of outstanding value, in this case, the museums of the city, trigger more eagerness to fulfill the gap for research in this field. Thus, this Master's thesis sheds light on architectural solutions supported by technological innovations to the accessibility of the museum's inner space, improving the level of inclusivity of museum buildings in the city of Gjirokastra. Furthermore, this thesis aims to raise awareness of these issues, since not only technology but also attention is needed to give adequate responses to emerging needs. Ultimately, the importance of modernizing old historical buildings has grown due to tourism, which provides income, promotes the city's cultural heritage, and allows everyone to have their own experience.

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List of Abbreviations

ADF - Albanian Development Fund

AHR - Adaptive Heritage Reuse

CESCR - International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

CH – Cultural Heritage

CHwB – Cultural Heritage without Borders

CNN – Cable News Network

CRPD - Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

FSHDPK - Fondacioni Shqipetar per te Drejtat e Personave me Aftesi te Kufizuara [Albanian Foundation for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities]

HR- Human Rights

HVAC System - Heating, ventilation, and air conditioning System

ICOM – International Council of Museums

ICOMOS – International Council of Monuments and Sites

INSTAT - Institution of Statistics in Albania

ODASA - Office for Design and Architecture SA

OHCHR - Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

RDNC – Regional Directorates of Cultural Heritage

REP - Resettlement Action Plan

TID – Tourism Improvement District operating in Gjirokastra

TIKA - Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency

TR – Technical Report

UN – United Nation

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization




Introduction

Built heritage refers to all types of buildings or other structures, monuments, or remains that are associated with cultural, historical, political, social, and economic values.¹ Thus, the city of Gjirokastra consists of architectural ensembles and individual dwellings that have historical and architectural values. Regarding the preservation process of these buildings and the promotion of the culture that they embody, the adaptation of such buildings into museums or hotels has already been an applied strategy. The Albanian Ministry of Culture in collaboration with the local government, local/international architectural studios, and organizations for cultural heritage, designs projects that target the preservation of this heritage. Therefore, many interventions have been made to the walls, roofs, or special damaged elements in old buildings.

Hence, it is important to pay attention to this detail as the museums that are part of the analysis of this thesis are adaptations of the old historical buildings used mainly as residences or fortifications. For instance, the adaptive reuse actions for the buildings discussed in this thesis are as follows: the Ethnographic Museum of Gjirokastra – originally the birth house of the Albanian dictator Enver Hoxha during the communist regime, the Museum house of Ismail Kadare – formerly the house of the writer Ismail Kadare, and Argjiro's Castle – Fortified structure for the protection of the city during the Ottoman Empire's occupation (Table 1).

¹ Wicklow Draft County Development Plan 2010 – 2016, Volume 1 Chapter 16- Built Heritage:194-198, last accessed May 31, 2023.

Table 1: Status of the built heritage used as a case study.

Name of the building	Status of the building					
	Until the 19 th century	1912-1966	November 1966-1991	1991-today		
The Ethnographic Museum of Gjirokastra	Residential building of the Hoxha's family.	Ruins from the fire that collapsed the building.	Museum of the National Liberation War of the Region.	Ethnographic Museum		
	1799	1999	28 th January 2016-today			
The house of Ismail Kadare	Residential building of Kadas's family.	Reconstruction of the building because of fire by UNESCO.	Museum of the writer Ismail Kadare			
	1336	1417	1812	WWI-WWII	1932-1968	1971-today
Argjiro's Castle	Traces of the Castle as part of the Despotate of Epirus.	Ruled by the Ottoman Empire. The residence of the ruler and the city garrison.	Reconstruction by Ali Pasha. Barracks for the placement of a garrison and underground warehouses.	It served as a refuge for the inhabitants of the city to protect themselves from aerial bombardment	Prison used by German and Italian conquerors as well as during the communist regime.	National Museum of Armaments/ Museum of the Castle

This status influences the implementation of technological innovations (elevators, new furniture for exhibiting artifacts, lighting system, audio system, 3D virtual tours, etc.) in such structures. Because Gjirokastra is a museum city,² the restoration process is more difficult, partly due to legal regulations. Its identity and the legacy of history are accompanied by respect for the heritage and strict implementation of several projects implemented by locals, architectural studios, the municipality of the city, and other heritage institutions.

Nevertheless, museums serve as hubs of learning, social engagement, and exchanging/acquiring of knowledge. Consequently, they ought to be examples of equality and inclusivity prioritizing the Universal Design³ recommendations for such buildings. Therefore, it is crucial for museums to be open to all, which leads to the cultural accessibility⁴ issue and the accommodation of everyone despite their disabilities. As such, the main purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the inclusivity of the museums of the city of Gjirokastra by improving the accessibility⁵ conditions for a specific group of people with disabilities enabled by the technological innovations in the architecture of the built heritage where the museums are hosted. The specific group focused on this thesis consists of people with visual and hearing impairments and persons who use wheelchairs. This choice is based on the UNESCO policies for people with disabilities,⁶ the United Nations Convention on

² The city was declared a “museum city” in 1961 by the communist regime.

³ Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability.

⁴ UN Convention (2006) introduces the Right to Culture, a concept of cultural accessibility that includes technologies, strategies, and other tools that can facilitate people with disabilities to approach to cultural spaces in their original condition. This process is achieved by removing the physical, sensory, and intellectual barriers.

⁵ There exist different categories of accessibility: cultural, intellectual, attitudinal, sensory, physical, economic, and geographic. However, this thesis is not focused on the last one as it needs further analysis of the urban pattern and not only the buildings of the museum which is beyond the limits of this master thesis.

⁶ “Policy for Including Disabled People in Social Cultural Life as Creators of Cultural Assets or Cultural Produce Users,” Diversity of Cultural Expressions, July 10, 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/policy-monitoring-platform/policy-including-disabled-people>.

the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,⁷ current research conducted on this topic, the ICOM's guidelines, and personal professional knowledge.

Aim and Problem

Currently, the city of Gjirokastra has been going through many changes such as a new project for underground parking, the reconstruction of the Cerciz Topulli Square, and the revitalization of the museums by introducing new technology into them. Projects designed by different architectural studios respect the environment and add new functions to museum areas to make them more alive and useful for citizens. In his article, Severin Karl Valentin Queck, emphasizes the significance of integrating modern architecture in historical sites to develop the city while preserving its identity amidst modern changes.⁸

More specifically, there is much room for improvement regarding the accessibility of the existing museums in the city. According to the universal design rules, the actual museums do not provide the necessary infrastructure for people with disabilities, there is no dedicated guide/program for people with special needs, or specific explanations of the exhibited artifacts in order to be imagined by persons with visual impairment. Artifacts and other objects that are exhibited stand behind the glass of the exhibitors without giving a replica to the tourists to transmit the feeling and shape of them. Furthermore, the inclusivity of the museums is complemented by the initiation of applying technological innovations, partially videos, and audio systems to facilitate the experience of people with disabilities in museums. However, according to the documents published by UNESCO and

⁷ “United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) | Australian Human Rights Commission,” accessed May 19, 2023, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/united-nations-convention-rights-persons-disabilities-uncrpd>.

⁸ Queck, Severin Karl Valentin. “Revitalization of the Kokalari Estate within the historic context of Gjirokastra” Last modified October 28th, 2017.

the city's municipality, the management plans of museums do not pay attention to accommodating people with disabilities in museums.⁹

According to research by the Cultural Heritage without Borders organization,¹⁰ museums should increase inclusivity, and it seems to be accurate and accepted by many countries in the world including Albania.¹¹ Considering the construction of the building as one of the factors that cause difficulties, this kind of museum has not been implemented yet in Gjirokastra. Hence, it seems of great importance to have better research, understand the relevance of this element, and to add it to the next projects. This approach to technological innovations will facilitate not only the persons with visual and hearing-impairment but will create a better atmosphere and complete content for everyone, even for the unimpaired visitors.

Consequently, the aim of this thesis is to present possible solutions to increase the inclusivity of the museums by improving their inner accessibility for disabled people (with visual/hearing impairment and wheelchair users) based on recent technological innovations in architecture in the city of Gjirokastra. Being aware of all the issues of accessing the buildings/museums in the city, this thesis does not seek to have them on focus. Furthermore, based on my personal experience in the field of restoration of monument buildings, and designing and curating museums, the pivotal point is the architectural solution more than the urban design and morphology of the city. Therefore, this thesis studies the cases of Argjiro's Castle, the Ethnographic Museum, and Ismail

⁹ Documents: Nomination file 569bis, Advisory Body Evaluation (ICOMOS) provided by UNESCO, Management Plan of Museums provided by the Gjirokastra's Municipality.

¹⁰ Cultural Heritage without Borders, a Swedish-founded cultural organization operates nowadays as an independent local NGO not only in Gjirokastra, and Tirana, but all over the Western Balkan. It enables restoration/conservation projects for historical buildings and organizes Regional Restauration Camps training young heritage specialists.

¹¹Cultural Heritage without Borders. "Disabled people and museums in the Western Balkans" Last modified 2014.

Kadare's House, as recently new technology has been applied to them and I also rely on my contribution to these museums as the architect during the implementation process.

Research question

The city's renewal is particularly relevant in light of new projects, involving modern technology and facilitating better transportation in the city or protecting old buildings by giving them a new function, for instance, hotels, restaurants, or museums, preventing their detrition and also making them profitable. Therefore, the topic of this MA thesis is studied based on the main research question about how to resolve the tension between preserving built heritage (the issue of authenticity) and increasing the inclusivity of the museums in the city of Gjirokastra, how can digital technology improve the issue of accessibility. I also extend the discussion focusing on the difficulties in the transformation process of traditional houses into museums for all and implement new technology in them while exploring the methods that architects are following in such projects. Furthermore, I discuss the level of interventions (what elements can be changed) that can be made in a building that is a monument of culture. In the scope of the main aim of the thesis, I assess the inclusivity of the selected museums of the city.

Methodology

My research focuses on the importance of implementing new technology in an existing building, a monument of culture¹² that is adapted to a museum. To analyze the main topic, I review the literature which includes articles from other national and international scholars, management plans for museums, un/successful applied architectural projects, and guidelines for museums.

¹² Monuments of culture consist of immovable ancient monuments, buildings, and cultural-historical areas that has a significance for the heritage of a certain population and place.

Furthermore, my research will benefit from recent research in Cultural Disability Studies and use it as a broad framework.

More particularly, I analyze the recent projects implemented at the Ethnographic Museum of Gjirokastra, Ismail Kadare's House, and Argjiro's Castle, which present values and good infrastructure to host such technological innovations. Furthermore, the method of triangulation is used to conduct semi-structured interviews: qualitative interviews are prepared from three different perspectives. In order to have a better understanding of the necessary needs of disabled people in museums, foreign experts/professionals and people with disabilities who experienced visiting museums will be part of the interviews. Furthermore, at the local level, local disabled people, local heritage organizations, and adequate heritage experts from the municipality of the city will be invited to participate in sharing their experiences and giving further recommendations. However, it is important to mention the difficulty of bringing all the stakeholders together due to different preoccupations.

Part of the research contains comparative cases between this thesis case studies and other similar adaptations of this type of building found in other places. The examples are mainly the museums in Austria regarding my personal visits and study about them during this master's program. Moreover, the study of digital technology as a tool for accessibility will contribute to a better grasp of the implementation of the innovations in the built heritage.

Based on these methods, this thesis consists of four chapters. As such, the first chapter discusses the historical and architectural background of Gjirokastra. It enables an overview of the architectural development of the city of Gjirokastra in a timeline concluding with the built heritage that exists nowadays. This information helps the reader to understand the specific conditions of the museums used as case studies and the limited interventions that can be done.

The second chapter focuses on the Legal Framework and Conventions for Cultural Heritage and Human Rights. It provides a presentation and analysis of the implementation of laws (national), conventions (national, UNESCO, UN), and guidelines (UNESCO, UN, local institutions/NGO-s) that exist for the built heritage and human rights concerning the museums' accessibility. This part of the thesis contributes to further recommendations for better management of the Ethnographic Museum, the House of Ismail Kadare, and the Argjiro's Castle as part of the World Heritage List UNESCO and the List of National Monuments of Culture.

The following chapter explores the Management of Museums and their Accessibility. It demonstrates an analysis of the current state of the city's museums, their management, function, and what they provide for people with disabilities. Furthermore, the level of digital technologies used in museums is discussed in this chapter. Ultimately, the experiences and opinions of people with disabilities on the accessibility issue of the museums (interviews) are included.

Lastly, the fourth chapter is dedicated to recommendations. This chapter takes into account the legal framework for the preservation of the built heritage, human rights for cultural participation, suggestions by people with disabilities and other experts in the field, and good national/international practices. As such, in this chapter, I provide recommendations about the improvement of the museums' accessibility issue and their management.

Chapter 1

1 Historical and Architectural Background



Source: "Gjirokastra | Edward Lear, Albania, Monument Valley." n.d. Pinterest. Accessed May 17, 2024.
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/gjirokastra--701013498221952059/>.

This chapter focuses on the concept of built heritage and how the city was developed until nowadays when its historical center is listed as a World Heritage Site. It provides a guide to the creation process of the museums part of the case study. Moreover, it explains the restoration interventions, adaptation reuse of this heritage, and the agency on them. In this way, this chapter sheds light on the conditions of preservation and the limitations to accessibility in the museums' buildings.

1.1 From its creation to nowadays, city urban development

The city of Gjirokastra is located in the south of Albania, and it is part of the Balkan Peninsula. According to Michele Lamprakos, Gjirokastra was founded in the third century BCE as a fortified settlement of the kingdom of Epirus, one of several Greek city-states in the area.¹³ While in the second century BCE, the Romans conquered the area and destroyed the existing architecture. Consequently, new fortifications were not built until the 6th century. During the medieval period, the city developed under the rule of local landowner families, especially the Zenebishi family.¹⁴ Throughout the years, the city went through several conquests by the Ottoman Empire and Italian Kingdom. The chronicler J. Kantakuzenos describes Gjirokastra as a city in 1336 called Argyrokastron, first a castle and then a city.¹⁵ According to Emin Riza, during the second half of the 13th century, it was the center of the Albanian clan of Zenebishi until 1419 when the Ottoman Empire conquered it for the next five centuries.¹⁶ As such, Gjirokastra provides an outstanding example of a Classical and Late Ottoman urban center. At the same time, it is a special example of urban and architectural designs based on self-defense by individual family units.

¹³ Michele Lamprakos, "Conservation of Gjirokastra," *Aga Khan Award for Architecture: On-Site Review Report*, January 1, 2010, https://www.academia.edu/67571326/Conservation_of_Gjirokastra.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Emin Riza. *Qyteti-Muze i Gjirokastrës*. [Museum City of Gjirokastra] Tiranë: Botimet Toena, 2004.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The old town section is placed on an impressive mountain slope, *Mali i Gjerë*, overlooking the Drino River valley, at about 300 m above sea level (Figure 1),¹⁷ and on the other side of the mountain range, *Lunxhëria*. The significance of the city is accentuated by a boat-shaped citadel, the castle of Argjiro, the second largest in the Balkan Peninsula, located on the top of a hill as a matter of defense for the city.¹⁸ During the Ottoman period, Gjirokastra developed from merely a fortified castle into a major administrative and commercial center known as Argyropolis (Medieval Greek: Ἀργυρόπολις, meaning "Silver City") or Argyrokastron (Medieval Greek: Ἀργυρόκαστρον, meaning "Silver Castle").¹⁹ As such, the morphology of the city developed and the urbanization process began. Bazaar was the first district constructed around the castle and then the city was spread all around the hills and in the direction of the river.

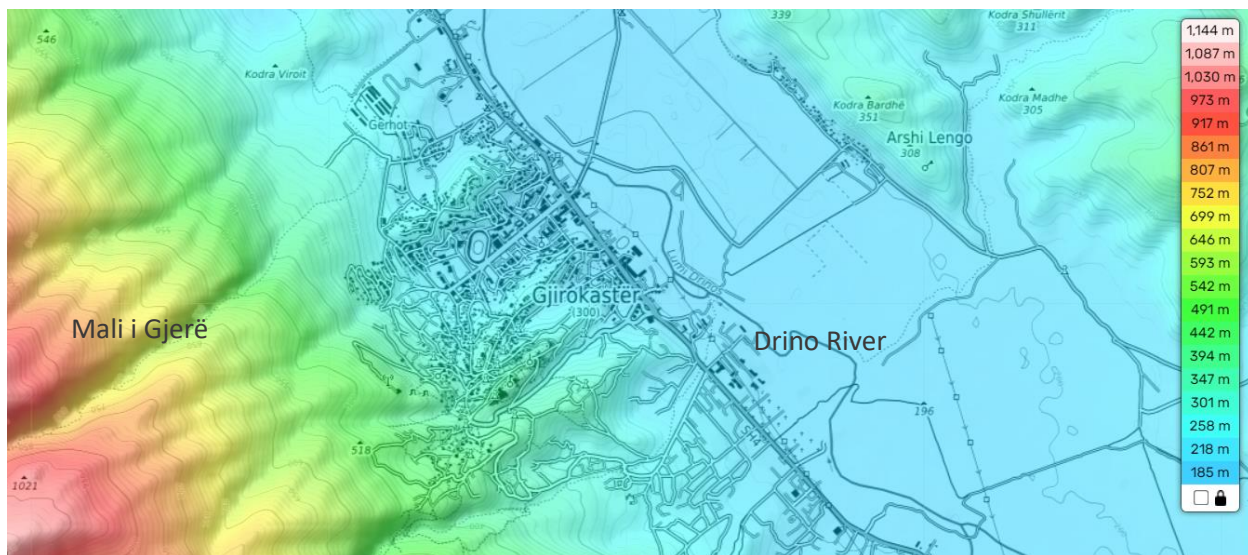


Figure 1: Topographic map of Gjirokastra.

¹⁷ "Gjirokastra Topographic Map, Elevation, Terrain", Topographic maps, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://en-gb.topographic-map.com/map-49lt6/Gjirokastra/?center=40.08865%2C20.13269&base=2&zoom=16>.

¹⁸ Ledita Mezini and Dorina Pojani, "Defence, Identity, and Urban Form: The Extreme Case of Gjirokastra," *Planning Perspectives* 30, no. 3 (2014): 397.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Due to different invasions and political regimes, the city resembles four main typologies of buildings (Figure 2). Mainly the Ottoman influence is obvious in the construction of *kullë*²⁰ consisting of high and wide stone walls covered by roofs in stone slabs, reinforcing the defensive character. Riza points out that this type of house fostered an extended family unit, usually including the owners and the relatives.²¹ Another element that became a focal point was the religious buildings, especially the mosques in each district. Their existence was in danger during the communist regime when the dictator, Enver Hoxha, decided to destroy many of the religious buildings in the country.²² However, the main mosque in Gjirokastra, the Bazaar Mosque survived and stands today as a distinct and valuable building.

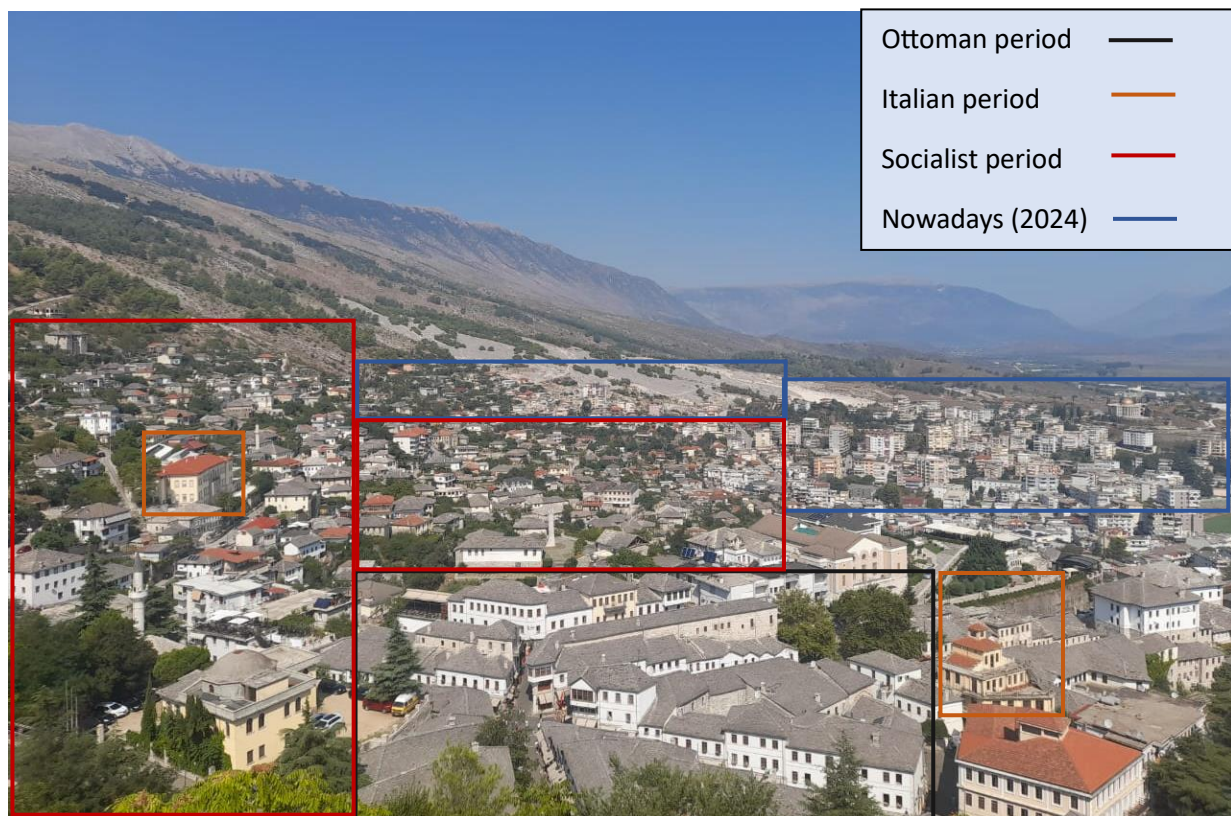


Figure 2: The different historical periods mirrored in the architecture of Gjirokastra. Image generated by the writer of the thesis.

