



# Gjirokastra Artisan Incubation Centre



Artisan incubator © UNDP Albania

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## BACKGROUND

The Historic Centre of Gjirokastra is inscribed on UNESCO's World Heritage List, jointly with the Historic Centre of Berat. Gjirokastra, is home to 35,000 people. The population lives in either the historic upper town, which is hundreds of years old, or the modern lower town, dating from the 1970s. Gjirokastra has suffered from a lack of investment, but efforts are under way to revitalize the historic town and restore its buildings.

Gjirokastra is also home to approximately 200 artisans specializing in local handicrafts and is consequently one of the major artisan centres of Albania. The artisans enjoy a mutual sense of familiarity and cooperation with one another, but they suffer from a lack of organized sales channels.

## PROCESS

To address the issue of having a sales point and a production centre that would also permit the transmission of skills from one generation to the next, it was proposed that an incubation centre be set up by the Joint Programme (JP).

The JP team identified a previously inhabitable building, and developed designs for renovations works which were conducted by UNESCO and UNDP. With funds-in-trust from the Albanian Government given for the restoration of the historic center of the town, UNESCO worked on the exterior of the building, while UNDP contributed with MDG-F JP funds to rehabilitate the interior.

## Outcomes

Since the building's inauguration, it has acted as a hub for local artists and artisans that have also benefitted by various training on product development. The centre is being operated by a local NGO, the Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization (GCDO) and has subsequently attracted the attention of other supporters of cultural heritage activities. Now the building houses a number of 'add-on' projects, which would be unable to operate without the common space allocation. Some examples include an iso-polyphny intangible heritage project, financed by a Telecom company, and inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List for Intangible Cultural Heritage, and an annual artisan fair, run with support from the British Council.

In all, over 250 artisans have benefited from the centre in and around Gkirokastra, including artisans from areas near Tepelene, Permet and Delvine. A total of over 500 small entrepreneurs benefited from participation in the annual artisan fair, which is growing ever-larger as the town further develops its arts and crafts in realization of its cultural tourism potential.

The artisan centre in Gjirokastra also sparked off other donor-financed projects aimed at renewed support for the artisan community in southern Albania.