

## Formation of tourism services through Georgian culture: Example of Kazbegi Municipality

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### **Abstract**

*The following research was conducted between 2013 and 2014 in the Greater Caucasus, Georgia. The study area was one of the most visited summer resort - Kazbegi Municipality. The research was supported by the University of Giessen with cooperation to Tbilisi State University. The main topic of the research is about Tourism Services in Kazbegi. The purpose of this study is to analyze offered services in the villages and town of Stepantsminda. In the article great attention is paid to determine the contribution to the development of tourism services by considering Georgian culture. The main concern is about identification cultural elements appeared in tourism services. The study is based on the information which is obtained through the fieldwork (in depth interviews and field observations) as well as from analysis secondary information (Statistical data, research reports, etc.).*

**Keywords:** Tourism services, Georgian hospitality and culture, MAXQDA

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## 1. Introduction

Tourism is amongst the fastest growing sectors in Georgia. It is remarkable that an average annual growth rate for the last 10 years (2005-2014) was 30%, with the highest growth rate seen in 2012, when the number of international arrivals increased by 56.9%. International visits were mostly undertaken for holiday, leisure or recreation purposes (37%) (Georgian Hospitality Sector Overview | KPMG | GE 2015). The obvious benefits of tourism sector cannot be denied in the Georgian economy.

The above-mentioned factors indicate that Georgian society places value on the development of tourism services. The changes are also significant in mountainous Georgia and have a substantial potential for further development. According to the Third Regional Development project, World Bank supports to improve tourism infrastructure in Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region. It is expected that above-mentioned region will have access to improved public and tourism infrastructure in renovated cities cultural heritage sites (World Bank Supports Improved Tourism Infrastructure in Georgia's Samtskhe-Javakheti and Mtskheta-Mtianeti Regions 2015).

## 2. Research methodology

The purpose of this study is to get basic information on the tourism services offered in the villages of Kazbegi Municipality. The methods applied for this

## 3. Characteristics of the research areas

Stepantsminda is the administrative center of the Kazbegi Municipality. It is located in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region, along the both banks of the Tergi River. Altitude: 1750 meters above the sea level. 1783 persons lived in Stepantsminda, according to the census of 2002 (The Results of the First Georgia General Population Census of 2002 2003).

There are several cultural and educational institutions, shops, etc., in Stepantsminda, such as museum, bank, post office, police, pharmacy shop, court, etc. The infrastructure and the main road are in good condition in order to go to the center of Stepantsminda to and from Tbilisi. It helps Stepantsminda to become a tourist center. Firstly, tourists from Tbilisi arrive there and then they visit different places in the area. In the center of

study have been chosen according to the research purpose and objectives. The research was conducted in Kazbegi Municipality (Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region of Georgia), in two villages – Sno and Juta, and one town of Stepantsminda (See Map 1.). The selection of respondents was done by using of purposive sampling, taking into consideration traits/characteristics of respondents.

Traits/characteristics of respondents (representatives of tourist's services) for in-depth interviews: Interviewed residents were working in different kind of institutions and therefore they represented different tourist services such as guesthouses, café, hotel etc. During the field work for collection of primary data in-depth interviews and participant observation were used. 15 interviews were recorded with representatives of different providers of tourist services (managers and other employees of cafés, restaurants, hotels and guesthouses, etc.). The duration of in-depth interviews was 30-35 minute.

Secondary information is collected from a database of the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat), National Agency of Public Registry and other open sources/web-sites. Next step after the field work was to analyze obtained data/information. Along with text, the data and its analysis are represented in form of graphs and maps, also some photos are attached, which allow better visualization of the results.

Stepantsminda there is a transport stop (to go to Tbilisi and other areas), an information stand, hotels, food joints and a store for those tourists, who need special equipment for hiking. In Stepantsminda one can find such services, which could not be found in Sno or Juta, for instance a museum, fast food, store for agricultural products or other things and an "open bazaar".