²⁰ Kullë – Old Albanian houses in Gjirokastra and Theth are called towers.

²¹ Riza. Qyteti-Muze i Gjirokastrës [Museum City of Gjirokastra].

²² “Communism – Gjirokastra,” accessed January 11, 2024, https://gjirokastra.org/gjirokastra/?page_id=2298.

Later on, in 1939, Albania was invaded by the Kingdom of Italy, and four years later, from 1943 to 1944, Germany occupied Albania. Therefore, the other noticed style of the building is the Italian one. Even though less in number, the “yellow buildings” (the so called by locals) can be easily noticed on a first glance of the city’s panorama. Facades painted in yellow and covered in red roof tiles distinguish from the rest in the stone city of Gjirokastra.²³ Furthermore, the infrastructure of the city excelled during the Italian rule, many bridges and streets were built. Moreover, the institutions’ buildings were involved in this process as well.²⁴

Regarding its political regimes, Albania was a socialist country from 1946 to 1991.²⁵ Gjirokastra was a crucial center as the birthplace of the dictator Enver Hoxha. As such, during the socialist period, the city faced another phase of urban and social development towards national character. Squares for political speeches, meetings with the community, cultural events, and factories were established. Moreover, a new element began to complete the city, the tribute to the heroes of the National Liberation War (1939-1944) depicted in paintings, mosaics, and sculptures.²⁶ Due to all important historical and architectural elements, preserving the old town became a priority and the city of Gjirokastra was categorized as a museum city in 1961.²⁷ Despite this, the expansion of the city was necessary as the population was growing. Therefore, a new part of the city was constructed, different in architectural elements, with neither Ottoman nor Italian influence, but a socialist one. Walking in the city from up (the castle) to down (the river), or looking from above,

²³ Personal observation of the author of this thesis.

²⁴ “Gjirokastra History,” accessed January 11, 2024, https://www.gjirokastra.org/sub_links/about_sub/about_history.html.

²⁵ “Communism – Gjirokastra.”

²⁶ “(PDF) The National Liberation Movement in Albanian History Textbooks of the Socialist Era: Conditions and Challenges for History Textbooks in Albania and South-Eastern Europe,” accessed January 11, 2024, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321495659_The_National_Liberation_Movement_in_Albanian_History_Textbooks_of_the_Socialist_Era_Conditions_and_Challenges_for_History_Textbooks_in_Albania_and_South-Eastern_Europe.

²⁷ Riza. Qyteti-Muze i Gjirokastrës [Museum City of Gjirokastra].

this new urban development and architectural style is very distinguished (Figure 2). The new panorama consists of new blocks of residential buildings, and apartments, made of stone, bricks, and concrete covered mostly by a flat roof. However, the alleged need for defense from the enemy was still present, not in the style of *kullë*, but in bunkers and tunnels.

This style of architecture was used in the following years as well even though the regime changed from socialist to democratic. Many consequences followed this regime shift. The country was no longer closed at its border, people could migrate to other neighboring countries which brought further changes to the different spheres of life.²⁸ Regarding the architectural construction of the country, on the one hand, many buildings were abandoned due to population migration, and others were destroyed to get valuable materials from them, for instance, the iron from the bunkers, building materials from factories that were not used anymore, etc. On the other hand, the modernization of lifestyle, brought new building materials, working machinery, and foreign influence on the architectural styles of houses and other buildings.²⁹ This also applies to the city of Gjirokastra, nevertheless, the modern architecture is quite restricted due to the designation of the old part of the city (the upper part of the city with Ottoman-Italian influenced architecture) as a World Heritage Site of UNESCO in 2005.³⁰ The city's historical center is recognized as an exceptional illustration of architectural style from the Ottoman area and meets the required criterion (iii) and (iv).³¹

²⁸ Erka Çaro and Leo Wissen, "Migration in the Albania of the Post-1990s: Triggered by Post-Communist Transformations and Facilitator of Socio-Demographic Changes," *SEER* 03 (January 1, 2008): 87–105, <https://doi.org/10.5771/1435-2869-2007-3-87>.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Letizia Dipasquale et al., "The Vernacular Heritage of Gjirokastra (Albania): Analysis of Urban and Constructive Features, Threats and Conservation Strategies," *ISPRS - International Archives of the Photogrammetry, Remote Sensing and Spatial Information Sciences* XLIV-M-1-2020 (July 24, 2020): 33–40, <https://doi.org/10.5194/isprs-archives-XLIV-M-1-2020-33-2020>.

³¹ UNESCO World Heritage Centre, "Historic Centres of Berat and Gjirokastra," UNESCO World Heritage Centre, accessed January 11, 2024, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/569/>.

Criterion iii: The city-museum of Gjirokastra is distinguished by its origin in the military fort. It is an exceptional testimony of a residential center of Albanian farming class related to large estates (latifundia). The settlement is characterized by the dynamic territory and the clear natural limits of the residential areas. It is a city built in stone, which developed from the 14th to 19th centuries.

Criterion iv: The residential house of Gjirokastra is characterized by its vertical composition and a clear distribution of the functions in the different floors. It has marked defense character. The houses are closely related with the rocky terrain. The monumentality of the exterior is contrasted by the elaborate interior. The fortified residence of Gjirokastra is a remarkable illustration of the way of life in Albania in a particular period of time (14th to 19th century).³²

Hence, the city's old areas are nowadays deemed museum areas, and structures within them, such as the castle, are considered cultural monuments in two categories protected by UNESCO. As a consequence, the height of the buildings in the new part of the city should not disturb the panorama of the historical part. As such, the city is divided into two parts nowadays and an axiological value is added to it which influences the touristic aspect of the city and its management.

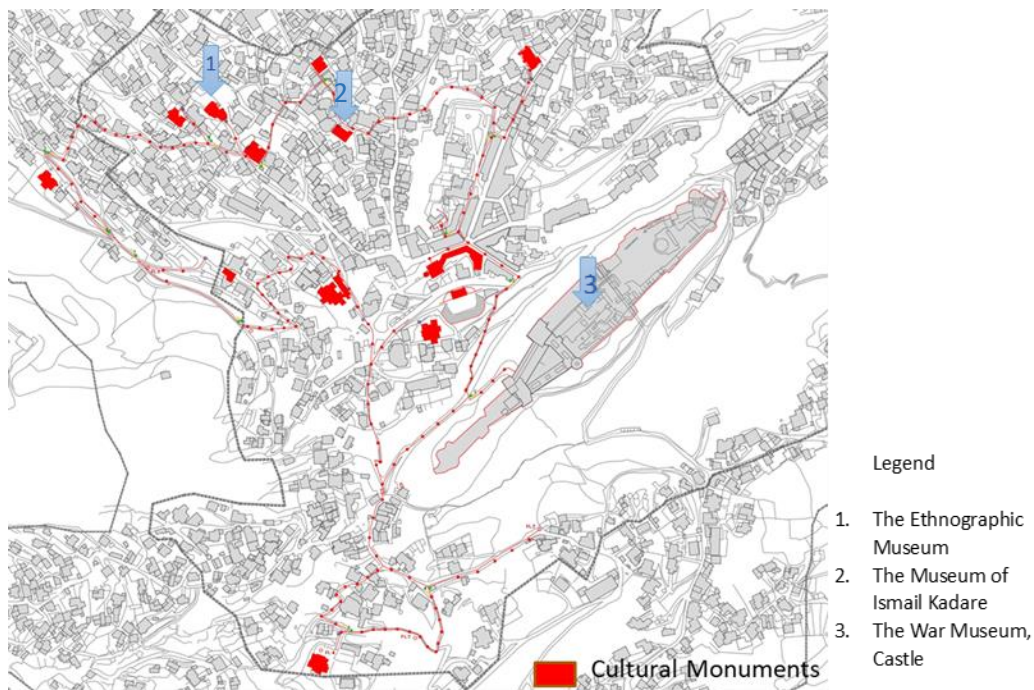


Figure 3: The museums used for case studies. Map produced by the author of the thesis.

³² ICOMOS, “Gjirokastra (Albania) No 569 rev, April 2005,” accessed January 20, 2024.

1.2 The Biography of Argjiro's Castle

First and foremost, it is crucial to shed light on the importance of the castle of Gjirokastra as the origin of the city's construction. Located on top of a hill, surrounded by mountains, the castle of Argjiro offered a strategic point to observe the enemy, and welcome and shelter residents. It would also protect them in case of war and serve primarily as an administrative and mercantile center for the sanjak of Albania.³³ The castle illustrates not only a historical past, but it likewise indicates the inheritance of the cultural exchanges and the lifestyles adapted to the urban development of the city in different periods (Figure 4).

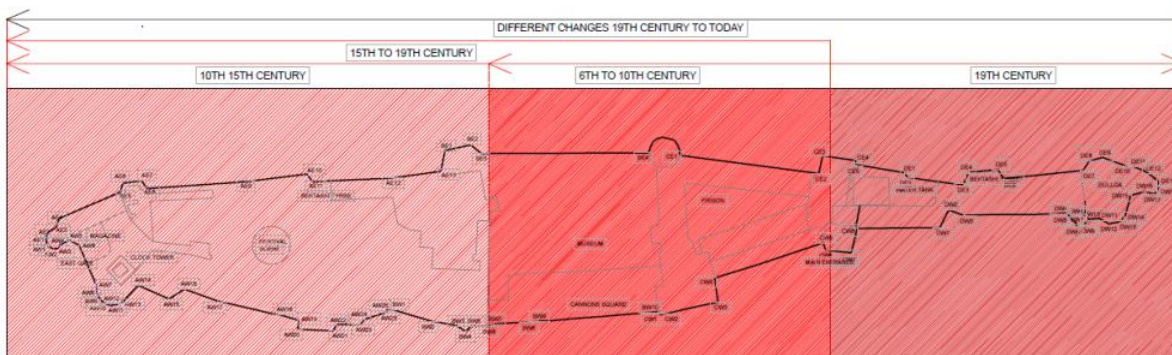


Figure 4: The extensions of castle in a chronological order. Image generated by CHwB, Technical Report.

Despite all the conquests, the castle of Argjiro in Gjirokastra stands as a significant historical and architectural built heritage. The castle dates back to the fourth century constructed as a fortification during the Ottoman period (1385-1912).³⁴ According to the report prepared by CHwB, the Castle's first enlargement dates from 1481 to 1512, during the regime of Sultan Bayezid II.³⁵

³³ Riza, “Qyteti Muze i Gjirokastrës” [Museum City of Gjirokastra].

³⁴ Cultural Heritage without Borders, “Technical report - Identification, Design of prioritized measures to address urgent safety concerns and prevent loss of heritage structures in the Castle of Gjirokastra”, 2021.

³⁵ Ibid.

The construction resulted in a castle in the form of a ship-shaped fortress in 1670 as described in the chronicles of the Ottoman traveler Evliya Çelebi. The report reveals the castle functioned as a garrison, controlled by the Ottomans in 1811. In the following year, 1812, Ali Pashë Tepelena³⁶ controlled the territory of Gjirokastra and developed the castle's structure by building the aqueduct and adding the clock tower to it, completing more services in the castle. Later on, in 1820, the castle was again in the administration of the Ottomans until December 4, 1912, when the city declared independence from the Ottoman Empire, a significant date that is still celebrated nowadays (Figure 5,6).³⁷

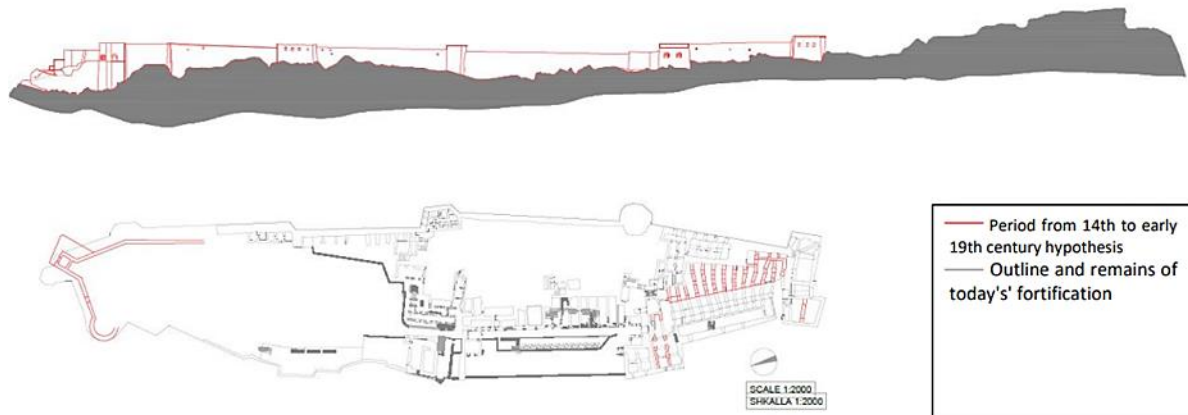


Figure 5: Hypothetical outline 14th-19th century. Image generated by CHwB, Technical Report.

However, the function of the castle changed again under the rule of King Zog I who used the castle as a prison in 1932. This function remained the same in other regimes (Fascists, Nazis, and Communists) as well.³⁸ Therefore, the castle conveys the struggles of Albanians for independence. The CHwB report describes the castle's function as a prison and a bomb shelter During the Second

³⁶ Ali Pasha Tepelena, administrator of Gjirokastra, Delvina, Berat, and Kardhiq during the Ottoman Occupation.

³⁷ Cultural Heritage without Borders, "Technical Report".

³⁸ Ibid.

World War (1939 – 1944).³⁹ Another change was in 1969 when the Arms Museum was established followed by the National Folk Festival stage built in 1983.⁴⁰ In particular, the Arms Museum, now located in the former prison area, reinforces the prior mission of the castle as a battlefield keen for freedom and justice.

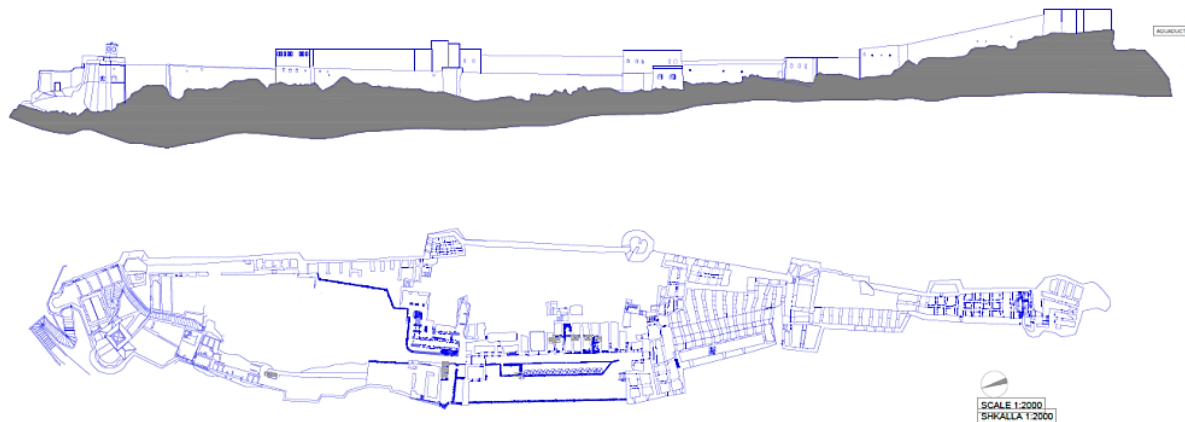


Figure 7: Hypothetical extension plan of the castle from 1812 to 1900. Image generated by CHwB, Technical Report.

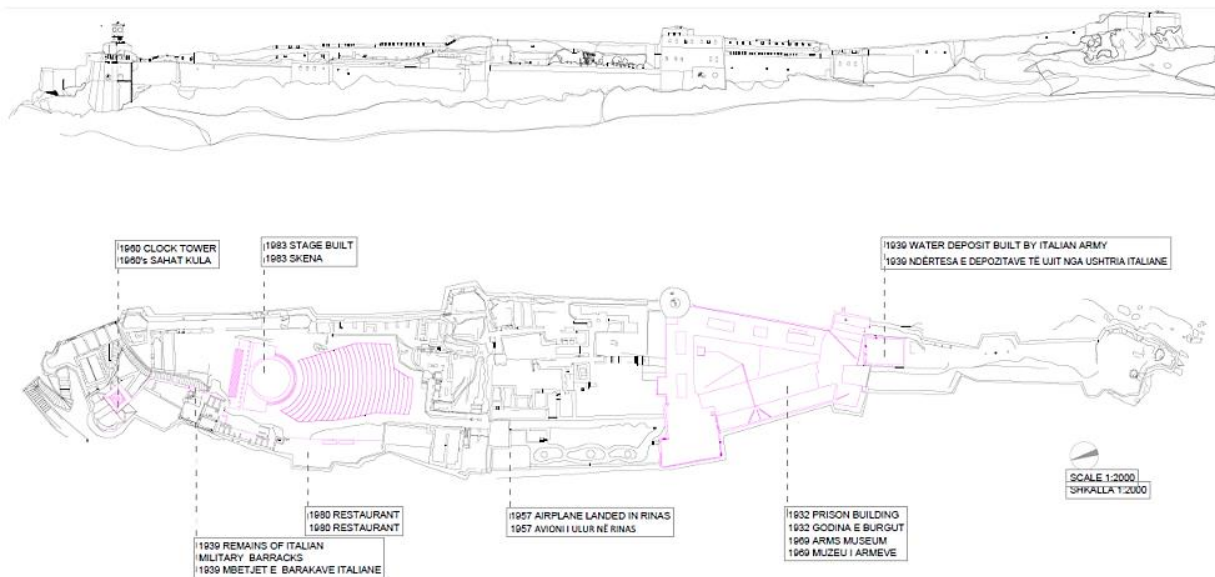


Figure 6: The present plan of the castle. Image generated by CHwB, Technical Report.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

1.2.1 Restoration-conservation interventions

The restoration interventions implemented in the Argjiro's Castle started in 1960. Especially they took place continuously before each year of the National Folk Festival until 1990 when the political system shifted and influenced the authorities of heritage preservation as well.⁴¹ Therefore, the next intervention took place in 2004 regarding the collapsed wall reconstruction. According to the technical report of the project, the reasons for this damage were the quality of the mortar used to connect the wall structure and the lack of stone tiles covering the head of the wall.⁴² These elements exacerbated the water penetration on the wall and consequently caused humidity. As such, measures were taken to repair this issue and in order to ensure the stability of the wall, injections and iron bars were applied to resist the humidity and avoid possible seismic pressures.

Regarding the technical report produced by CHwB, the same type of intervention was applied in 2006. This project was a conservation work on the southeast tower which demonstrated cracks in the walls since 1986.⁴³ The works done for this intervention were minor such as cleaning from mud and covering the top of the wall with stone slabs in order to avoid water penetration. Furthermore, gutters were installed to channel the rainwater out of the building.⁴⁴ This project included the same implementations in other parts of the castle as in the walls surrounding the clock tower and closing with stones the open holes in the walls located beside the *Türbe* (shrine) and the area where the airplane is located.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

The hydro insulation issue seems to be a continues problem for the castle as the intervention in 2007 had the same focus. This time the project was focused in the area of the prison and gallery.⁴⁵

The change in the intervention's nature happened in 2008, regarding the project "Reconstruction of the electrical system at the Grand Gallery". This intervention focused on the improvement of the security and development of the electrical supply system separating it from the city supply system.⁴⁶ The novelty of it was the introduction of substitute energy resources. As such the proposal and implementation were about using the photovoltaic panels on top of the prison's roof.

Furthermore, another important intervention in 2008 was the project proposal for the construction of toilets in Argjiro's Castle by the Regional Directorate of the National Council.⁴⁷ Although the castle had a new function as an attraction of the city, and being visited by many tourists, this service was not present. In order to implement this project, the adaptation of a certain area was needed. Due to the humidity factor, the wooden structure was replaced by the aluminum elements having the wood color and further restoration works took place for the hydro isolation, reopening of windows, considering the level of the floor for the electrical and plumbing installations, as well as restoring the walls of the existing spaces. The project was concluded with the establishment of a ticket office at the entrance of the castle.⁴⁸

The following restoration project took place in 2009, dedicated to the area of the Gjin Zenebishi galleries, the main passage of the Argjiro's castle.⁴⁹ The adaptive reuse of this area resulted in a museum area representing the existing war cannons. Furthermore, this intervention created more accessible areas which could be used as art galleries for different events. The undertaken

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Ibid.

restoration works included the restoration of the cobblestone floor, windows, and electrical and mechanical installations that existed in the castle's system. Especially the electrical system excelled in 2012, a project on the realm of the celebration of one hundred years of independence of Albania, funded by ADF.⁵⁰ It consisted of lighting the curtain walls of the north-west façade of the castle. The 2016 project was initiated by the craft people team, part of the RDNC, aiming the restoration of the damaged supporting walls, located on the northern gate path's walls. One year later, in 2017, another project reflecting the one of 2009 took place. The rehabilitation project of the Gjin Zenebishi galleries was implemented by RDNC. The additional intervention was the construction of wooden basements for the display of the war cannons as well as creating a greenery area in the external part and providing lighting for them.⁵¹ Meanwhile, the Institute of Cultural Monuments proposed a project for the preservation of the historical and architectural values of the Clock Tower and the improvement of its conditions. This project included the restoration of all structural elements of the tower and it was financed by the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) in 2018.⁵²

Regarding the personal professional involvement (consultant architect) in the designing phase of the restoration project, the last interventions concluded in 2022 were focused in two directions:

- 1) The geological interventions dedicated to the areas E1, E2, E3 and E4 as illustrated in the Figure 8. According to the technical report, the nature of the works had on focus the installation of temporary safety barriers, installation of rock's double protection, injection grouting of cavities

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

below tower A (Figure 9), underpinning of wall foundations and bases of conglomerates, anchoring of triple twist mesh, mass concrete filling.⁵³

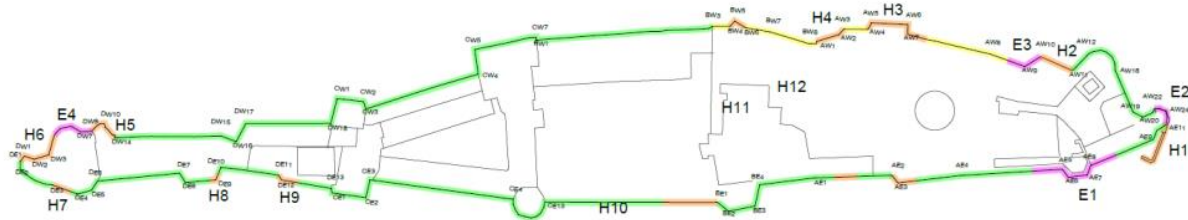


Figure 8: The map of towers. Image generated by CHwB, Technical Report.

2) The second direction focused on the structural interventions consisting of the consolidation of the structure of Tower A (Figure 9), the reconstruction of the curtain walls completing of the missing masonry parts, and wall consolidation.

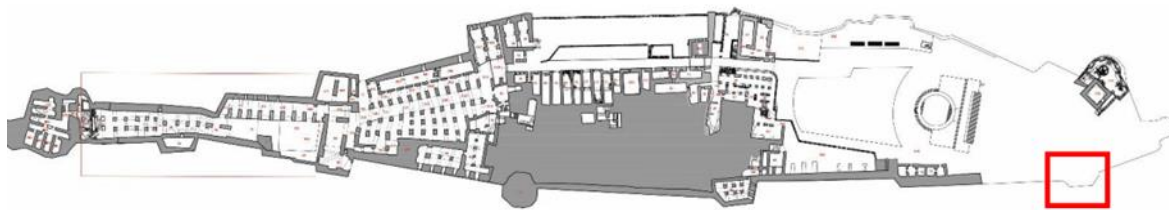


Figure 9: The position of Tower A. Image generated by CHwB, Technical Report.

After describing all the interventions, it can be concluded that the projects implemented in the Castle of Argjiro aimed to preserve the authenticity of the materials and the way how the structures were built. Another achievement of these projects was the choice of materials in harmony with the existing ones. These decisions respect the legal framework and contribute to the preservation of such structures, but do not focus on the accessibility of the building.

⁵³ Ibid.

1.3 The Ethnographic Museum's Architectural Adaptation

The building of the Ethnographic Museum of Gjirokastra is located in the “Palorto” district, part of the city’s historical center (Figure 10). This building stands today as a reconstruction of the birth house of Enver Hoxha, which was accidentally destroyed by fire in 1912. As it was described above, Gjirokastra consists of the urban-architectural ensembles and this building together with the Zekate, Babaramo, and Skenduli house in the surrounding, contributes to this element. To reconstruct the house, and have it again in this ensemble, the works started in April – May 1963.⁵⁴ According to CHwB’s technical report, the architect Gjovalin Kroqi was on charge of designing the project, although there was not a preliminary study conducted.⁵⁵ However, the experts considered the existing foundations of the building to continue the construction. Moreover, they preserved the water tank cistern and a part of the floor layer, black stone tiles that remained after the fire. The building functioned as a Museum of National Liberation War until 1991 when all the artifacts were relocated to the Skenduli house which served as a museum as well.⁵⁶ This was the last change in function that gave to the building its current use as an Ethnographic Museum.



Figure 10: The position of the museum within the Historic Center. Image modified by the writer of the thesis.

⁵⁴ Cultural Heritage without Borders, “Technical report - Improvement, and Renovation of the Museum System of the city of Gjirokastra”, 2020.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

1.3.1 Restoration-conservation interventions

Due to the lack of the research, the reconstruction project in 1963 did not provide detailed elements from the interior of the house.⁵⁷ Hence, a team of specialists had the duty to examine various components of other traditional houses in Gjirokastra and recommend them for this new project. As a result, today's building structure includes regional materials such as concrete, stone, and wooden elements (*çatma*). In 1965 the reconstruction of the building was complete and it led to the opening of the Ethnographic Museum of Gjirokastra in November 1966.⁵⁸ However, this would not be the last restoration intervention, because, in the following years, further works were done to avoid humidity and other damages. The last intervention in the building which modernized it by adding technological innovations in exhibiting the artifacts was finalized in August 2022.



Figure 11: The Ethnographic Museum.

Knowledge of the restoration process was provided through books, media (documentaries, interviews, articles), local people and storytelling, and local masters who contributed to the restoration process. The reconstruction process of the house where the Ethnographic Museum is located nowadays, started by using the ruins of the previous buildings and the information collected by the family members especially the sister of Enver Hoxha, Haxho.⁵⁹ Later on, new drawings of the floorplans of the building were created and distributed until nowadays through archives. The main aim was preservation and authenticity. Therefore, the following method of restoring respected all the authentic elements that should be

⁵⁷ The information is based technical reports written by the cultural heritage organization for the restoration project of 2019, and personal work as an architect on the design and implementation of the restoration project for this monument in 2021.

⁵⁸ Cultural Heritage without Borders, "Technical report".

⁵⁹ Ibid.

preserved and only if considered necessary would be substituted with new material using the same technique and material.

After 1990 the building suffered from the lack of maintenance. The leaking roof was the cause of much damage to the wooden ceilings and floors of the building. Furthermore, due to the civil war in 1997 which happened in Albania and in the city of Gjirokastra, several explosives damaged the building in some parts.⁶⁰ Hence, the Municipality undertook some measurements to repair the damages in the roof, facade, and the windows of the building. Regarding the CHwB's technical report, the Municipality financed further restoration works including the full restoration of the roof, the restoration of the wooden cantilever structure of the main façade, and hydro isolation of the terrace on the second floor in 2016-2017. These works aimed to stop further water penetration from the roof. Nevertheless, the water leak had already damaged and deformed the interior wooden elements such as ceilings and floors.⁶¹

The cause of the water penetration in the building is mainly the exposure of the roof materials to the atmospheric agents. The rain and wind exacerbate the conditions of the stone slabs covering the roof and cause their displacement leading to openings where the rainwater can go through. Based on this, in 2019 a new restoration project was designed by the Cultural Heritage without Borders, in order to prevent the decay of structural elements of the building. During the first phase of documenting the current state of the monument, many problems appeared. Regarding the personal involvement as architect during documentation of the damages as part of the design of the restoration project and later on part of the implementation phase, the following list of the restored elements can be demonstrated:

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Stone damages: internal/external floors, internal/external stairs, external walls, cracks on the façade, arches above the outside doors, broken stone slabs of the roof.

Wooden damages: leaning doors inside, damaged external doors due to humidity, wavy floors, rotten/broken beams, decorative elements are broken or missing parts, windows, and the broken railing/frames/handles of the window, stairs, rotten and wavy ceilings, *çatma*'s structure and plaster (Figure 12).

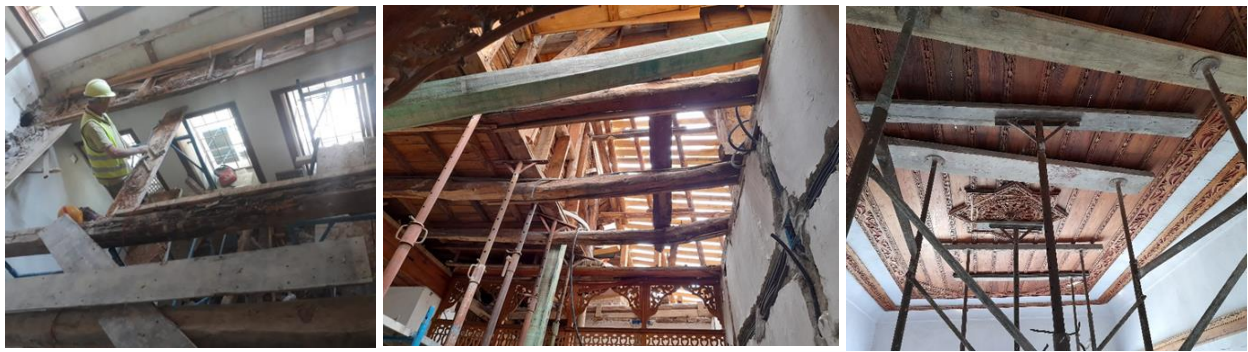


Figure 12: Restoration of the wooden elements, 2022. Images generated by the writer of the thesis.

However, the implementation of the project was executed in 2021 after its confirmation by UNESCO, the Albanian Development Fund, and the Institute of Monuments in Gjirokastra, followed by the local municipality. This project was financed originally by the World Bank. The last intervention in the building which modernized it by adding technological innovations in exhibiting the artifacts was finalized in August 2022.⁶² The implementation of the project would be granted to LEON Konstruksion, a construction firm known in the field of restoration works in Albania.⁶³

Since this monument of culture of the first category, served as an ethnographic museum, the first task was to store all the collection of objects in a safe place in order to be used again after the

⁶² “Casanova+Hernandez | A126_Ethnographic Museum Of Gjirokastra,” accessed April 2, 2023, https://www.casanova-hernandez.com/a126_ethnographic-museum-of-gjirokastra/.

⁶³ “LEON KONSTRUKSION,” accessed April 8, 2023, <https://leonkonstruksion.al/>.

intervention. Afterward, an update on the damages to the building was necessary, not only to see if there were new ones but also to start the process. As such, based on the fieldwork, many new damages appeared as the proposed restoration project was designed more than one year ago. Therefore, a few additions followed the implementation of the project. Nevertheless, the aim of preserving the authenticity of the building did not change.

There were limited interventions in most of the cases, especially in the façade. Many windows' frames were substituted with new ones, but the material, size, and shape were the same as the old ones. The same strategy was applied to the doors as well as other wooden decorative elements that were reproduced or restored by the local masters. The floors were curved due to problems with the wooden beams. For this, in some cases, it was necessary to remove the whole wooden floor, matriculate it, select the good parts, replace the beams, and build the new floor while mixing the old good existing parts with new parts respecting the material, local pine. In order to fix the ceiling and its curves, was followed the same strategy, but in cases that could be possible, scaffolding was assembled to straighten the curved surface.

The wooden works were completed through the restoration of the staircase where the stable elements were reused, and *çatma* (Figure 13), the wooden wall was constructed and then covered by traditional plaster. The selection of the wood must respect the: type, density, humidity, and strength of the original elements. Therefore, before the purchase of the material, an analysis of these characteristics was required. Furthermore, the elements used for the plaster were original and the way of the preparation and implementation followed the old one. It consists of old lime, straw, and goat's hair. After mixing the elements, it is applied on the wall's surface and then covered by layers of lime if it is necessary to uniform the surface.



Figure 13: Restoration of çatma and preparation of plaster for çatma, 2022.

Regarding professional involvement in the project, I admit that the most complicated part of the project, and the one where more changes occurred from the initial project was the roof (Figure 14, 15). Due to many rotted beams and other wooden elements, the stability of the roof was at risk, therefore was reasonable, to dismantle all the stone slabs and matriculate them according to the parts of the roof where they were, followed by selecting the good slabs to be reused. The proposed interventions were consulted among the masters responsible for the restoration of the roof. Due to the lack of finding the beams the same as the original material, size, and shape, instead of cylindric beams, the cuboid oak beams by a resistant and stable material were used.



Figure: 15, Restoration of the roof, Image taken by the writer of the thesis.



Figure 14: Replacement of the wooden beam, Image taken by the writer of the thesis.

This decision was made by the experts on the construction site, the head of Architecture and Urbanism in the municipality of the city, and the Institute of Monuments. The ultimate issue during the restoration process was the differentiation of the restored elements in color. After a decision of the committee, it was decided that the restored elements should be colored with the shade of the original material.

1.3.2 Interpretation of the Restoration

Overall, the restoration works in the building fulfilled the original purpose and objectives. In a museum area, and a first-category cultural monument, any intervention out of the traditional method is extremely limited. In this way, compared to the new methods of restoration, it is not easy to apply since the tools and materials used for restoration are determined. Changing the rules in implementation, without the commission's decision, would lead to illegal intervention. In this way, following the traditional methods would be a step forward to preserve the authenticity of the building. The authentic values of a building are not only in the appearance of the materials but also in their role in the structure and the way they are produced and implemented.

1.4 The reconstruction of Ismail Kadare's House



Figure 16: The house of Ismail Kadare, Image taken by the writer of the thesis.

This house is associated with the name of the Albanian renowned global writer, Ismail Kadare who was born in this house in 1936 and grew up there.⁶⁴ Ismail Kadare is now the city's pride because he is distinguished for his writing in different categories such as poetry, fiction, history, and journalism. His best-seller book “Chronicle in Stone”, depicts in detail the house

where he lived in Gjirokastra, and the neighborhood, by potentially promoting this city worldwide same as his fame even during Albania's isolation period.⁶⁵

Nowadays, Ismail Kadare's house is located close to the Ethnographic Museum of Gjirokastra in the “Palorto” district. These buildings are connected by a famous alley called “Sokaku i të Marrëve” (Fool's Alley). The house dates back to 1770 and was rebuilt after an accidental fire in 1999. This reconstruction was financed by UNESCO and the Albanian government, and Kadare's description assisted in the designing process.⁶⁶ Today, this house is a typical example depicting the 19th-century typical houses of Gjirokastra consisting of stone slabs for the roofs, stone arches, and

⁶⁴ “Ismail Kadare House -Visit Gjirokastra, Official Tourism Page of Gjirokastra,” accessed January 11, 2024, <https://www.visit-gjirokastra.com/see-and-do/ismail-kadare-house/>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 7.

wooden details (Figure 17). Meanwhile, the specialists took care of replicating the same elements in the interior presenting the same appearance as in the earlier phase.⁶⁷



Figure 17: The house before and after the fire. Image provided by Agron Doraci.

Based on these architectural characteristics, the house of Ismail Kadare was primarily declared as a first-category monument of culture in 1991. After a long process of revitalizing the house, in 2015 this building was adapted into a museum by the decision of the City Council of Gjirokastra.⁶⁸ Ultimately, on 28 January 2016, on the occasion of Ismail Kadare's 80th anniversary, this building started to function as a public museum.

1.4.1 The restoration process of the building

According to Agron Doraci, the restoration of the building has followed the original form composed of two main floors and the basement where the *zahire* (food reserves) were kept for winter (Figure 18). Moreover, this floor was the shelter during the bombing of World War II. As in many other typical houses in Gjirokastra, there is a water cistern that collects rainwater from the roof gutters located in the foundations of the house. On the ground floor there are the halls that

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Jo Vetem Mode - Shtepia e Ismail Kadarese Ne Gjirokastra - Emisioni 22 - Sezoni 4! [Not Just Fashion - Ismail Kadare's House in Gjirokastra - Episode 22- Season 4] (20 Shkurt 2016), 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXYkErbHavo>.

were used for animals and storing the work tools. While, on the second floor, there are located two large guests' rooms, and two small "winter" rooms used by the family.⁶⁹ Furthermore, in these spaces, some original family items were presented such as a brazier, a chest, and a Vietnam War helmet where Ismail Kadare was a reporter.

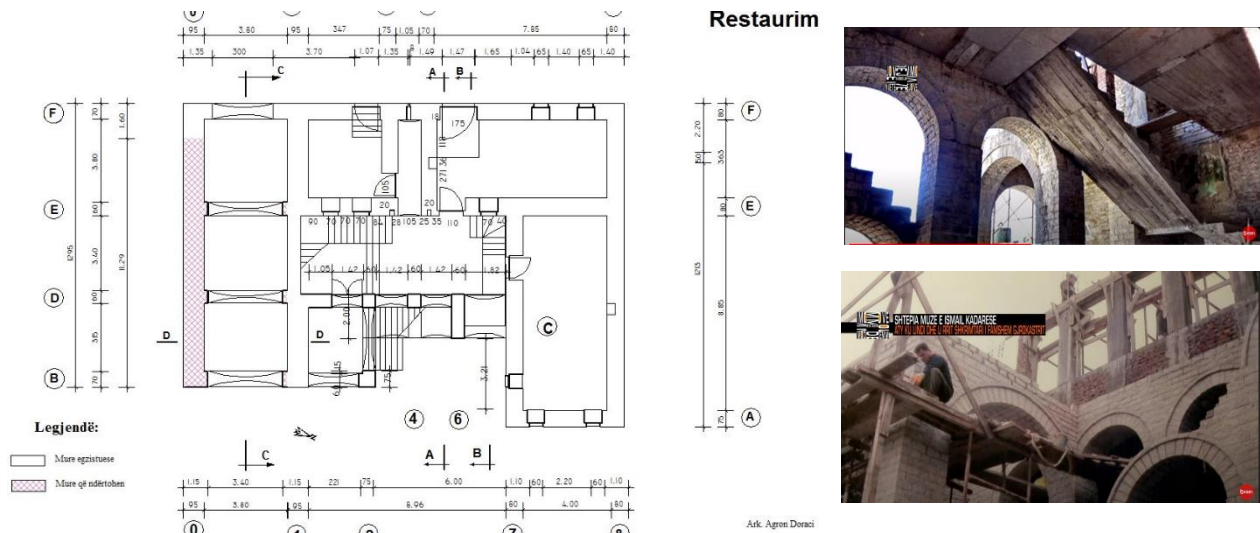


Figure 18, *Reconstruction of the house, 2015*, Image provided by Agron Doraci.

Agron Doraci expresses that in the whole city of Gjirokastra, but especially in the house of Kadare, there is a rhythmic and harmonious distribution (Figure 19).⁷⁰ The form, a voluminous planimetric point of view, is built on geometric principles on which all classical creativity is based. He argues that it is similar to the planimetry of Greco-Roman architecture and later in classical architecture. Furthermore, Doraci explains that the entire floor plan of the Kadare house is built based on squares, which are inserted four times in the lateral direction and three times in the transverse direction.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 7.

⁷¹ Ibid.

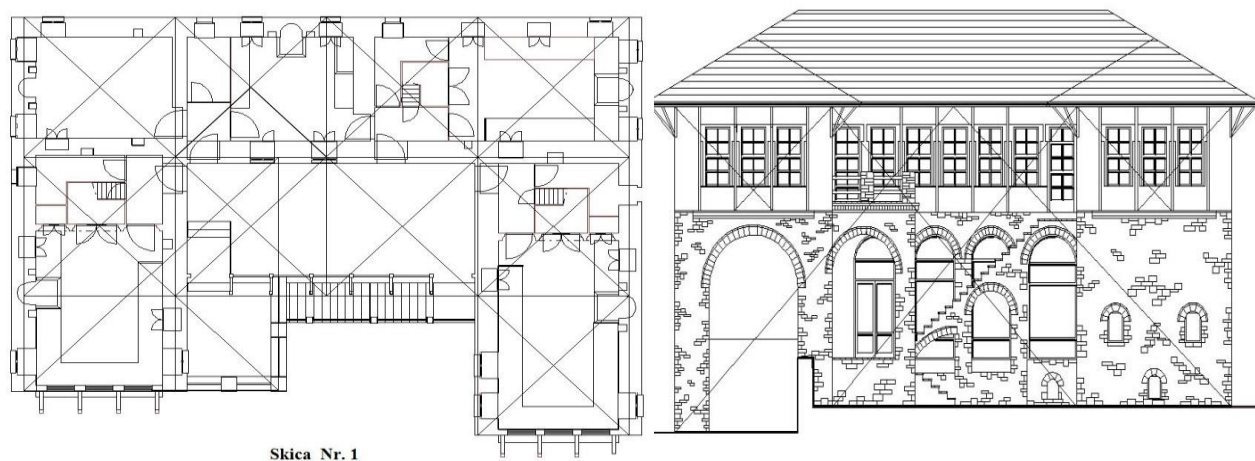


Figure 19: The geometry of the house in plans and façade. Image provided by Agron Doraci.

The house went under reconstruction in 1969 with voluntary contributions.⁷² Kadare's house had been expropriated, and the state needed reconstruction to house other people. The architect Doraci was present in the project of the house and he had the opportunity to collect the architectural materials which would be helpful for further interventions in the building. Throughout that period there were several attempts from Doraci to convince the government to strict intervention on the building, but could not succeed. Similarly, in 2006, the project was stopped by a confrontation with the owner of the house next to it, who did not agree to the new construction, and the state did not take care of the expropriation.⁷³

It is interesting that this house hosts some rare elements that are not found in other houses. Some external stairs give some rare architectural values. Doraci points out the stairs that start inside and go outside the house enabling access to the upper floor. He admires the refractions of light and the contrasts of shadow and light volume that give arcades and transparency within the walls of the

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

central part of the building. Another exceptional element present in this house is the height of the first floor of five meters.

After a few reconstruction works in years, UNESCO financed a full reconstruction process of the building in 2015. Architect Doraci was in charge of this process and implemented his knowledge based on the former documents, his memories, and consultations with Ismail Kadare. Since the building was highly damaged by the fire, lots of interventions were needed. However, the walls of the ground floor of the building are the existing ones, and new elements were built following the same techniques and materials. This intervention would conclude not solely by reconstructing the house but by adapting it in a museum for the artwork of the writer Ismail Kadare.