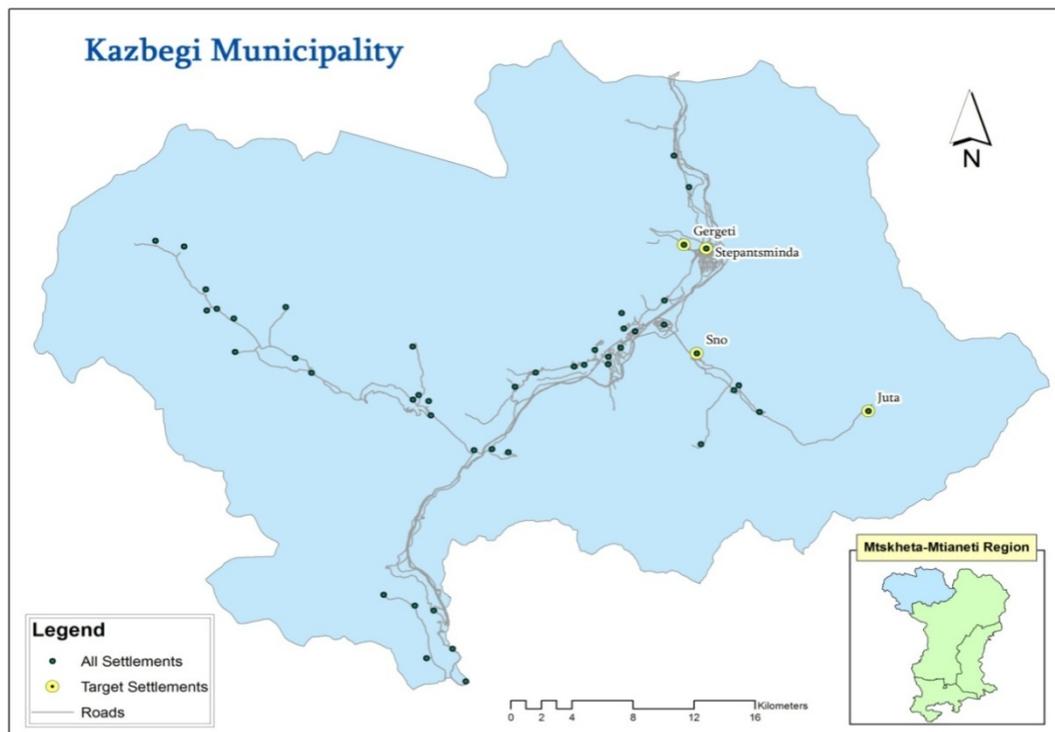
Village of Juta is located in Kazbegi Municipality. The elevation of the village is 2200 meters above the sea level. The population of the village was 62 people, according to the census of 2002 (The Results of the First Georgia General Population Census of 2002 2003). There are one good quality hotel and six or seven guesthouses in Juta. There is not any grocery store in the village. As locals say, once a week a

“Magazia chamotarebit”<sup>3</sup> (Mobile shop) comes to the village and sells both domestic and agricultural products (see Photograph 1.).

There is the “Zeta Camp” near the village that was established in 2009, at the altitude of 2 300 meters and only 900 meters away from the center of the village. It is located at the base of the Chaukhi, one of the most beautiful mountain ranges of Georgia. “Zeta Camp” includes one cottage with three large rooms, sleeping/living places in a wooden hut or tents, a cafe, camping place and solar-powered comfortable bathroom. It is interesting to note that solar cells are regularly used in this place, mainly for heating water. Travelers who visit “Zeta Camp” can enjoy various kinds of tourist services: excursions, horse riding, a guide, and planned local tours provided with maps. The owner of this place is from Tbilisi and other staff

members are from neighboring region (Dusheti), while hired guide is a local person. As a manager of this café told us, they prepare food by environment friendly organic product. During our research, as we mentioned in the methodology section, we made a desk research on using cafe or hotel information papers/leaflets and we found out that only by “Zeta Camp” is mentioned that they serve tourists with organic food. In their menu are also highlighted traditional Georgian meals like “Khabizgina” (cheese and potato filled griddle baked flat bread), “Mkhlovani khachapuri” (cheese and beat leaf filled griddle baked bread). Also they offer specific drinks such asherbal tea (with locally grown mint), local alcoholic beverages (e.g. hot chacha), etc(Zeta Cafe | Zeta Camping 2014).