The last intervention in the building was in 2022. A new concept for the museum was presented. The use of technological innovations (video audio, lighting systems, and new wooden materials for furniture such as jojoba wood) for the demonstration of the artwork of the writer Ismail Kadare modernized the museum and created more functions in it. The restoration interventions were less compared to 2015. The implementations took part only in a small part in the southern part of the roof, cleaning the masonry by the vegetation and writings on it, cleaning and treating the wooden elements, and completing the interior of the rooms and toilets.⁷⁴

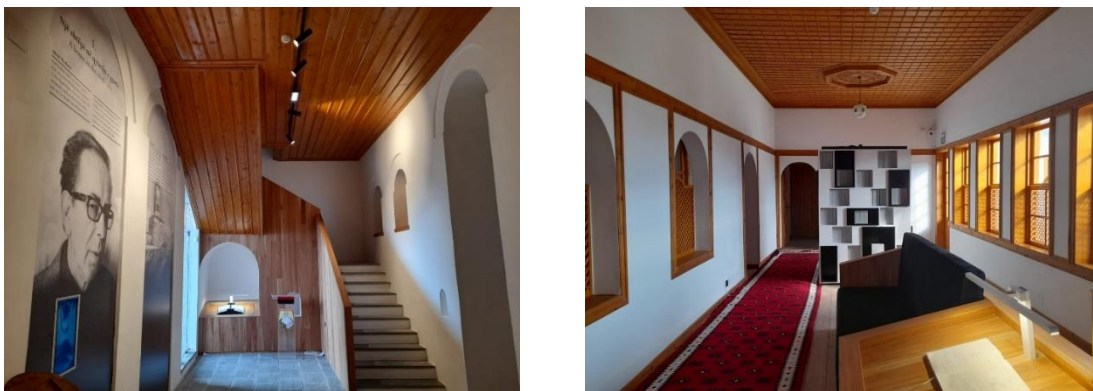


Figure 20: Interventions in the building, 2021. Images provided by the writer of the thesis.

⁷⁴ Information provided by the writer of the thesis regarding the professional involvement in the implementation of the project.

Conclusions

These changes in status through different years offered the city the possibility to be financially and spatially developed enabling a better lifestyle for the citizens. Regarding the past of the Gjirokastra's city, most of the buildings in the historical center have Ottoman influence in their architecture. Another element to consider is the year of construction and the circumstances. These buildings that stand today as museums, were built during the war times, thus they represent more of a type of fortification or defensive vernacular architecture. However, on the one hand, due to the respect for traditional methods of reconstruction and authentic elements, these buildings are today part of the World Heritage List and their preservation is a crucial point. On the other hand, the change in their function and the adaptation of the buildings in museums requires the consideration of human rights, especially the needs of people with disabilities. Even though the interventions can be limited, the opportunities offered by digital technologies and other technological innovations in architecture can provide essential changes for these museum buildings to be more accessible and inclusive.

In this way, the values of the vernacular architecture⁷⁵ in the construction process, materiality (local stone), lifestyle, and emotions are engaged in one place which does not change over time but admits new values in it. Therefore, the combination of the need to preserve the built heritage and the rights of people who access it becomes crucial for each designer of architectural projects.

⁷⁵ Vernacular architecture - an architectural style that is designed based on local needs, availability of construction materials, and reflecting local traditions.

Chapter 2

2 Legal Framework and Conventions of Cultural Heritage and Human Rights



Source: "Gjirokastra | Edward Lear, Albania, Monument Valley." n.d. Pinterest. Accessed May 17, 2024.
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/gjirokastra--701013498221952059/>.

In this chapter, I analyze the tension between monument protection and human rights in heritage sites and museums. Moreover, the tension between laws and practice in terms of accessibility is discussed based on the legal framework governing national cultural institutions and museums. Additionally, a comprehensive overview is presented regarding the international conventions and national law pertaining to the inclusivity and cultural rights of individuals with disabilities within cultural events. This encompasses an analysis of various guidelines and strategies aimed at safeguarding cultural heritage sites and monuments within Albania, with a specific focus on Gjirokastra. The comparison of the legal framework of cultural heritage and conventions of human rights followed by the implementations in practice points out their distinct and shared priorities, discrepancies, and contradictions.

Table 2: List of National Law and International Conventions analyzed in this thesis.

Title	Category	Timeline	Political context	Content
Monument Protection				
Law for Safeguarding Cultural Monument	National Law	22 June 1928	(Albania Kingdom, King Ahmet Zog I, 1928-1939)	Monument Protection
Preservation of cultural heritage	Decree	1948	Albania was a socialist country from 1946 to 1991, Leader - Enver Hoxha	Monument Protection
Law No. 9048	National Law	07.04.2003	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	Law for Cultural Heritage
Decision No. 619	National Law	7.7.2015	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	Historic Center's geographic boundaries and regulations for protection
Law of “Heritage and Museums”	National Law	2016	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	Permissible interventions in built heritage

Law No. 27/2018	National Law	2018	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	Museum's admission fee
Museums				
Museum Law No. 9386	National Law	4.5.2005	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	Finance and Administrative
Law for Cultural Heritage and Museums	National Law	2018	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	Finance and Administrative
National Strategy for Culture 2019 to 2025	National Strategy	2019-2025	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	*Empowering Museums through Technology *Sustainability
New Museum definition, ICOM	International Organization	2022	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	International Definition
Human Rights				
Universal Declaration of Human Rights	International Convention	1948	Albania was a socialist country from 1946 to 1991, Leader - Enver Hoxha	Human Rights, Cultural Rights for people with disabilities
CESCR	International Convention	1991	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights
CRPD	International Convention	2013	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Law No. 93/2014	National Law	2014	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	Inclusion and Accessibility of People with Disabilities
Decision No. 612,	National Law	1995	Parliamentary Republic of Albania	Facilities for people with disabilities in cultural events

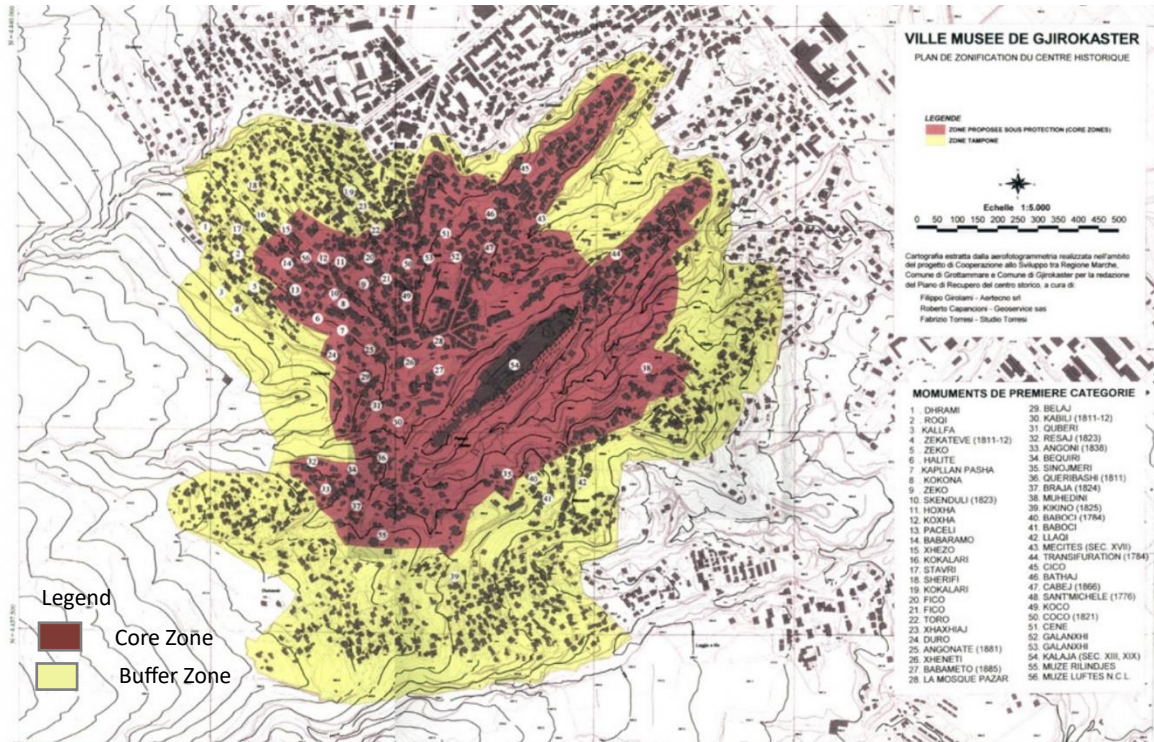
2.1 Monument protection and heritage sites

Throughout various periods of invasions and territorial transformations, Albania has undergone significant changes and urban developments. Consequently, the preservation of historical memory and its transmission to future generations has been deemed pivotal. These enduring values trace back to the era of King Zog I, notably underlined by the enactment of the legislation in 1928 aimed at safeguarding cultural monuments. Enacted on 22 June 1928, this legislation defined the categorization of cultural monuments, designated responsible institutions for their protection, and established guidelines governing the trade and exportation of artifacts arising from archaeological excavations or coincidental discoveries.⁷⁶

Moreover, the distinctive vernacular architecture that emerged in Gjirokastra, characterized by its integration with the rocky terrain, has gifted the city a unique architectural identity. Recognized for its architectural and cultural significance since its inception, Gjirokastra was officially designated a "Museum City" by a decree of the Council of Ministers in 1961. Subsequent legislative measures aimed at the preservation of this cultural heritage site include Decree 568 of 1948, focusing on the conservation of rare cultural and natural monuments. This decree was subsequently succeeded by legislative frameworks introduced in 1971, 1994, and 2003. Notably, the 2003 decree introduced the concept of "museum town" revealed as: "the urban center being protected by the state for its historical and cultural values" (Table 2).⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Alma Mile, "Si i Ruante Ahmet Zogu Monumentet Me Ligj, Që Nën 1928, [How did Ahmet Zogu protected the monuments by law since 1928]" accessed January 18, 2024, <http://www.panorama.com.al/si-i-ruante-ahmet-zogu-monumentet-me-ligj-qe-ne-1928/>.

⁷⁷ UNESCO, "Advisory Body Evaluation (ICOMOS), 2005", accessed January 20, 2024.



It is relevant to note that while the aforementioned values refer mainly to the historic center, the ongoing urban development within the buffer zone is subject to continual supervision (Figure 21)^{78,79} The main conservation management of Gjirokastra falls within the purview of the municipality. Inspection of restoration activities is entrusted to the Institute of Monuments of Culture in Tirana, alongside its local branch in Gjirokastra, in accordance with established criteria.⁸⁰ This inspection is facilitated by the legal framework defined in Law No. 9048, dated 07.04.2003, referring to cultural heritage.⁸¹ This legislation defines cultural monuments (structure) categorized as first and second categories in Article 28, outlining permissible adjustments aimed

at preserving the authenticity of these buildings. Furthermore, Articles 29 and 39 describe the regulations for changing the function of the building. However, drawing from personal observation and my architectural expertise, it becomes apparent that certain provisions within this law have not been implemented as mandated (Figure 22). Indeed, instances of unauthorized construction interventions have emerged, deviating from the prescribed legal framework.



Figure 22: The illegal interventions in the historical buildings, first category monuments of culture, and alleys (different materials from the original – aluminum windows, white tiles instead of white cobblestone, additions of the existing building with new materials, and changing the façade of the building), district “Partizani”, Gjirokastra.

Source: Daniela Baçe, “Technological Innovations and the Revitalization of Museum Areas. Case study: The city of Gjirokastër”, June 13, 2022.

Based on the elements of the Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (16 November 1972), the ICOMOS report reveals that the initial proposal attempt for the designation of Gjirokastra as a world heritage site historic center of Gjirokastra was in 1990.⁸² However, its nomination faced some changes opposed in June 1991 by the Bureau of the World Heritage Committee in Paris. As a result, Albanian authorities had to redefine the nominated area and tailor a specific management system supported by ICOMOS recommendations and resubmit

⁸² ICOMOS, “Gjirokastra (Albania) No 569 rev, April 2005, accessed January 20, 2024.

the nomination file to UNESCO in October 2003.⁸³ After regular supervision by UNESCO's experts, the historical center of Gjirokastra was successfully inscribed in the World Heritage List 2005, meeting the criteria outlined for such designation (Chapter 1).⁸⁴

The enactment of Law No. 9048, dated 07.04.2003, titled "For Cultural Heritage", was succeeded by Decision No. 619, dated 7.7.2015, which declared the Historic Center's geographic boundaries and approved regulations governing its protection, integrated conservation, and administration (Table 2).⁸⁵ This decision delineates permissible and impermissible interventions within the protected area, accompanied by stipulated consequences, including fee payment for violations. Notably, the case of Ismail Kadare's House (described in Chapter 1) presents a deviation case from the prescribed regulations. Classified as a first-category monument of culture in 1991, this designation mandates its preservation in its entirety, with no alteration permitted in its structural or functional aspects. However, the current use of this residential building as a museum deviates from these terms, as well as the changes in the structure of the building (concrete slabs between floors).

2.2 Museums in Albania

As analyzed in the first chapter, the transformation of the Ethnographic Museum, Ismail Kadare's House, and Argjiro's Castle nowadays possess the status of museums open to the public. Therefore, their service and function should align with Law No. 9386, dated 4.5.2005 (Table 2) related to Museums in the Republic of Albania with further specifications in 2018, including the concept of

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Decision No. 619, dated 7.7.2015.

Cultural Heritage.⁸⁶ Notwithstanding, both iterations of the law primarily focus on administrative and financial matters, with insufficient attention directed towards mechanisms fostering inclusion and accessibility within museum environments, despite their overarching objectives of providing a culturally and educationally enriching experience for all individuals. For instance, Article 14, “For certain social categories, which are approved by decision of the Council of Ministers, reduced prices of public museum tickets are set.”,⁸⁷ addresses the existence of discounts without offering substantive elaboration. Similarly, the 2018 Law for Cultural Heritage and Museums fails to expound upon this aspect.

Conversely, the National Strategy for Culture, spanning 2019 to 2025,⁸⁸ introduces notable advancements within the cultural sphere and museum landscape. It delineates four primary objectives, notably featuring the “Empowering Museums through Technology” project as part of its inaugural goal, “Support Sustainable Systems of Governance for Culture”. Against the backdrop of challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in Albania, this strategy underscores the pivotal role of technology and innovation in enhancing museum services and expanding audience reach. Initiatives such as electronic ticketing systems, museum digitization efforts, and integration of immersive 3D experiences are highlighted as crucial components in optimizing museum performance and enriching the tourism sector. Moreover, this direction toward the use of technological innovations in museums and inclusion aligns with the ICOM's new definition of museums:

A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible, and inclusive, museums foster diversity

⁸⁶ Ligji nr. 9386, date 4.5.2005 per Muzete [Law No.9386, date 4.5.2005 for Museums], translated in English by the author of the thesis.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ UNESCO, “The approval of the national strategy for culture 2019-2025”, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.unesco.org/creativity/en/policy-monitoring-platform/approval-national-strategy-culture-2019-2025>.

and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally, and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing.⁸⁹

As such, the international legal framework and national laws can assist in the improvement of the museums' performance and facilitate the inclusion of society in cultural events.

2.3 International Conventions and National Laws for people with disabilities

In framing the museum experience, it is crucial to contextualize within the established framework of human rights and cultural rights, particularly emphasizing the principle of inclusive participation in cultural life. Internationally, Cultural Rights are derived from Human Rights, with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed by the UN General Assembly in 1948 serving as a foundational document.⁹⁰ As a member state of the United Nations, Albania has ratified various treaties, including the CESC (1991), and the CRPD (2013) that influence the national Albanian law.⁹¹ Furthermore, Albania has signed another crucial convention regarding the value of Cultural Heritage for society (the Faro Convention, 2005),⁹² although this convention has not been ratified yet, therefore, its regulations cannot take place in this country.⁹³

Based on the international legal framework, Albanian national documents control the management of the cultural sphere while stressing on the importance of inclusion. The CRPD points out the respect for the rights of individuals with disabilities by the public and private institutions and

⁸⁹ ICOM, "Museum Definition", accessed March 9, 2024, <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>.

⁹⁰ United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights", accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

⁹¹ OHCHR, UN Treaty Body Database, accessed February 5, 2024, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=2&Lang=EN.

⁹² Council of Europe, "Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society", 27.10.2005, accessed February 5, 2024, <https://rm.coe.int/1680083746>.

⁹³ Council of Europe, "Chart of signatures and ratifications of Treaty 199", accessed February 5, 2024, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/conventions/full-list?module=signatures-by-treaty&treaty=199>.

makes them responsible to provide solutions for the accommodation within their environments.⁹⁴

As such, articles 2 and 9 of the CRPD highlight the concept of Universal Design as a means to address accessibility challenges, leveraging technological innovations to facilitate this process.⁹⁵

Additionally, Article 30 of the CRPD highlights the cultural rights of individuals with disabilities in cultural life, leisure activities, and sports, despite of their disabilities. Accordingly, it emphasizes the awareness that the institutions must have to this issue, and develop specialized programs to, provide cultural materials in accessible formats, such as sign language or the Braille alphabet.⁹⁶

Furthermore, Law No. 93/2014 for the Inclusion and Accessibility of People with Disabilities reinforces the commitment to financial support for accessibility measures:

Article 11, “2. State, central, and local institutions gradually take measures for securing the necessary funds for the removal of environmental obstacles and infrastructure in the provision of public services.”⁹⁷

Referring back to the status of the historic center of Gjirokastra as a world heritage, the draft law of 2016 for “Heritage and Museums”, describes in Article 2, the regulations, procedures, and adequate authorities responsible for the protection, and evaluation of the cultural property, and its administration.⁹⁸ Additionally, it defines foundational principles for museum classification, operational modalities, and organizational structures within the Republic of Albania. Crucially, Article 3 of the current Law No. 27/2018 for Cultural Heritage and Museums underscores the imperative of ensuring equal physical access to cultural values (Table 2):

⁹⁴Qendra e Botimeve Zyrtare, “Përmbledhje e Legjislacionit për Njerëzit me Aftësi të Kufizuar” [Summary of Legislation for People with Disabilities], Tirane 2020, 9.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶Qendra e Botimeve Zyrtare, “Përmbledhje e Legjislacionit për Njerëzit me Aftësi të Kufizuar” [Summary of Legislation for People with Disabilities], 21-22.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Projektligji_per_Trashegimine_Kulturore_dhe_Muzete [Draft Law for Cultural Heritage and Museums], Article 2, translated by the author of the thesis.

“3. Central and local government bodies and private entities create conditions for guaranteeing equal access for every person to cultural values.”⁹⁹

However, while Article 3, point 3 emphasizes accessibility to cultural heritage, point 2 appears to prioritize property protection over accessibility:

“2. The right of access to cultural heritage constitutes an opportunity to use cultural values, ensuring physical or intellectual access to them, without damaging or exposing them to any risk.”¹⁰⁰

Lastly, Article 233 of this legislation delineates regulations for determining museum entrance fees and specifies the entity responsible for such decisions.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, these regulations do not follow a list of categories of people with disabilities exempt from entrance fees allowing assumptions and not enforcement of this regulation in many cases.

2.4 From papers to practice

Despite the existence of legal provisions, the actual evidence suggests a discrepancy between policy and practice, particularly concerning the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in cultural life and societal activities. Interviews conducted with directors of organizations representing individuals with visual and physical impairments in Gjirokastra reveal systemic shortcomings in the implementation of relevant legislation, exacerbating challenges faced by this part of the population. In contrast with Decision No. 612, dated 6.11.1995 (Table 2), favoring individuals with disabilities within the cultural, youth, and sports spheres, outlining the obligation of organizers to

⁹⁹ Law No. 27/2018 for Cultural Heritage and Museums [Ligji nr. 27/2018 per Trashegimine Kulturore dhe Muzete], Article 3.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

provide special accommodations for this demographic during cultural events, accounts from Vjollca Koko,¹⁰² underscore discrepancies between stated commitments and actual practices. For instance, during the National Folk Festival (2023) held at Argjiro's Castle, no designated space was allocated for wheelchair users or their assistants, highlighting a failure to adhere to regulatory mandates.¹⁰³ Moreover, Koko, during her tenure on the Council of Gjirokastra's County (2015-2019), advocated for infrastructure improvements aligned with legislative standards. However, her efforts admit unsatisfactory results, particularly concerning interventions in public institutions and museums, where urban planner/ architect experts highlight challenges posed by the city's terrain and architecture.

Similarly, Rushit Kusho,¹⁰⁴ visually impaired person underscores the disconnect between legislation and implementation.¹⁰⁵ Despite legislative frameworks and drafted strategies, tangible outcomes remain elusive. Kusho notes a decline in the participation of individuals with visual impairments in cultural events and sites post-2015, attributing this regression to the restrictive provisions of Law No. 93/2014 and limited funding allocated to the Association's activities.¹⁰⁶

Another issue that arises in the interview with Kusho and Koko is related to financial support. The absence of assigned workplaces and funding from the City Council of Gjirokastra limit their engagement in activities and operations as associations.¹⁰⁷ This evident discrepancy reveals weakness in law enforcement and the fulfillment of the needs of individuals with disabilities, highlighting the need for strong initiatives to bridge the gap between policy intent and practical implementation.

¹⁰² Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 6.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 4.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Qendra e Botimeve Zyrtare, "Përmbledhje e Legjislacionit për Njerëzit me Aftësi të Kufizuar" [Summary of Legislation for People with Disabilities].

¹⁰⁷ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 4, 6.

Conclusions

The comparison between legal frameworks governing built heritage protection and those safeguarding the rights of individuals with disabilities discloses deceptive discrepancies in their emphasis and priorities. While built heritage protection laws prioritize the preservation of architectural integrity and cultural significance, regulations applied to cultural rights underline the necessity of inclusion and accessibility for all individuals, including those with disabilities. This dichotomy poses a challenge, particularly concerning the practical implementation of these frameworks, which often results in a degraded reality that necessitates immediate intervention to ensure equitable access to shared environments.

In the realm of museums, where both legal frameworks converge in acknowledging the importance of accessibility for individuals with disabilities, a harmonized approach can be proposed to reconcile these seemingly conflicting priorities. By integrating inclusive measures that cater to the needs of individuals with disabilities, museums cannot only fulfill their obligations under the cultural rights framework but also enhance the overall visitor experience for everyone. Moreover, such measures contribute to the broader objectives of the legal framework by promoting multiple access to cultural heritage sites and ensuring that built environments accommodate the diverse needs of all individuals. Ultimately, adopting a holistic approach that balances heritage conservation with principles of inclusivity and accessibility is imperative to address the existing disparities and facilitate meaningful participation in cultural life for individuals with disabilities and all visitors alike. By aligning these frameworks and implementing practical solutions that prioritize universal access, museums can effectively bridge the gap between heritage preservation and human rights, thereby creating more inclusive and equitable cultural spaces for all.

Chapter 3

3 Management of Museums and Their Accessibility



Source: "Albania in the Painting of Edward Lear | Robert Elsie." 2024. Albanianart.net. 2024.
<http://www.albanianart.net/painting/lear/lear040.htm>.

In this chapter, I explore the management structure of the museums in Gjirokastra. Moreover, I analyze the functions and the accessibility of each museum as part of this thesis to understand the integration of the technological innovations used in the architecture of these museums. This analysis is based on my expertise and materials collected from the interviews that I conducted.

3.1 Management of museums in Gjirokastra

Museums of the city of Gjirokastra are considered local museums, accessible to the general public.¹⁰⁸ As such, their operational oversight falls under the purview of the city's municipal authority, which operates under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture of Albania. Hence, the municipal administration includes within its organizational framework the Directorate of Museums, alongside the Department of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Sports which operates under the aegis of this directorate.

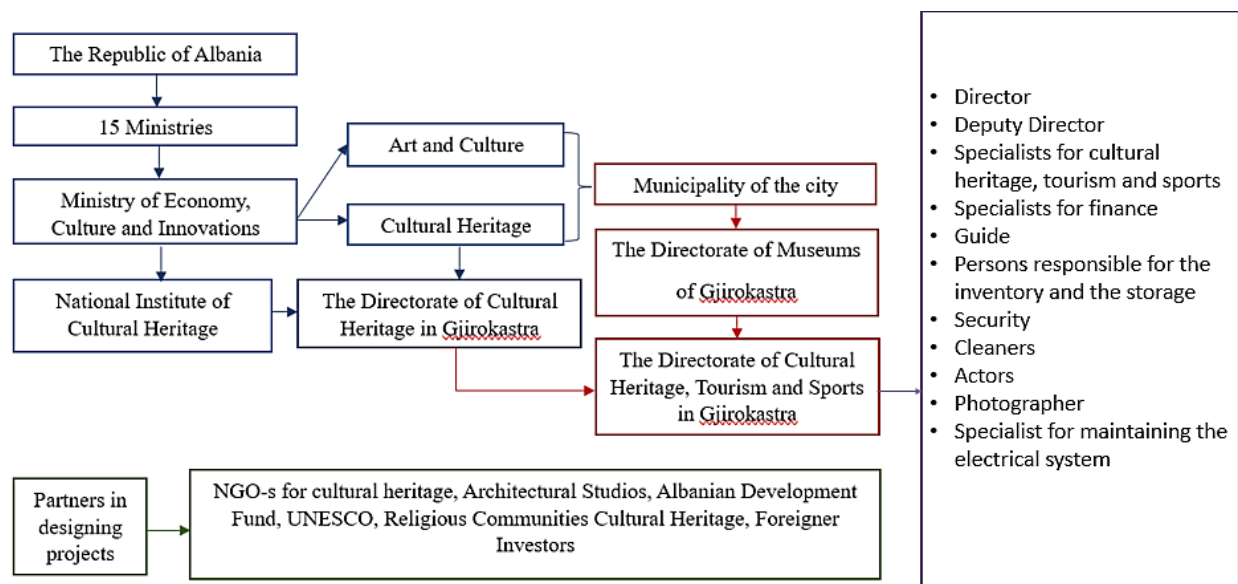


Figure 23: Organizational structure of the management of Gjirokastra's museums, produced by the writer of the thesis.

¹⁰⁸ Ligji nr. 9386, date 4.5.2005 per Muzete [Law No.9386, date 4.5.2005 for Museums], Article 8, translated in English by the author of the thesis.

The Directorate of Cultural Heritage in Gjirokastra serves as a bridge between national and local cultural institutions. Its primary responsibility encompasses the maintenance, documentation, preservation, restoration, and promotion of cultural sites in Gjirokastra.¹⁰⁹ Working closely with the Department of Culture in the municipality of Gjirokastra, and its Directorate of Museums, specialists of the field design and implement cultural projects that take place in city's museums. According to the deputy director of the Directorate of Museums in Gjirokastra, this partnership goes beyond national borders, engaging international partners such as the Council of Europe and entities like TID¹¹⁰ in initiatives that aim to enhance Gjirokastra's cultural scene.¹¹¹

The hierarchical organizational structure inherent in these institutions often results in bureaucratic processes within decision-making frameworks. This structure typically adheres to a top-down approach, exemplified by the Department of Museums in Gjirokastra, which oversees the coordination of activities proposed or selected by small working groups comprising two to three specialists per respective field. Additionally, the design phase of these initiatives may involve the participation of cultural organizations or associations, both national and international, with vested interests in the city's cultural heritage. In certain instances, these cultural entities may also serve as sponsors for activities. However, it is crucial to note that the management structure of these cultural institutions emphasizes collaborative leadership, fostering teamwork, and cooperation within the institution reinforcing a top-down management system of the official administration. This character extends to fostering partnerships not only within internal museum departments but also with external stakeholders such as artists, cultural organizations, and governmental agencies.

¹⁰⁹ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 5.

¹¹⁰ TID – Tourism Improvement District operating in Gjirokastra.

¹¹¹ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 5.

Significantly, there is a concerted effort to bolster tourism and enhance its appeal through the development of innovative tools. While there may not be an explicitly articulated management plan specifically targeting museum improvement, Gjirokastra received notable acclaim as one of the top ten destinations within Albania for summer 2023.¹¹² This accolade was reaffirmed by CNN's recognition of Albania as one of the most captivating destinations to visit in 2024, attributing its attraction to both its natural splendor and cultural richness.¹¹³ This recognition followed a surge in tourism, particularly during the summers of 2022 and 2023. According to Ardis Duka,¹¹⁴ the County of Gjirokastra welcomed three hundred thousand tourists, with eighty thousand hailing from Spain, an indication of the region's increasing appeal on the global stage.¹¹⁵

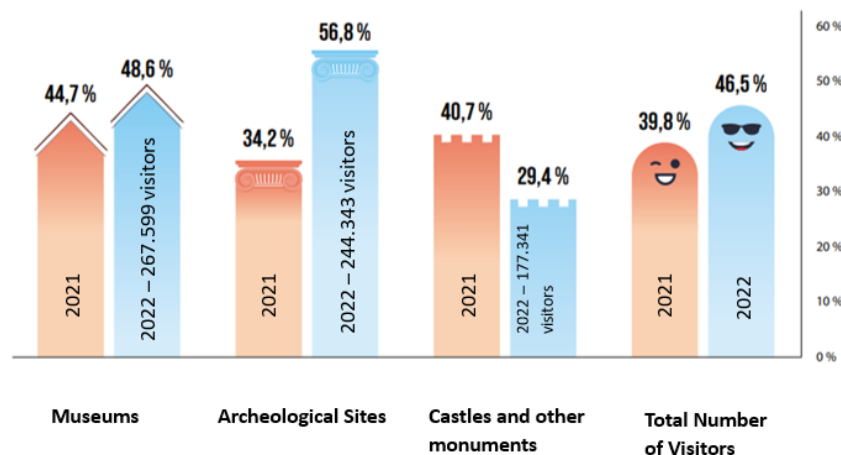


Figure 24: The percentage of foreign tourists in museums, castles and other monuments, archeological sites produced by INSTAT, modified by the author of the thesis.

A contributing factor to this achievement was the hosting of the National Folk Festival at Argjiro's Castle, which drove it to become the most visited site in 2023.

Furthermore, data from INSTAT¹¹⁶ indicates that

Argjiro's Castle was the most visited site in 2022 compared to other castles in Albania (Figure 24).

¹¹² Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 8.

¹¹³ "Places to Visit in 2024, CNN Travel Includes Albania on the List," Vox News, accessed March 21, 2024, <https://www.voxnews.al/english/lifestyle/vendet-qe-duhen-vizituar-ne-vitin-2024-cnn-travel-rendit-edhe-shqiperi-i55931>.

¹¹⁴ Ardis Duka, the director of the Cultural Heritage Directorate of Gjirokastra.

¹¹⁵ rom ario, "80 Mijë Turistë Spanjollë Vizituan Gjirokastrën Në 2023," [80 thousand Spanish Tourists visited Gjirokastra], Euronews Albania, January 4, 2024, <https://euronews.al/80-mije-turiste-spanjolle-vizituan-gjirokastrën-ne-2023-dominuan-madrilenet/>.

¹¹⁶ INSTAT - Institution of Statistics in Albania.

3.2 Audience

The visitor demographic at the museums of Gjirokastra reflects a diverse array of nationalities, genders, and age groups, including individuals with disabilities. While precise statistics regarding the attendance of visitors with disabilities at these cultural institutions are unavailable (unless general information on people with disabilities who are registered in the office of Economic Aid office of Gjirokastra, Table 3),¹¹⁷ I draw upon personal observations and experiences as a resident of the city for the purposes of this research as well as the interviews that I conducted with the experts of the particular fields. Consequently, it is evident that the integration of individuals with disabilities remains an area requiring improvement. The absence of tailored activities or initiatives adapted to this part of the population underscores this deficiency. Opportunities for showcasing their talents or facilitating museum visits, particularly for local residents, are predominantly driven by individual initiatives. Nonetheless, despite infrastructural challenges, the inherent desire to engage with cultural offerings persists within this demographic. Several instances demonstrate instances where individuals from this target group have participated in activities, albeit encountering obstacles, which will be further explained in subsequent sections of this chapter.

Table 3: Number of People with Physical Disabilities and Visual Impairment in Municipality of Gjirokastra.

No.	People with disabilities	Gjirokasta	Cepo	Lazarat	Picar	Lunxheri	Odrie	Antigone	Total
1	Physical and mental	269	44	29	21	51	9	12	435
2	Para-Tetraplegic	26	2	1	7	3	0	0	39
3	Visual Impairment	84	10	4	6	15	5	4	128
4	Work disabled	551	59	34	24	67	12	23	771

¹¹⁷ Table 3, translated by the author of this thesis, prepared by experts for “Plani lokal, Bashkia Gjirokastra 2020-2023” [Local Plan, Municipality of Gjirokastra 2020-2023].

The Municipality of Gjirokastra oversees six additional communes, as outlined in Table 3, and engages in various informative and consultative sessions with local organizations catering to individuals with disabilities. However, a report incorporated into the Local Plan of the Municipality of Gjirokastra reveals a notable absence of concrete measures aimed at enhancing services for this demographic.¹¹⁸ In accordance with Decree 1074, issued on 23.12.2015, both the municipality and other pertinent institutions have yet to formulate a comprehensive plan of action to improve accessibility in public buildings and the dissemination of information for individuals with disabilities.

Furthermore, the Local Plan underscores a lack of sufficient consideration given to requests for adjustments benefiting individuals with visual and auditory impairments within the financial allocations for the reconstruction of public infrastructures.¹¹⁹ Despite the awareness among specialists within the Directorate of Public Affairs, Urban Planning, and Civil Emergencies regarding the regulations outlined in the 2008 decree “For the use of spaces by persons with disabilities” there is a conspicuous absence of investments toward implementing necessary modifications to render public institutions more accessible. Moreover, the municipality's absence of an actionable plan to address issues concerning construction suitability exacerbates the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities, who find themselves excluded from numerous activities due to the lack of financial backing for architectural projects.

¹¹⁸ Fondacioni Shqipetar per te Drejtat e Personave me Aftesi te Kufizuara, “Plani lokal Bashkia Gjirokastra 2020-2023” [Local Plan, Municipality of Gjirokastra 2020-2023], 14.

¹¹⁹ FSHDPAK, “Plani lokal Bashkia Gjirokastra 2020-2023” [Local Plan, Municipality of Gjirokastra 2020-2023], 54.

3.3 Services in the museums at the present time

3.3.1 Argjiro's Castle

As outlined in the first chapter, the most recent interventions at Argjiro's Castle occurred in 2022, focusing on reinforcing the structural integrity of the castle and enriching the visitor experience within its main gallery spaces. These efforts culminated in the expansion of accessible areas within the castle premises. Notably, this initiative facilitated a more immersive experience for visitors through the integration of interactive activities. Furthermore, enhancements were made to the western section of the castle, ensuring its accessibility to individuals using wheelchairs. A specially designed pathway was constructed, enabling wheelchair users to navigate the area with ease, thereby promoting inclusivity and broadening access to this cultural site (Figure 27).

3.3.1.1 Functionality

Presently, Argjiro's Castle offers a comprehensive historical and cultural itinerary for visitors. Situated on the top of a hill, the castle provides breathtaking panoramic views of the city. To exploit this feature, specific areas within the castle are designated for panoramic viewing, while the remaining spaces are dedicated to showcasing archaeological findings, architectural features, and the rich history of the city, including its festivals (Figure 25). Notably, all programs and exhibitions are predominantly situated on one level of the castle, facilitating ease of navigation for visitors. Furthermore, the Arms Museum within the castle offers in-depth insights into its historical significance, particularly concerning the wars that have transpired in the city. Through detailed exhibits, visitors can delve into the castle's role in past conflicts and gain a deeper understanding of its military history.



1. Entrance/Exit

4. Picnic/Point of view

2. Learning about Castle

5. Archeological site

7. Clock Tower/ Lookout

3. Lookout point

6. Festival/Events' scene

point

Figure 25: Functions of the Argjiro's Castle. Source of the 3D Castle Image: Sketchfab. "Gjirokastra Castle Albania - 3D Model by Landco70," n.d., accesed March 12, 2024, <https://sketchfab.com/3d-models/Gjirokastra-castle-albania-900e68f93eee48ec87062c4125109fd6>.

3.3.1.2 Accessibility

Due to its relatively even terrain, approximately eighty percent of the castle's spaces are accessible, rendering it highly accommodating for visitors, including those using wheelchairs. Despite facing various physical challenges, individuals such as Koko, driven by historical curiosity, cultural interest, or simply the desire for entertainment, have frequented the castle environment on multiple occasions. While Koko may not have explored every corner of the castle, she has expressed excitement at the opportunity to immerse herself in the historical narrative of her city, underscoring the value of inclusive access to cultural heritage sites for individuals with disabilities (Figure 26).¹²⁰



Figure 26: Challenges of accessibility of the Argjiro's Castle. Photographs provided by Vjollca Koko.

The choice of concrete for creating accessible pathways was made with careful consideration of its practical benefits, particularly in facilitating wheelchair movements. Despite its distinction from traditional stone construction, the use of concrete does not significantly contrast with the surrounding environment, thereby mitigating concerns regarding visual disruption. Instead, it serves as a pragmatic solution that aligns with contemporary accessibility standards while

¹²⁰ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 6.

preserving the overall aesthetic and historical integrity of the castle. In this way, the project strikes a balance between modern accessibility requirements and the preservation of cultural heritage, ultimately contributing to the castle's continued relevance and enjoyment by diverse visitor demographics (Figure 27).



Figure 27: Accessibility of the recently opened part of the Castle. Image captured by the author of the thesis.

3.3.2 Ethnographic Museum

The architectural project designed by Casanova and Hernandez architects, in collaboration with Cultural Heritage without Borders in 2020, embodies a meticulous approach to preserving and restoring the existing structure while introducing a new architectural layer that harmonizes with its historical context without altering it.¹²¹ This innovative addition to the building manifests a subtle impact, refraining from imitation of the original architecture while establishing a cohesive dialogue with it.

¹²¹ "Casanova+Hernandez | A126_Ethnographic Museum of Gjirokastra", accessed March 5, 2024, https://www.casanova-hernandez.com/a126_ethnographic-museum-of-gjirokastra/.

Central to this endeavor is the exhibition design, which emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between interpretation and artifacts. The exhibition of the artifacts allows visitors to engage with them partly and provides comprehensive insights into the significance, usage, and contextual background of each item through the audio-visual materials.¹²² This enriches the visitor experience and fosters a deeper understanding of the cultural heritage on display. Moreover, the design scheme deliberately highlights the distinction between the old and new elements, emphasizing the uniqueness of each while facilitating seamless integration within the exhibition space. The introduction of new furniture further enhances the presentation of artifacts, ensuring their proper display and enhancing the overall aesthetic appeal of the exhibition. Through thoughtful design and careful execution, this architectural project not only preserves the integrity of the existing structure, includes the memory as the birth house of the dictator Enver Hoxha, but also elevates the visitor's encounter with cultural heritage, offering a nuanced exploration of the past within a contemporary framework.

3.3.2.1 Functionality

The museum experience is organized based on the permanent exhibition, the temporary one and a few educational programs designed for the transmission of the knowledge on the ethnographic elements of Gjirokastra county. To facilitate a comprehensive visitor experience, the functions of the Ethnographic Museum are distributed across the four levels of the house. The ground floor (Figure 28) serves as the entry point for visitors, housing the reception area, temporary exhibition spaces, and archives. Some of the museum's archival materials are stored within designated rooms on this level.

¹²² Casanova+Hernandez architects, Cultural Heritage without Borders, “Design and Supervision Gjirokastra System of Museum, Ethnographic Museum, Technical Report”, July 2020.

On the first floor (Figure 29), the focus is primarily on the permanent exhibition, a small administrative office, and the open archive. The latter stands as an innovative feature on this floor storing ethnographic artifacts, while intriguing visitors with glimpses of select objects from the collection. The second floor (Figure 30) is fully dedicated to the permanent exhibition. However, the main guest room can be utilized for different events or educational workshops. Accessed via the loggia, the third floor (Figure 31) offers a unique perspective on the building's construction and decorative elements, therefore it features a rare window that provides views of the interior roof space.

Incorporating technological advancements, the museum consists of LED screens and projectors to present audiovisual materials.¹²³ Additionally, specialized cabinets and lighting systems enhance the display of artifacts, simultaneously ensuring their preservation and maintaining optimal environmental conditions. Furthermore, the museum's heating system has been upgraded to a modern HVAC system, utilizing existing infrastructure in good condition. This ensures efficient climate control within the building, contributing to the preservation of both the structure and its contents.

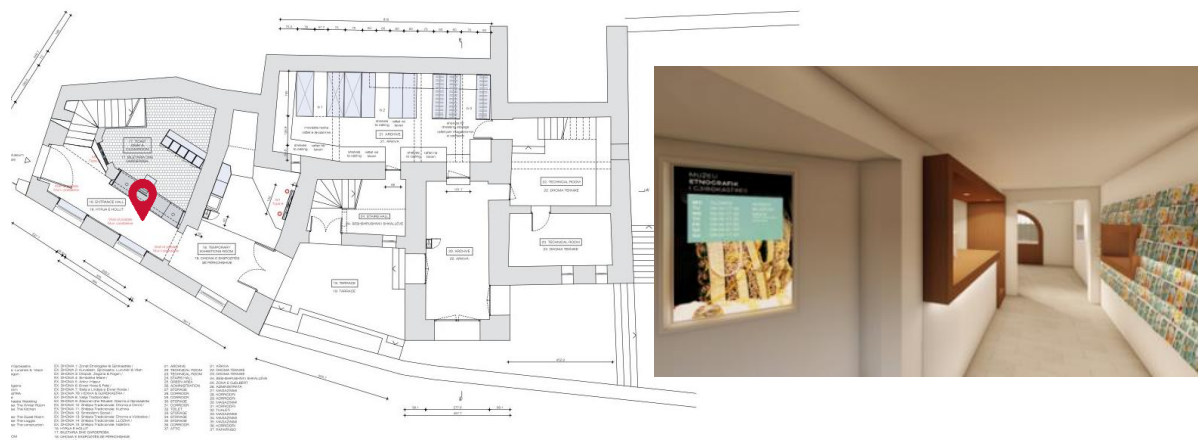


Figure 28: Plan of the ground floor, Floorplan designed by Casanova+Hernandez.

¹²³ Information from the author of this thesis's professional experience in the project of the renovation of Gjirokastra's system of museums.



Figure 29: Plan of the first floor; Floorplan designed by Casanova+Hernandez, Images taken by the author of this thesis as part of the implementation teamwork of the project. (Exhibitions: Ethnological zones of Gjirokastra, Enver Hoxha's birth room, Religious symbolism).



Figure 30: Plan of the second floor; Floorplan designed by Casanova+Hernandez, Images taken by the author of this thesis as part of the implementation teamwork of the project. (Exhibitions: Social symbolism, Habits & Rituals/ The traditional dance and Gjirokastra wedding).



Figure 31: Plan of the third floor, Floorplan designed by Casanova+Hernandez. (Exhibition: The traditional house).

Visitors follow a free movement throughout the levels of the house experiencing the sections of the permanent exhibition on their own and creating a unique and distinct personal experience. For this purpose, the rooms' doors are always open and in some of them such as Enver Hoxha's birth room or the kitchen the circulation can be accessed in two or three directions (Figure 29,30).

3.3.2.2 Accessibility

The strategic location of the museum along the main street, connecting the old and new parts of the city, presents a significant advantage, particularly for individuals with mobility limitations who may struggle with steep terrain. However, the lack of adequate parking areas poses a notable challenge to accessibility. Upon entering the building, accessibility issues become more evident. As the structure consists of four floors accessible only via staircases, individuals using wheelchairs

encounter significant barriers (Figure 32). In addition, there is the challenge of the designation of the building as a first-category monument, which prohibits alterations to its facades and structure.



Figure 32: Section of the building depicting staircases and the mobility in the building, designed by Casanova+Hernandez.

Consequently, according to the legal framework, the installation of outdoor or indoor lifts to address accessibility concerns is not feasible, as it would entail substantial modifications to both the interior character and exterior appearance of the building. This regulatory restriction exacerbates the accessibility limitations faced by visitors with mobility impairments, highlighting the need for alternative strategies to enhance inclusivity within the museum premises. While the museum attaches technology to enhance visitor understanding through interactive exhibits and activities, it increases the accessibility standards for individuals with hearing and vision impairments. While the technological displays aid in providing context for artifacts and fostering community engagement, the absence of audio descriptions or written texts in Braille excludes individuals with these disabilities from fully participating in the museum experience.