Map 1. Research areas in Kazbegi Municipality



Source: National Agency of Public Registry; *Note: Map is created for this research by the authors*

<sup>3</sup>A vehicle, which moves from village to village or from city to city and sells products.

Photograph 1.



"Magazia Chamotarebit" in Stepantsminda, Kazbegi Municipality. ©Temur Gugushvili

Sno is a small village in Kazbegi Municipality and the elevation of the village is 1760 meters. 418 people lived in the village, according to the census of 2002 (The Results of the First Georgia General Population Census of 2002 2003). In Sno some different situation is observed, compared to Stepantsminda and Juta. There are no restaurants, cafes and guesthouses in that village. Actually we found one advertisement with phone number of a guesthouse in the center of Sno. However, unfortunately, local dwellers didn't have any information about that guesthouse. Later we have discovered that the guesthouse provides accommodations only to those visitors who stay longer than 10 days in the area; thus, the guesthouse does not work permanently. There are two interdependent factors for explaining this situation: (i) tourists usually visit village Sno for sightseeing and they don't stay to overnight, and because of that there is no requirement of providing permanent services; (ii) on the other hand, Sno will meet the coming season(s) with a new hotel, which is being built now, and a cafe near the trout farm. When some tourist services will appear in Sno, tourists

will probably have more reasons to stay there for a few days.

There is a trout farm in the village. It is important because the farm is the only one in this area (Kazbegi Municipality). In the separated ponds farmer produces different sizes of trout (the ponds with different age's trout's). Result of our research emphasizes that this trout farm supplies several clients: the main customers are local residents, cafes and restaurants. The owner of this farm intends to develop his business and expand it. Building cafes where tourist can taste trout will probably be the first step, followed by arrangement of fishing places for visitors.

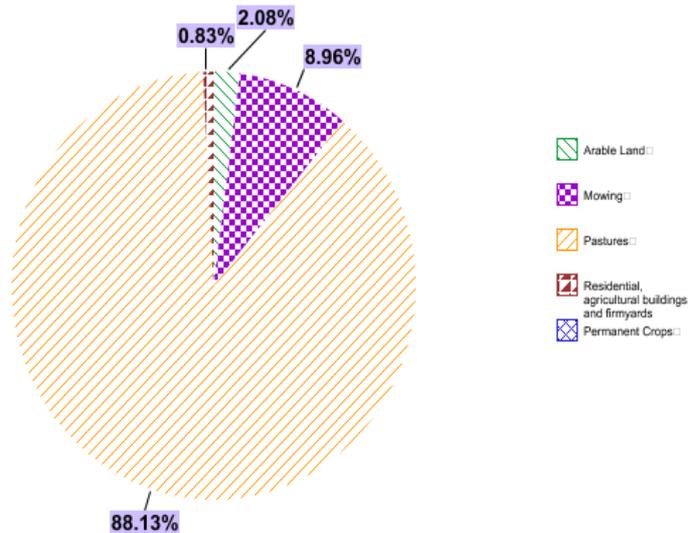
#### 4. Agricultural products

According to the State Department of Land Management of Georgia by 1st April of 2003 there were 4800 hectares of agricultural land in Kazbegi Municipality. The main part of this area was pastures and mowing/hay land i.e. extensively used agricultural land, comprising 4230 hectares, which is 97% of the whole lands under agriculture. <sup>4</sup>(Fig.1; 2)

<sup>4</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia **Note:** Mentioned information we requested from National Statistics Office of Georgia

and it is not available online/ on site, we got it in written form by them.