As a result, visitors who are blind or have low vision may encounter barriers to accessing the museum's content, limiting their ability to engage and fully grasp the significance of the exhibitions. To promote inclusivity and accommodate diverse visitor needs, the museum needs to implement measures such as audio descriptions and texts in Braille to ensure that all visitors can access and enjoy the museum's offerings regardless of their abilities. By addressing these accessibility concerns, the museum can sustain its commitment to providing all community members with an enriching and inclusive experience following the Museum Law¹²⁴ and ICOM definition for museums¹²⁵.

3.3.3 Ismail Kadare's House

Based on the exhibition designer's report for the House of Ismail Kadare, the overarching concept revolves around “Reading Kadare's Birth House”.¹²⁶ This thematic approach offers visitors a multi-layered exploration of the renowned writer's childhood, his birthplace, and a particular period of the Second World War as well. The narrative framework guiding visitors through the museum draws heavily from Kadare's book “Chronicle in Stone”, which vividly depicts his childhood home and the events of that era. Furthermore, the museum depicts segments of Kadare's memories during the Italian occupation of Albania.¹²⁷

Through the architectural design and museum's curation, the concept of the museum “Reading Kadare's Birth House”, aims to bridge the physical space of Kadare's birth house with the abstract descriptions of his childhood and the dwelling as depicted in his book. This design enables an

¹²⁴ Ligji nr. 9386, date 4.5.2005 per Muzete [Law No.9386, date 4.5.2005 for Museums], translated in English by the author of the thesis.

¹²⁵ ICOM, “Museum Definition”, accessed March 9, 2024.

¹²⁶ Casanova+Hernandez architects, CHwB, “System of Museums (SoM) Preliminary Detailed Project Design, Ismail Kadare's house, Technical Specification”, July 2020.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

immersive experience for the visitors who can delve into Kadare's literary world, gaining insights into his upbringing and the historical context that shaped his literary work.

3.3.3.1 Functionality

The exhibition production is based on four main mechanisms enabling a unique experience:

1. Presenting parts of the book on the walls of the building through projection of texts, or prints.
2. Demonstration and reproduction of significant objects mentioned in the book accompanied by a description that explains their context.
3. Depiction of the narrated stories in the book through audio-visual materials, reproduced by local filmmakers and local actors.
4. Exhibition of historical facts part of the book through photographs and reproduced videos.¹²⁸

Regarding these mechanisms, the exhibition is organized into three layers that are distributed along the three floors of the museum's building: The Literary Cabinets, the Biographical Books, and the Walk through the Chronicles in Stone.

The ground floor of the building includes the visitor's reception where visitors can find information and buy tickets for the museum functions as a bookshop as well. As such, visitors can read or buy books in various languages from Kadare's literature. Furthermore, on this floor, one can find the permanent exhibition, the temporary exhibition utilized a multifunctional auditorium and an educational room dedicated to the educational workshops pertaining to the works of Kadare, and the cafe. Kadare Cafe and Street Library is located at the exterior passage and it is connected to the garden of the museum (Figure 35). This area is easily accessible from the street alongside the

¹²⁸ Ibid.

museum. However, there has been no activity going on in this part of the museum since the implementation of the project in 2022.¹²⁹ Even though the structures are available for the exhibition of books or coffee machines, they have not been in use yet. One of the reasons for these conditions might be the problems with the safety of the area and fear of damage to the books.¹³⁰ Therefore, nowadays this area of the museum, easily accessible by visitors stands more like a passage and a relaxing place to sit than having the prescribed function in the project. Regarding the permanent exhibition, one can find rooms 3 and 4 (Figure 33) placed in the basement, rooms 1 and 2 (Figure 35) located on the ground floor, and on the third floor rooms 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 (Figure 36) aligned with the respective exhibition rooms:

1. Kadare cafe & street library	Ex. room 4: the cellar as air raid shelter
2. Ticket desk & bookshop	Ex. room 5: The world of books
3. Storage & technical room	Ex. room 6: The large oda
4. Educational & multifunctional room	Ex. room 7: Movies
5. Garden	Ex. room 8: Granny Selfixhe
6. Permanent exhibition:	Ex. room 9: Fantasy
Ex. room 1: House in the city of stone	Ex. room 10: War & Liberation
Ex. room 2: Falling in love with books	7. Toilet
Ex. room 3: The Cistern	8. Balcony

¹²⁹ Information from the author of this thesis's professional experience in the project of the renovation of Gjirokastra's system of museums.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

BASEMENT FLOOR

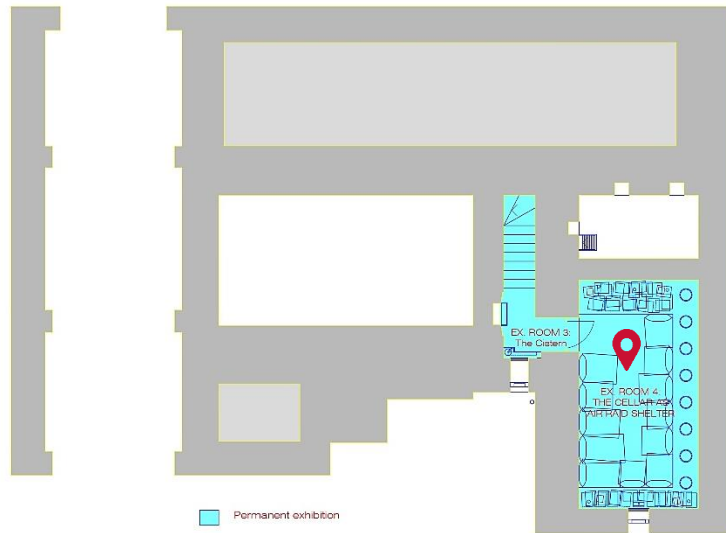










Figure 33: Basement's floor plan of functions, designed by Casanova+Hernandez, Images taken by the author of this thesis as part of the implementation teamwork of the project.

Legend

	Permanent exhibition		Outdoor space
	Education Area		Toilets
	Info desk/Tickets/Cloakroom/Office/Storage		Technical room and storage
	Kadare café and Street Library		Temporary exhibition

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

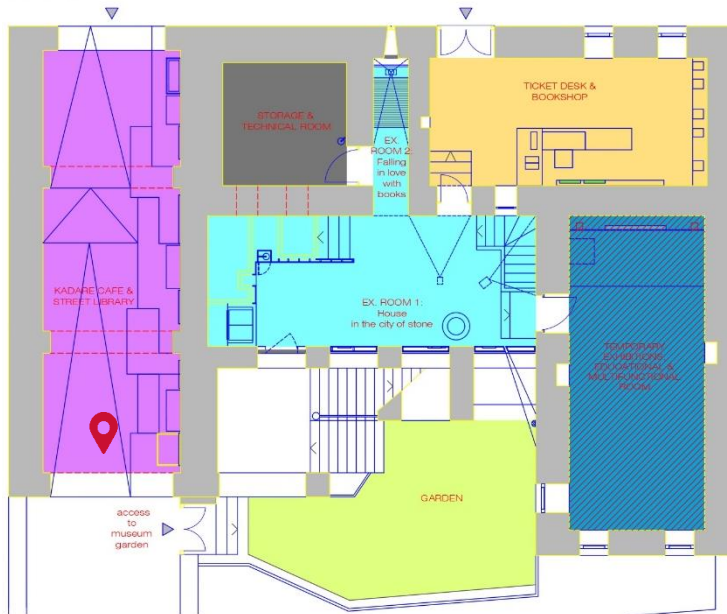


Figure 35: Ground floor plan of functions, designed by Casanova+Hernandez, Images taken by the author of this thesis as part of the implementation teamwork of the project.



Figure 36: First floor plan of functions, designed by Casanova+Hernandez, Images taken by the author of this thesis as part of the implementation teamwork of the project.

The most recent intervention in the house has significantly improved the heating system, incorporating underfloor heating for the ground floor and heating carpets in individual rooms. This innovative system offers an effective solution to heating challenges, particularly in areas with thick stone walls where conventional heating methods may be less efficient, as detailed in the initial chapter. However, while these enhancements address the heating needs of the house, there remains a notable gap in addressing cooling requirements, especially during the summer period.

The absence of a cooling system poses a challenge, particularly in regions with warmer climates where temperatures can rise considerably. To ensure optimal comfort for the building, it may be advisable to explore the implementation of a cooling system, such as air conditioning (as implemented in the Ethnographic Museum of Gjirokastra), to complement the existing heating infrastructure. This would not only enhance the livability of the house but also contribute to maintaining a consistent and comfortable indoor environment throughout the changing seasons and contributes in the preservation of the artifacts.

3.3.3.2 Accessibility

Accessibility remains a significant challenge within the museum building due to its lack of lifts or ramps, which restricts access for individuals with mobility impairments (Figure 37). Despite being designated as a first-category monument, discussions around potential solutions to improve accessibility without compromising the building's integrity are necessary. Balancing the preservation of the building's historical significance with the necessity of inclusivity poses a complex dilemma that requires innovative approaches.

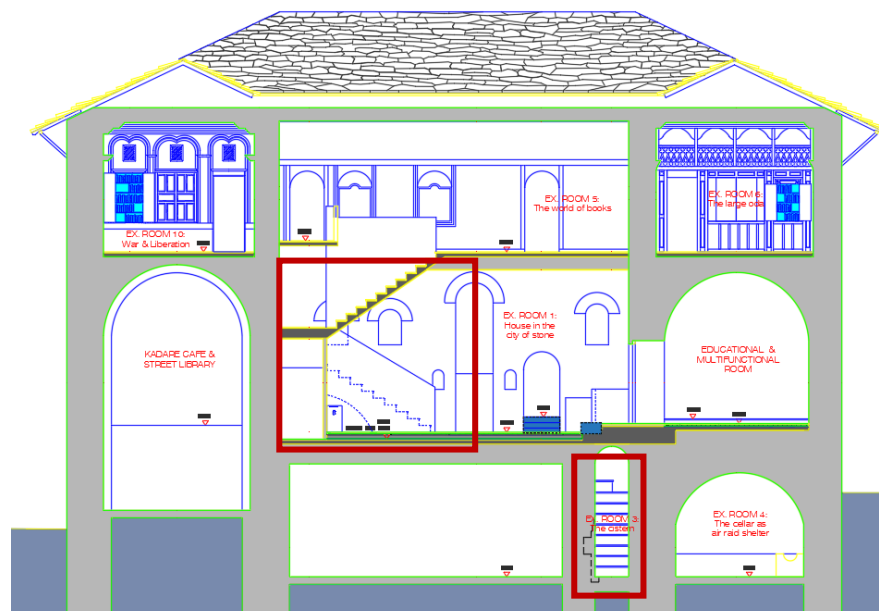


Figure 37: Section of the building depicting staircases and the mobility in the building, designed by Casanova+Hernandez.

Ismail Kadare's house stands as a pivotal attraction in the city due to his fame as a writer and the presence of his literary work in the Albanian school textbooks, but not only. The work of Kadare is famous worldwide and even he lists a few awards complementing his work and his global impact. Lately, Kadare won the Neustadt Prize (2020), and earlier in his career, in 2015 he won the Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society, and in 2009 Prince of Asturias Prize in Spain.¹³¹ Therefore, despite the mobility challenges, individuals with disabilities demonstrate a strong desire to engage with the cultural offerings of the city due to the renowned work of Kadare (Figure 38). However, it is crucial to mention that visits to the museum are on a personal level and not organized by cultural organizations or the ones for people with disabilities. This fact is due to the lack of financial support and difficulties in the accessibility of the museum.¹³²



Figure 38: Section of the building depicting staircases and the mobility in the building, designed by Casanova+Hernandez.

¹³¹ Rob Vollmar, "2020 - Ismail Kadare," Neustadt Prizes, March 13, 2020, <https://www.neustadtprize.org/2020-ismail-kadare/>.

¹³² Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 6.

Nowadays, the museum has made the first steps including the needs of individuals with visual and hearing impairments through technological innovations, such as interactive exhibits and audiovisual materials (Figure 40), but there are still notable gaps in accessibility of some elements. Regarding my personal experience in the process of the exhibition implementation, I positively evaluate the English translation of the texts printed on the walls (Figure 40) for foreign visitors, however, it would be useful to have an audio version of it or the text written in the Braille alphabet. Moreover, accessing E-Books present on the shelves of the room could be simplified by scanning the QR code, rather than searching online for the printed link. These minor adjustments can greatly impact the museum's accessibility for people with disabilities.

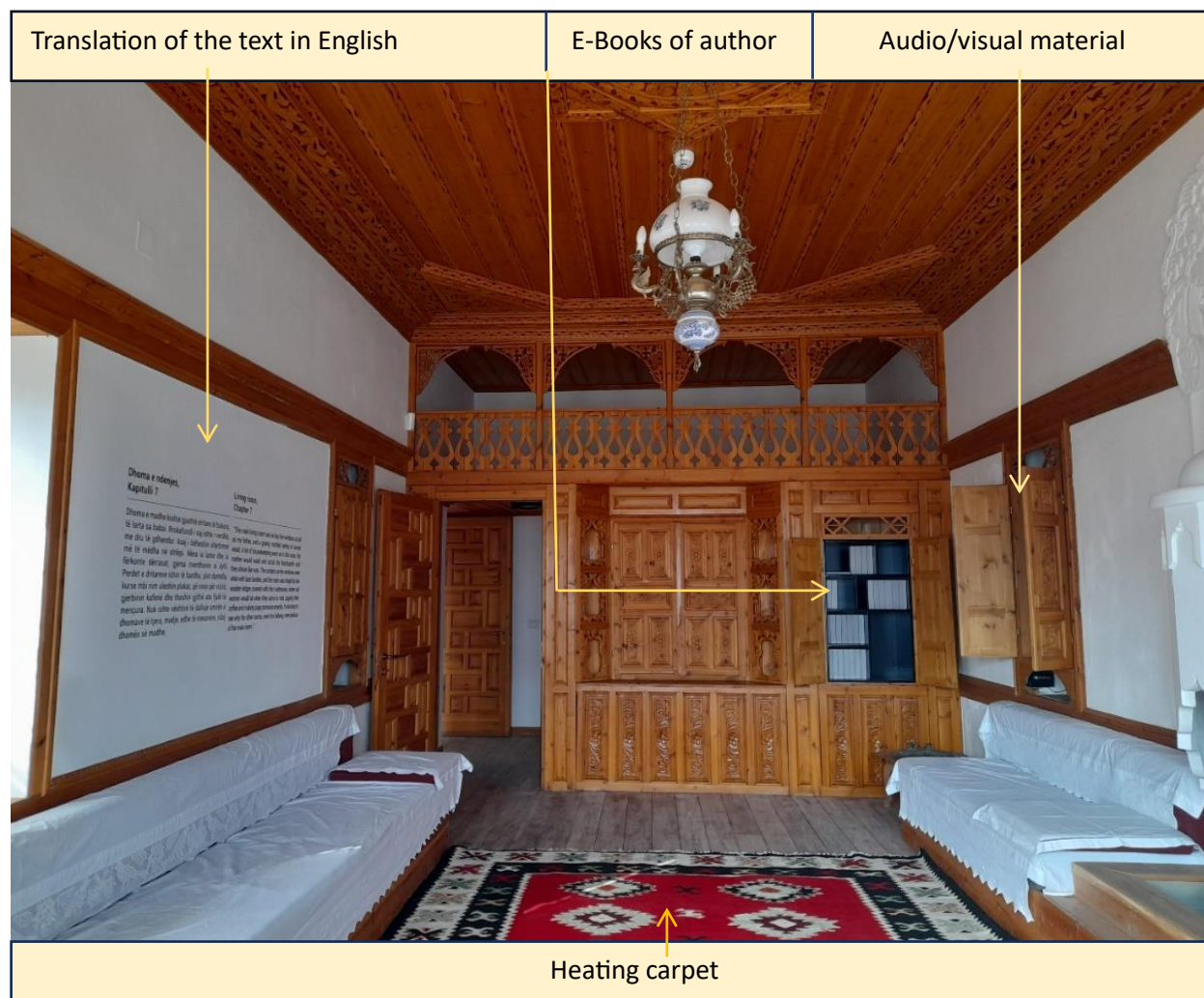


Figure 40: Technological innovations used in the museum. Image captured by the author of the thesis.

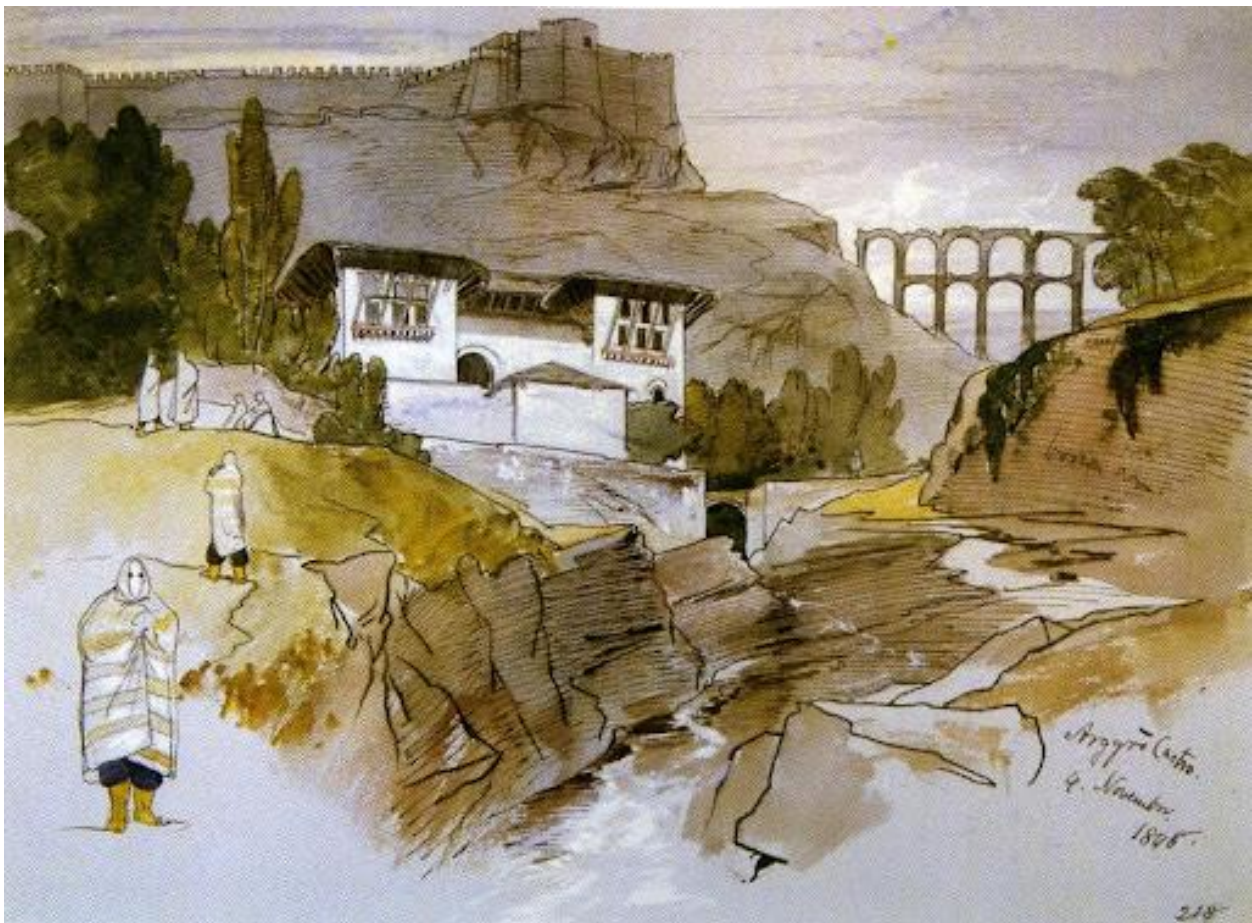
Conclusions

Regarding the management of the museums of Gjirokastra, can be concluded that they operate within a hierarchical structure, which can lead to complexities in decision-making processes. Based on the latest practices, this management style may sometimes result in deviation from the laws and regulations implementation, potentially affecting the maintenance of buildings and the quality of services provided to visitors. The top-down approach that these cultural institutions are following, creates a lack of financial support for the cultural events of the organizations of people with disabilities and does not allow them to initiate visits to the museum or other activities. Hence, the revision of the organizational structure of these institutions and the involvement of people with disabilities in the cultural events of the museums, besides respecting and fostering their needs, would make the museums more inclusive.

Moreover, based on the floorplans of the museums, it is pivotal to compare the facilities that the museums are offering nowadays with the accessibility of the exhibition spaces within the buildings of the museums. For instance, the three museums described above, offer accessible entrances but do not offer other services such as a cloakroom, museum shop (partly done in the museum if Ismail Kadare is in the reception area), lift for mobility in the building, or extra wheelchairs to give to people with disabilities (where the mobility is possible as in the case of Argjiro's Castle). Another crucial point is the organization of the exhibition. The ground floor of each museum is more dedicated to the reception area, technical rooms, or auditorium, which does not welcome many people with disabilities. This way of organizing the exhibition spaces, placing all the important artifacts on the upper floors, does not give a glance at the museum's atmosphere to people with disabilities who face mobility impairments. Therefore, based on the features of the buildings, changes can be made to improve the accessibility of the museums and their inclusivity.

Chapter 4

4 Recommendations



Source: "Albania in the Painting of Edward Lear | Robert Elsie." n.d. [Www.albanianart.net](http://www.albanianart.net). Accessed May 17, 2024. <http://www.albanianart.net/painting/lear/lear043.htm>.

In this chapter, I proffer recommendations to enhance the efficacy and inclusivity of the museums in Gjirokastra, building upon the preceding discourse. This chapter draws extensively upon insights collected from interviews conducted with local inhabitants, foreign visitors, and exemplary practices observed in analogous museum contexts, all of which expand the comprehensiveness of museum offerings. Additionally, a segment of this chapter is based on my professional background as an architect and prospective expert in cultural heritage.

Hence, in alignment with the definition by the International Council of Museums (ICOM),¹³³ the museums of Gjirokastra should adhere to the prescribed guidelines in order to uphold the objective of fostering accessibility and inclusivity. Thus, following the legal framework mentioned above, I provide an explanation of potential interventions within the museum infrastructure leveraging digital and architectural innovations (Figure 41). Within this thesis, I concentrate on selected categories of accessibility that are deemed feasible for prompt improvement, particularly based on the initial strides that have already been undertaken in these museums.



Figure 41: Possible services in the museums, Figure generated by Accessible Balkan Museums, https://accessible.bkmuseums.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Accessible_Balkan_Museums_00.pdf.

¹³³ ICOM, "Museum Definition", accessed March 9, 2024, <https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/>.

4.1 Management of museums and cultural heritage

In the realm of museum management, the implementation of a detailed and tailored management plan with attention to inclusivity and accessibility of the museums stands as a pivotal strategy. Given the inherent tension between the preservation of built heritage and the protection of human rights as stipulated in both national legislation and international frameworks, a Cultural Heritage Management plan undertakes particular significance. Such a plan can serve to mitigate this conflict by fostering measures that promote a harmonious combination of Cultural Heritage imperatives and Human Rights considerations.¹³⁴ Central to this approach is the cultivation of a culturally sensitive ethos that resonates with the local community and stakeholders.

Moreover, similar to numerous other museums, the formulation of a comprehensive policy document for each museum discussed in this thesis is essential. This document should encompass the institution's mission, objectives, guidelines for collection management, and operational protocols. Enhancements in museum operation and organizational structure are imperative, necessitating the establishment of dedicated working groups tasked with artifact maintenance, continuous exhibition monitoring, and further research into stored artifacts. Such initiatives not only strengthen museum efficiency but also rationalize administrative processes, thereby avoiding predominant bureaucratic hurdles.

Furthermore, the Albanian Ministry of Culture's attention to transforming museum spaces into vibrant cultural hubs dedicated to knowledge dissemination and entertainment holds considerable promise for elevating these institutions' inclusivity and efficacy. Another approach is to create the

¹³⁴ “Task 4 – Develop a Cultural Heritage Management Plan,” accessed April 24, 2024, <https://socialway.angloamerican.com/en/toolkit/impact-and-risk-prevention-and-management/cultural-heritage/guidance/do/task-4-develop-a-cultural-heritage-management-plan>.

opportunity for the local community to initiate exhibitions, guides, or other activities in the museums of the city supported by adequate institutions (e.g., the Job Fair organized in Baazar of Gjirokastra in 2019 by the National Employment Agency and Ministry of Culture with drawings of Ervin Shameti, mobility impaired person, Figure 42¹³⁵). By embracing this multi-layered approach, museums can transcend their traditional roles, assuming a dynamic stance as interactive centers of cultural exchange and knowledge transfer.



Figure 42, Drawings of Ervin Shameti in the Job Fair in Gjirokastra, Image provided by Vjollca Koko.

In the management process of the museum is important to shed light on the audience, the target that the museum has, and the audience's development. As in the case of Gjirokastra, the museums are attraction points mostly for tourists who visit the city, it is important to consider the foreign audience besides the local community as well. The museums must adopt a comprehensive approach to understanding the diverse spectrum of their visitors, communities, and potential users (children, elderly people, people with disabilities, etc.), including those who have not yet engaged with the institution. This entails conducting ongoing consultations, surveys, and analyses, while

¹³⁵ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 6.

actively soliciting and incorporating feedback to continually enhance accessibility to collections and services.

Moreover, the museums of this thesis must align their offerings with the motivations and characteristics of prospective visitors. As an integral component of the Audience Development Strategy,¹³⁶ there is a critical need to establish standardized methods for data collection that can be uniformly applied across all museums in Gjirokastra. This rigorous effort will enable the museums to broaden their audience base and foster deeper engagement, as well as advancing their overarching mission.

4.2 Accessibility of the museums

To enhance the performance and inclusivity of museums, it is pivotal to integrate considerations of human rights, particularly the rights of individuals with disabilities, into the framework of this thesis. It is important to commence interventions that expand accessibility while compromising the architectural and historical integrity of Gjirokastra's museums buildings. Addressing the challenges outlined earlier, the following categories of accessibility improvements can be implemented:

a. Cultural Access

Building upon this premise, the museum space must serve as an entry to cultural engagement for visitors.¹³⁷ Consequently, museum programs must be accurately crafted to resonate deeply with

¹³⁶ Anna Koszłowicz-Kraska, "Audience Development: How to Effectively Engage the Audience," *Medium* (blog), October 20, 2023, <https://medium.com/@anna.koszlowicz/audience-development-how-to-effectively-engage-the-audience-00f8338d64f8>.

¹³⁷ Museum of London, "Access Policy", accessed April 27, 2024, https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/application/files/7115/8022/0032/Access_Policy.pdf.

the rich cultural and social elements that characterize Gjirokastra's society (children, and elderly people).

b. Attitudinal Access

As a result, it becomes principal to cultivate museum promotion activities that portray the museum as a space that is both inviting and inclusive, devoid of any sense of threat or exclusion.¹³⁸ Practically speaking, this entails arranging visitor arrivals in a manner that exudes warmth and reassurance. Furthermore, the creation of comfortable environments within the museum fosters a sense of appreciation and empowerment among visitors, allowing them to learn at their own rhythm and comfort level.

c. Intellectual Access

Special consideration should be given to the content disseminated across galleries, exhibitions, educational materials, publications, websites, and social media platforms, ensuring that it resonates with the specific needs and preferences of the target audiences while adhering to the museum's established style guide. A more comprehensive strategy involves the implementation of clear and effective physical navigation signage and museum maps, supplemented with explanations in Braille and tactile infrastructure at the information desks, catering to tourists in key languages.¹³⁹

Moreover, it is imperative to provide multilingual museum maps and exhibition guides for non-Albanian audience, accompanied by sign language interpreters for visitors with hearing impairments. Additionally, enhancing the museum's website with updated and valuable information in Albanian and English as an international language considered for broader

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

communication, and potentially other languages, aids in serving both tourists and the local community better.

d. Digital Access

To foster closer connections with the audience and to effectively promote the museum, embracing digital accessibility for the museum's content and supplementary information is essential for inclusivity. Digital access facilitates the creation of a museum space that is compatible with all devices and assistive technologies, ensuring unified engagement for diverse users through the optimal text font size and clear background. Through the website, the museum extends digital accessibility to all audiences by employing digitization techniques and implementing user-friendly interfaces. It provides virtual access to the museum's collections and additional materials as applied to the Leopold Museum's website in Vienna.¹⁴⁰ In particular, the website offers an excellent opportunity to showcase museum videos in the form of virtual tours, especially for those who cannot visit the museum physically or require digital resources for research purposes. Moreover, museums can effectively convey its importance and appeal to a broader audience by curating an online collection of artifacts featured in the museum and highlighting select pieces of significance.

e. Physical Access

Recognizing museums as cultural hubs open to the public, these buildings should prioritize accessibility. Despite inherent architectural limitations discussed earlier in this thesis, there are viable avenues for enhancing museum performance and visitor experiences. Thus, it is essential to undertake proactive measures to ensure that policies, practices, and procedures do not discriminate against individuals with disabilities. This involves providing supplementary aids and services that

¹⁴⁰ "Collection-Virtual Tour Through Vienna 1900", Leopold Museum Vienna, accessed May 12,2024, <https://www.leopoldmuseum.org/en/collection/virtual-tour>.

facilitate the use of the museum by people with disabilities, as well as the removal, alteration, or avoidance of physical barriers within museums' buildings.

As described in the first chapter the renovation interventions applied to the museums part of this thesis have been various and fall into the framework of the Adaptive Heritage Reuse, defined as the process of repairing and restoring existing buildings for new or continued use.¹⁴¹ In addition, ODASA refers to it as a tool to not freeze the built heritage but allow the addition of a new layer to it without erasing the earlier layers, documenting it as a new phase, but not the final one.¹⁴²

Therefore, accessibility can be improved by implementing a lift¹⁴³ access in feasible spaces and constructing ramps¹⁴⁴ incorporated into the existing staircases for wheelchair accessibility where applicable (Figures 43-49). Considering museums as spaces to be visited by people, it is pivotal to highlight the rights of these individuals to reach this space and the exhibitions. As such, Doraci expresses that the museums are for people and architects should build for them, otherwise, these buildings cannot fulfill their function, especially when it is important to meet the needs of people with disabilities and respect the historical and architectural values of the buildings.¹⁴⁵ For instance, the lift in the case of Ismail Kadare's house can be implemented in a corner of the building without disturbing the free movement of the museum's itinerary and without causing structural damage (referring to the lift model used in Albertina Modern Museum in Vienna, Figure 45¹⁴⁶).

¹⁴¹ "Adaptive Reuse of the Built Heritage: Concepts and Cases of an Emerging Discipline," Routledge & CRC Press, accessed May 12, 2024, <https://www.routledge.com/Adaptive-Reuse-of-the-Built-Heritage-Concepts-and-Cases-of-an-Emerging-Discipline/Plevoets-VanCleempoel/p/book/9781138062764>.

¹⁴² Justine Clarke. "ODASA Design Guidance Note: Adaptive Re-use," July 2014, <https://cdn.environment.sa.gov.au/environment/docs/her-conservation-adaptive-reuse-guide-odasa.pdf>.

¹⁴³ "Accessibility Design Manual: 2-Architecture: 2-Elevators," accessed April 26, 2024, <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/designm/AD2-02.htm>.

¹⁴⁴ Radhika Seth, "Convertible Ramp - Yanko Design," May 9, 2013, <https://www.yankodesign.com/2013/05/09/convertible-ramp/>.

¹⁴⁵ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 7.

¹⁴⁶ "Reaching Us," The ALBERTINA Museum Vienna, accessed May 11, 2024, <https://www.albertina.at/en/visit/reaching-us/>.

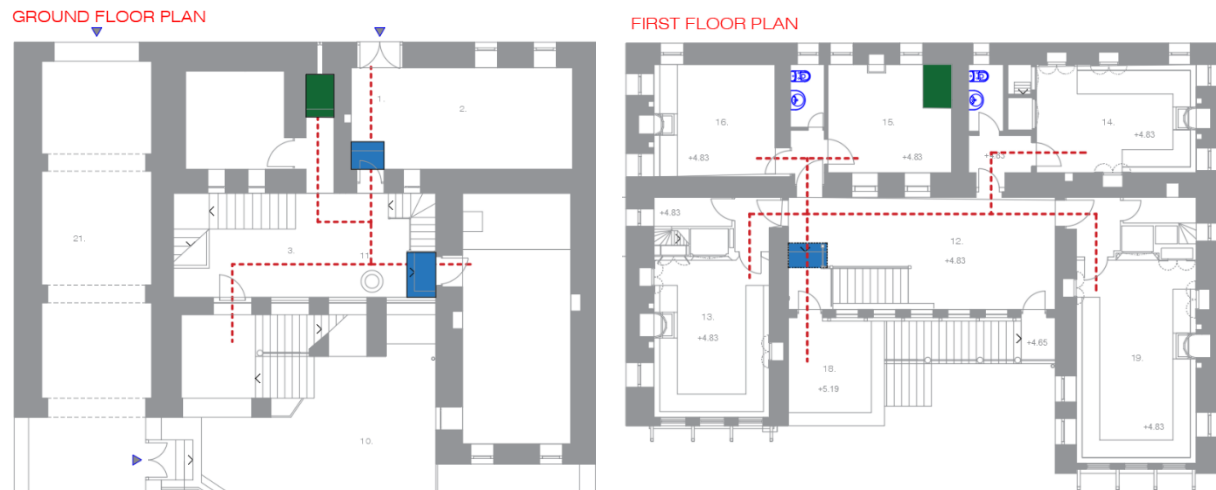


Figure 43: Proposed mobility for people with disabilities by the author of this thesis, Ismail Kadare House.

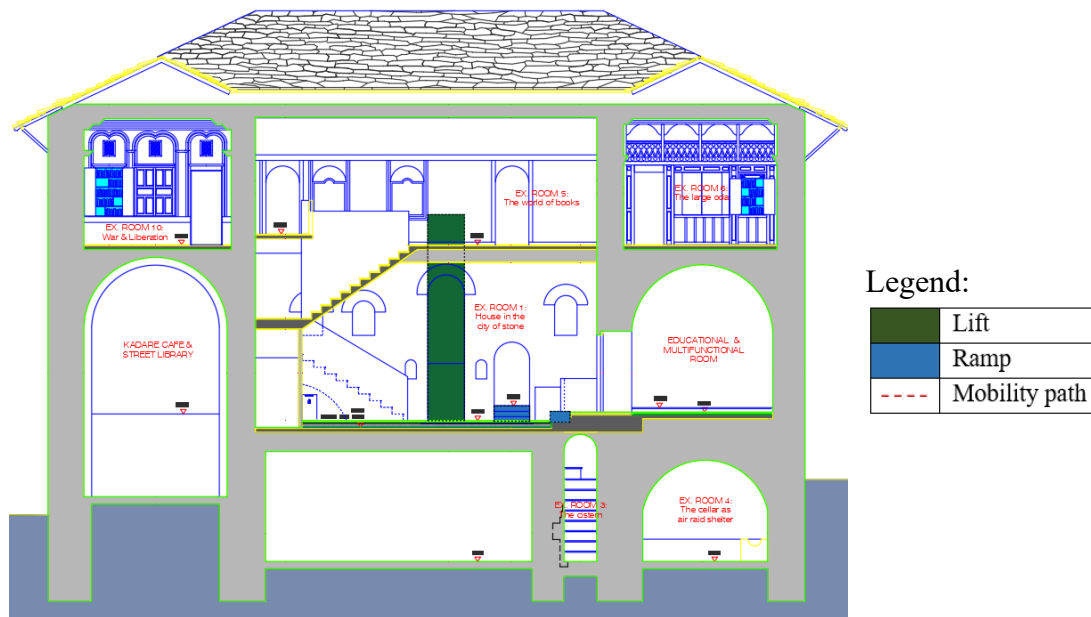


Figure 44: Section of the building of Ismail Kadare's House.



Figure 45: Examples of the proposed lift (Albertina Modern Museum, Vienna), and ramps.

While in the building of the Ethnographic Museum, the accessibility is a bit more complex due to the structure of the building as well which is not a simple square shape as in the case of Ismail Kadare. However, there is an option that can support the construction of a lift. This change can be done in the Northern part of the building, in the existing rooms number 21, 22, Ex. Room 6, and 32 (Figures 46-49). The wooden staircase placed in room 22 on the ground floor, has a hidden exit in the floor of the Ex. Room 6. Therefore, seems a good opportunity to use this place for the cabin of the elevator constructed of wooden and glass material in order not to contrast the rest of the materials used in the building. The window of this room is already not functional as in the inside part it is closed by a wooden board for exhibition purposes. This lift would give the chance to the building to be almost fully accessible except on the third floor, located on the roof. The slop of the staircase that leads to this floor does not complement the proposal of a ramp either.

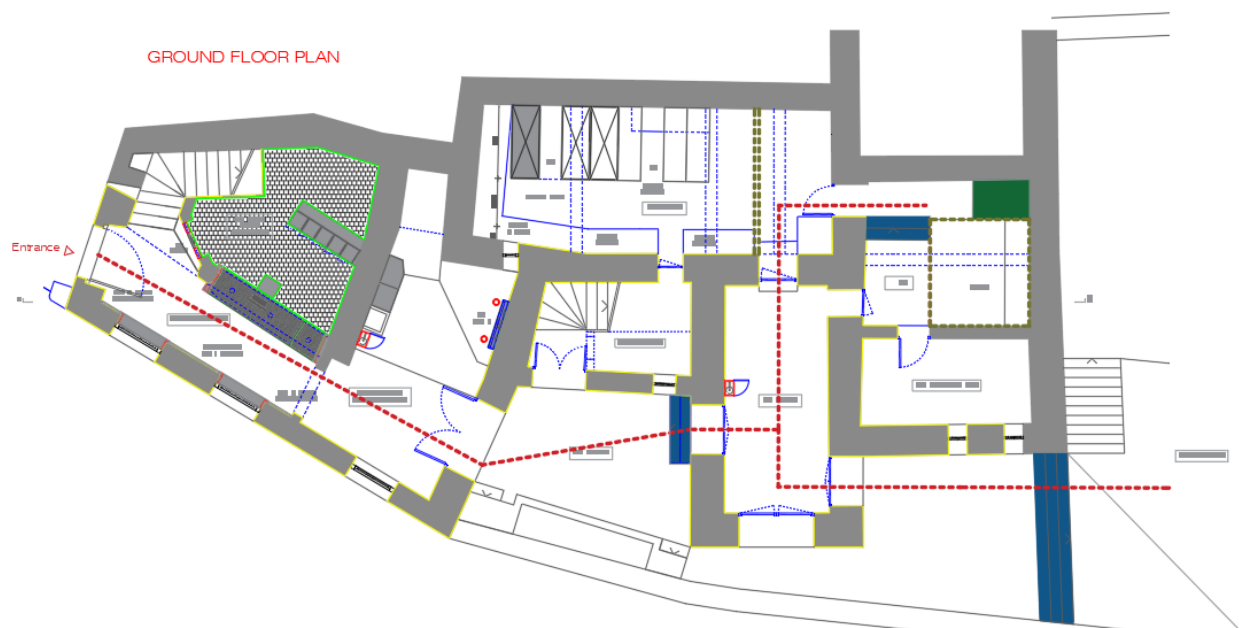


Figure 46: The proposed mobility by the author of this thesis for the ground floor of the Ethnographic Museum.

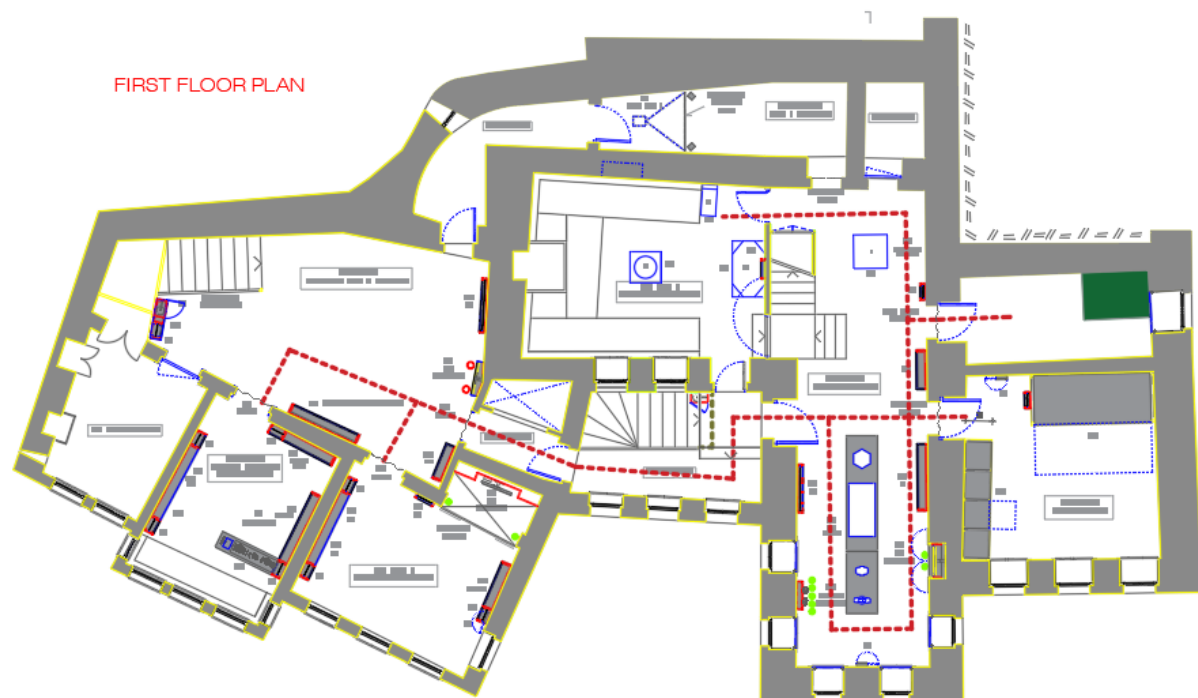


Figure 48: The proposed mobility by the author of this thesis for the first floor of the Ethnographic Museum.

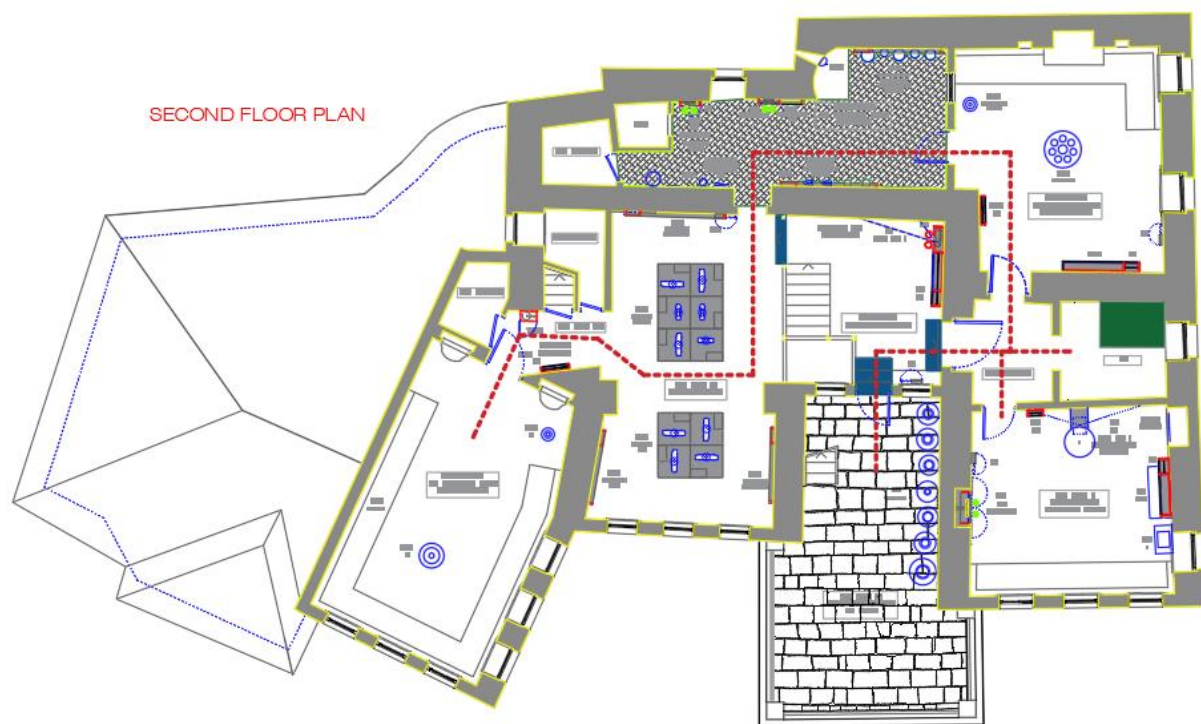


Figure 47: The proposed mobility by the author of this thesis for the second floor of the Ethnographic Museum.

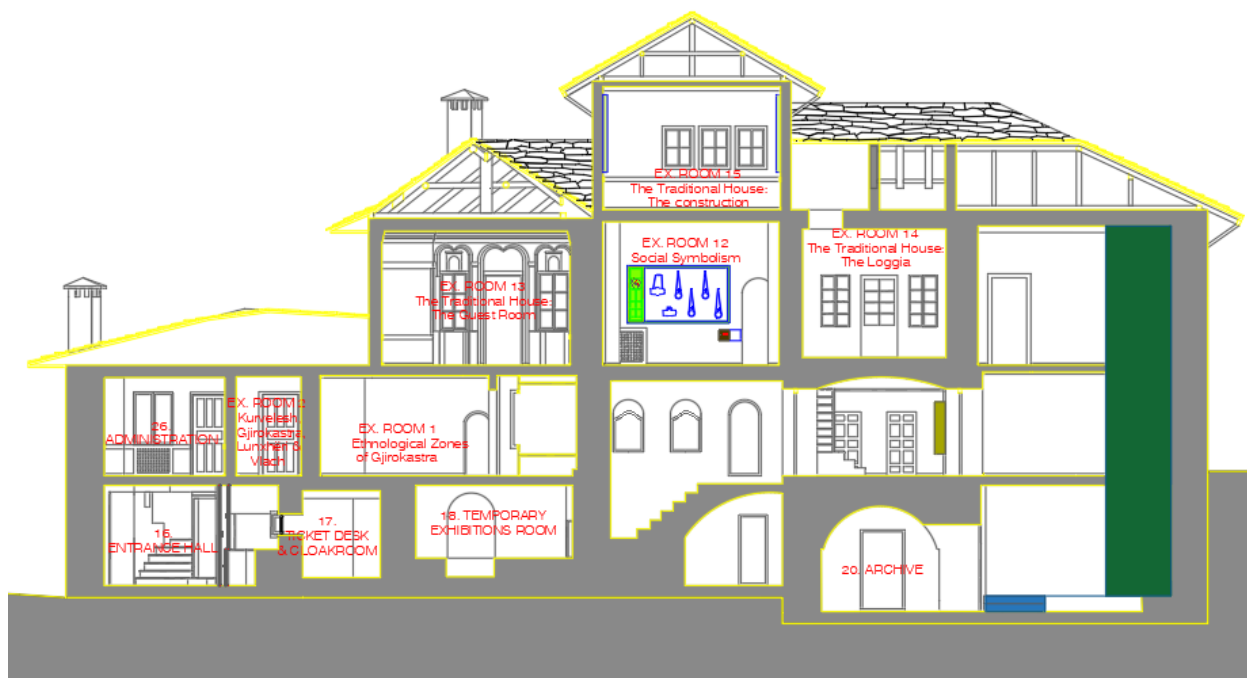


Figure 49: Demonstration of the lift positioned in the building.

Legend:

			
Lift	Ramp	Mobility Path	New construction (wall, toilet)

Examples of lift implementation can be found in various museums, for instance in Albertina Modern Museum in Vienna, or Schallaburg Castle in Austria.¹⁴⁷ Enhancements to mobility can also be achieved through improved signage delineating wheelchair-accessible paths and designing exhibitions with wheelchair users in mind. Additional facilities such as traditional and motorized wheelchairs, as well as vehicle transportation (Figure 50) within the building for those with mobility limitations, should be provided. Furthermore, ensuring sufficient accessible seating throughout the buildings contributes to an inclusive museum experience. This idea is presented in interviews by Koko as a wish and as a solution for Argjiro's Castle and even by Mária Flamich

¹⁴⁷ Schallaburg, "Erlebniswelt Schallaburg," Schallaburg, accessed May 11, 2024, <https://www.schallaburg.at/en>.

and Rita Hoffmann, visually impaired persons, who highlight their experience in the museum Madame Tussauds Museum in Great Britain in the exhibition of the Big London fire.¹⁴⁸

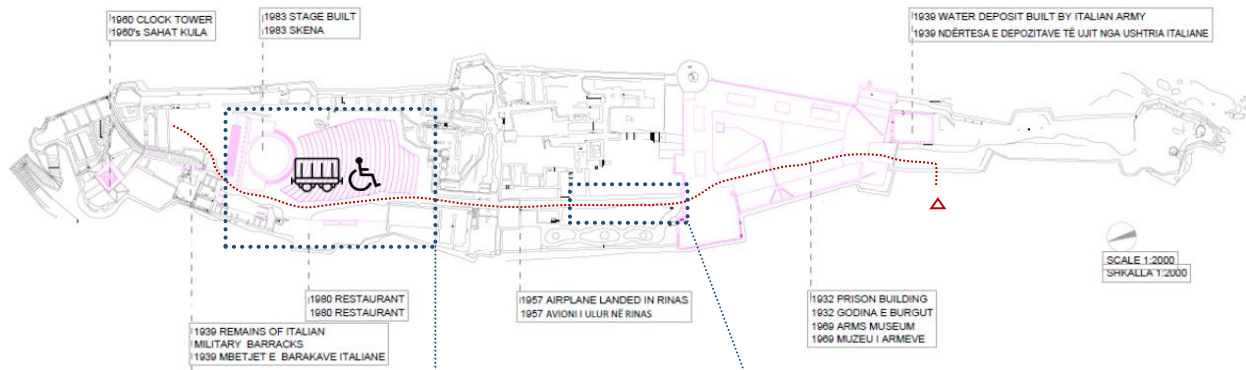


Figure 51: Mobility in the Argjiro's Castle, Plan modified by the author of the thesis.



Figure 50: Proposed areas for material improvement. Image taken by the author of the thesis.

Furthermore, the material used for the paths in the external space of the castle can be improved. Therefore, instead of gravel, it is recommended to use resistant materials to atmospheric conditions such as stabilized decomposed granite (Figures 50-51).¹⁴⁹ In order to improve the infrastructure it

¹⁴⁸ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 1.

¹⁴⁹ Paul Mathis, "Kafka Granite's Guide to Wheelchair-Accessible Pathway Materials," Kafka Granite, August 31, 2017, <https://www.kafkagranite.com/blog/kafka-granites-guide-wheelchair-accessible-pathway-materials/>.

is important to use signs as well that indicate the itinerary, the path for wheelchairs, or other information for the spaces/artifacts on the way.

f. Sensory Access

To enhance inclusivity, the museum should provide trained front desk staff equipped with the awareness and skills necessary to effectively communicate with, welcome, and offer quality service to individuals with visual or hearing impairments. It is imperative to ensure that exhibitions and galleries incorporate a diverse array of multisensory exhibits, such as the visual system (Figures 55, 56, 57), auditory system (sense of hearing – Figures 56, 57), somatosensory system (sense of touch – Figures 52, 53, 54, 58¹⁵⁰), an olfactory system (sense of smell – the Ex. Room 11, the kitchen, Figure 32), and a gustatory system (sense of taste – The kitchen, Figure 30) to improve the experience of the visitors and make it more concrete. Additionally, video-based exhibits should feature subtitles and include interpretation in sign language for visitors with hearing impairments (Figure 56¹⁵¹). While the current audio guides exist for visitors only in Ismail Kadare's House, should be available in all museums of Gjirokastra and accessed in different languages.

A valid point was highlighted by Mária Flamich and Rita Hoffmann, visually impaired persons, that differs the perspective of the approach to the tactile solutions:

And there is one more thing you should take into consideration, blind people do not touch the way sighted people think they do. They touch things very gently, very carefully, and they get a lot more information. Sighted people are afraid of letting the blind touch things because they think if the person doesn't see the object, the object can be easily damaged. So, they don't know how the blind people touch things. So, if they were aware, they would let a lot more objects be touched even in museums.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ "Kasematten Wiener Neustadt," accessed May 12, 2024, <https://www.kasematten-wn.at/de/>.

¹⁵¹ "WIEN MUSEUM," WIEN MUSEUM, accessed May 11, 2024, https://www.wienmuseum.at/landing_page.

¹⁵² Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 1.

Regarding their experience in different museums in London, Spain, Hungary, the USA, and New Zealand, they point out the experience in the Monserat Museum where all the sculptures exhibited were possible to be touched and help people with visual impairment to create a better idea of the object. Another solution that they suggest is the use of replicas of prioritized, particular, and valuable objects that convey a wealth of information (Figure 53¹⁵³).¹⁵⁴ Moreover, an explanatory table accompanies the replica. In the case of clothes, the table contains different patterns to demonstrate different materials, or in the case of paintings in relief, different patterns in the table demonstrate different textures of the materials in the painting (Figure 52¹⁵⁵). These strategies are present in many museums worldwide nowadays, and they would make a change in the exhibition development of the museums of Gjirokastra. Furthermore, texts in Braille help this category of people to read the information served independently and they ease the process in case of interactive activities (Figures 52, 53).



Figure 54: Existing condition, The Ethnographic Museum.



Figure 53: Proposed Sensory Access, Upper Belvedere Museum, Vienna.



Figure 52: Images and texture explanatory facility, Wien Museum.

¹⁵³ “Visit | Belvedere Museum Vienna,” accessed May 11, 2024, <https://www.belvedere.at/en/visit>.

¹⁵⁴ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 1.

¹⁵⁵ “WIEN MUSEUM.”



Figure 58: Existing condition, Ismail Kadare's House.



Figure 57: Proposed Sensory Access, Wien Museum, Vienna.

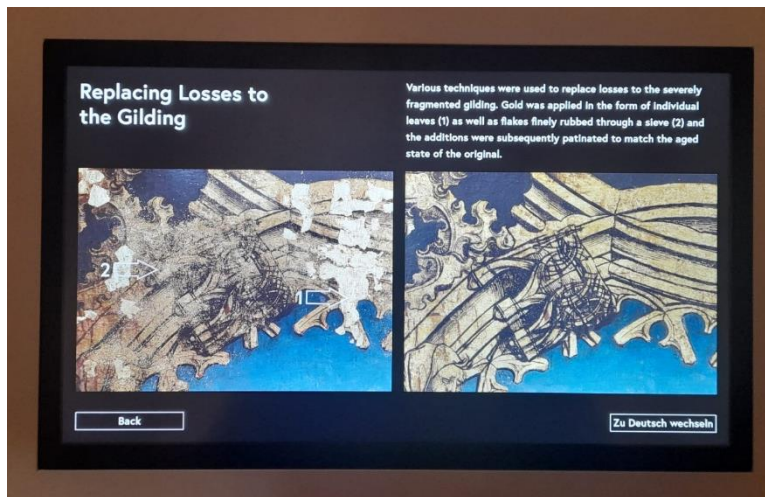


Figure 56: Proposed visual facility to explain maps, or give more information, Upper Belvedere, Vienna.



Figure 55: 3D model of the building with lights pointing the chosen part, Kasematten Wiener Neustadt, Austria.

An additional proposal is the use of 3D virtual reality or different projections in the spaces of the building, that create another perception of the space or that recreate the building in 3D vision for people with mobility impairment who cannot access the building one hundred percent. This service can be offered on the ground floor of each museum discussed above. Furthermore, through the

assistance of the video materials, the building and the exhibition of the artifacts can be depicted in a video material displayed as a welcoming material into the museum. Despite their costs, their facility enhances the experience of everyone who decides to engage with the ethnographic information of Gjirokastra, the literature knowledge, or who is eager to discover the war times in the castle of Argjiro.

g. Economic Access

Another crucial aspect of museum accessibility is economic access. Many museums adhere to the tradition of providing free entry to individuals under 18 years old and people with disabilities who present verification documentation. Additionally, ensuring that the museum is open to the public seven days a week, except for public holidays, contributes to enhancing economic access.¹⁵⁶

Furthermore, offering a range of ticket options and discounts is essential. This includes discounted rates for individuals receiving benefits, students, and senior citizens, as well as offering combined tickets for access to multiple museums. Building on discussions from events like the European Parliament's EYE 2023, consideration should be given to providing a pass for all people with disabilities, guaranteeing free entrance to museums across Europe.¹⁵⁷

Lastly, providing free educational programs to primary and secondary schools that face financial constraints in organizing museum visits is crucial. As pointed out by Koko and Rusho, by removing economic barriers to access, museums can ensure that everyone has the opportunity to engage with cultural and educational resources regardless of financial circumstances.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Museum of London, "Access Policy", accessed April 27, 2024, https://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/application/files/7115/8022/0032/Access_Policy.pdf.

¹⁵⁷ Participated in the event "Working in Europe-accessible for all?", EYE2023, Strasbourg, June 10, 2023.

¹⁵⁸ Appendix, Table 4, Interview No. 4, 6.

Conclusions

Based on the analyses done in the other chapters of this thesis, the recommendations for the improvement of inclusivity and accessibility issues of the Argjiro's Castle, Ethnographic Museum of Gjirokastra, and Ismail Kadare's House create a better picture of the functions of the museums in this city and promote its cultural heritage at the same time. In order for these cultural institutions to be more efficient, it is necessary to have a well-tailored management plan organizing the administration of the local museums of Gjirokastra. Surveying the efficiency of the museums through continuous reports or collecting feedback from the visitors, allows the museum to achieve its goals and develop the exhibitions to foster the needs of the visitors.

Even though the AHR is not always successful because of the confrontation with different applied local policies and different perspectives of the experts that might have on the given solutions, it is important to be presented as a choice as it can pose discussion and sparks new ideas and novelties that fit the values of the buildings. Therefore, despite the conflict between cultural heritage and human rights, finding common ground and engaging the targeted community in the decision-making, is a strategy to lead towards good solutions. In this way, many of the stakeholders involved in the discussion will have their benefits. Using technological innovations in the buildings of the discussed museums in the thesis, will not only satisfy and give access to people with disability, but it will enhance the performance of the museum and its inclusivity for the whole audience that it has.

Conclusions

This thesis examines the historical and architectural significance of Gjirokastra, tracing its origin from ancient Greek, Roman, Ottoman, and Italian influences, and integrating this with contemporary architecture development. In addition, the enduring preservation of these architectural styles and the harmonious coexistence among them substantiate Gjirokastra's designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site enhancing its cultural and historical values. Consequently, the need to keep preserving these traditions comes along with the adjustments of the needs and development of modern lifestyles.

As such, the museums of this thesis, Argjiro's Castle, the Ethnographic Museum, and Ismail Kadare's House serve as legacies of the past despite undergoing numerous renovations over time. Especially the latter which was rebuilt after the fire that destroyed its structure on a huge scale. The concept of adaptive reuse applied in this built heritage involves altering their initial function and creating spaces suited to their new purposes. However, changes are relatively small-scale ones due to the restrictions of the legislations for the adaptation of the buildings into museums. Therefore, in architectural terms of design, it cannot be merely defined whether the reconstruction process of these buildings followed the architectural principle that form follows the function or vice versa.

In spite of the successful adaptation of the examined buildings as museums, there is a gap in accomplishing the criteria of functioning as a museum. There is no representation of the needs of people with disabilities while adapting this built heritage into cultural and knowledge spaces such as museums. The discrepancies between legal frameworks of built heritage protection and those safeguarding the human rights are emphasized in the way how museums are managed and how

priorities are defined. On the one hand, built heritage protection laws prioritize the preservation of historical and traditional elements while neglecting the inclusivity that the museum should have. On the other hand, the human rights for people with disabilities highlight the cultural needs of everyone and the right to access cultural spaces without barriers. This poses challenges for the experts who deal with these issues and confront them with difficult decisions which according to existing conditions of the museums in this thesis, leads to the prioritization of the built heritage.

Although the accessibility of the spaces is addressed mostly implicitly in the written form of the legislation framework of the monument protection or museums, the conventions of museums and human rights clearly point it out as a duty of the institutions to ensure accessibility. In this case, the technological innovations in architecture present today can mitigate this discrepancy between the written laws and the practice. Since the adaptation of these museums is a continuous process, it seems reasonable to argue that new technology is a tool for the development of the museum's spaces towards inclusivity and create the necessary means for the accessibility of people with disabilities. The alignment of these frameworks and practical solutions that prioritize universal access, helps museums to fill the gap between heritage preservation and human rights while offering an inclusive cultural space for all.

Following the enforcement of law and the conventions of Cultural Heritage and Human Rights, the revision of the duties and priorities given in the hierarchical structure of the Museum Directorate would create more space for initiatives from the cultural NGOs or those for people with disabilities. Therefore, the inclusion of this group of population in the decision-making process and cultural events, may influence not only the efficiency of the museum's management, but it offers a voice to these people and represent them in their way. It is essential to have a collaboration of experts of the field and main actors in order to draw effective conclusions and to have more insights into their needs. Such decisions should be part of a written management plan

and policy documents of these museums which are missing nowadays. In this way, the shift from merely raising awareness of the needs of people with disabilities in museums into real actions will change the way of tackling the problem.

Especially, based on the analysis of the current facilities in the museums of this thesis, there are areas where such actions can take place as an improved version of what is already existing. Since the fundamentals of technological innovation integration exist in the aforementioned museums, my recommendations would complement further applications in fostering the diverse needs of visitors and enhancing their overall experience. The use of audiovisual materials, tactile methods, mobility facilities, or interactive activities including museums' artifacts cater for the needs of a diverse audience and ensure a great experience. As confirmed by the interviews conducted for this thesis, it is important to create opportunities for everyone despite their disability.

Hence, the novelty of this research is the recommendation of installing additional facilities to improve cultural, intellectual, digital, physical, and sensory accessibility. Among all the aforementioned categories of accessibility, physical accessibility is a crucial problem of these museums because of the conflict between built heritage protection and human rights. Nevertheless, as a result of this thesis based on successful implementations of other adaptations of built heritage, various solutions can be applied regarding the new technologies in architecture that ease this process for people with disabilities.

The dedication of an inclusive project that considers the adaptation of some areas of the Ethnographic Museum of Gjirokastra and Ismail Kadare's House for mobility solutions, such as the proposal of the lift, is a step forward to welcoming more visitors and broadening the audience of the museums. Furthermore, the digital facilities to enhance the sensory access in the museum highlight the visitor's experience. Having in display 3D models of the buildings, or replicas of the artifacts, like traditional clothes, or utensils, supported by audio and visual recordings which

provide further explanations, demonstrates a more interactive approach. In this way, the information that a visitor grasps in the museum lasts in one's memory longer and even contributes to individual memories. Therefore, I conclude that while respecting the integrity of the architectural and historical values and fostering the cultural rights of people with disabilities, the use of technological innovations in the built heritage of Gjirokastra creates space for everyone to engage in the museum experience.

This thesis focused on a certain target group and addressed certain accessibility issues contributing to foundational information for further research about different applications needed for other categories of disability such as the neurological developmental syndrome. Furthermore, it stimulates further discussion on the efficiency of AHR and different architectural innovations that can be implemented. Ultimately, this thesis is a guide for the field experts, informing future actions to enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of the museums.

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Appendix

Table 4: List of Interviews conducted for this thesis.

No.	Name	Affiliation	Place	Date
1.	Mária Flamich	Hungarian Music teacher with visual impairment, ELTE PPK Doctoral School of Education and Cultural Disability Studies, Singer in choir and orchestra.	Online meeting through Zoom.	March 9, 2023
	Rita Hoffmann	Hungarian English teacher with visual impairment, Working on preparing autobiography for people with disabilities.		
2.	Albana Allushi	Director of the Department of Financial Aid, Municipality of Gjirokastra.	Gjirokastra	July 27, 2023
3.	I.SH, and B.P	Ethnographic Museum and Ismail Kadare's House Guide	Gjirokastra	August 10, 2023
4.	Rrushit Kusho	Chairman of the Association of Blind People in Gjirokastra County, Visual Impaired Person.	Gjirokastra	August 3, 2023
5.	E.S	Deputy Director of the Museum Directorate	Gjirokastra	August 17, 2023
6.	Vjollca Koko	Rheumatologist at the Omer Nishani Hospital in Gjirokastra, Professor in the Department of Medicine at Egerem Cabej University in Gjirokastra,	Gjirokastra	August 23, 2023

		Director of the Association of Paraplegics in Gjirokastra County, A person with paraplegic impairment.		
7.	Agron Doraci	Architect of the Ismail Kadare House.	Gjirokastra	January 8, 2024
	Y.Z, P.M, Nj.Ç	Construction Technician, Civil Engineer, Architect.		
8.	B.N	Specialist for the UNESCO area, Revenue manager in the central system run by the Ministry of Culture (Argjiro's Castle).	Online meeting	March 12, 2024
9.	Different individuals	Students, Activist in NGO-s for people with disabilities with visual, hearing, and mobility impairments.	European Parliament, Strasbourg.	June 2023