Figure 1. Distribution of Agricultural Land in Kazbegi by April 1, 2003



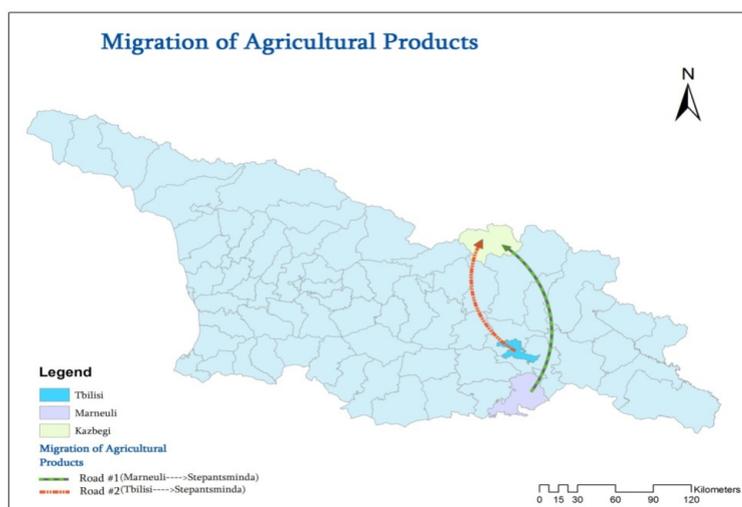
Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat)

The last Agricultural census was held in Georgia in 2004. Thus our description of agriculture could use only a database from 2004. Potato is most common annual crops (85 hectare) in Kazbegi Municipality. As locals say carrots, cabbage, beets are the most common vegetables and occupy 2 hectares. Largest number of livestock is comprised by sheep (18991), followed by bovine (4311), and pig (1589). There is also beehive (452) in the area.<sup>5</sup>

Agriculture products are available in stores and “open bazaars”. Open bazaars in Kazbegi Municipality

are of special type; it is presented by one or two sellers (street vendors) trading in an open space. Sometimes cars or other vehicle are used as bazaar stalls. There are different types of product in stock, such as fruits and vegetables, eggs, etc. It should be noted, that a large part of production is imported from Tbilisi and Marneuli (Kvemo Kartli region, Georgia) (See Map 2). In the municipality, namely the village Sno, there is a trout farm that sells fish to the local market and is a supplier of various enterprises.

Map 2. Migration of Agricultural Products in Kazbegi Municipality



Source: National Agency of Public Registry; [Note: Map is created for this research by the authors](#)

<sup>5</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia **Note:** Mentioned information we requested from National Statistics Office of Georgia and it is not available online/ on site, we got it in written form by them.

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The geographical location of Kazbegi Municipality is favorable for livestock farming. According to the people we talked, the number of livestock in families varies between two and twenty.

Greenhouses in Kazbegi district are noticeably destroyed or tumbled-down. As one of our respondents said - *“In early times every family had a greenhouse, because gas was free. Locals produced different types of products, for instance: vegetables, and then they sold them in Ordzhonikidze (Soviet name of the Russian city of Vladikavkaz). After the government demanded payment for gas, families disestablished*

*greenhouses, because the business was no longer profitable for them”* (Male, 67 years old).

From agricultural products honey is the most readily available. It is sold in stores, markets and also along the motor-road. In case if a tourist wants to buy butter, cheese, sour or any type of milk product, he/she can approach any particular family and buy products from them. It is clear that the locals produce a small amount of products, which are only enough for their families and, in some cases, for selling them to travelers. Accordingly, in Kazbegi the most common occupation in agriculture is “farming for personal consumption”, i.e. subsistence farming.

Photograph 2.



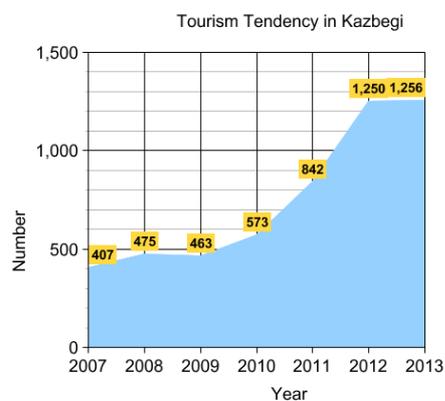
"Open Bazaar" – Sellers from Marneuli in Stepantsminda, Kazbegi Municipality. ©Temur Gugushvili

## 5. Hotels and guesthouses

It should be noted that part of the Guesthouses are not officially registered and, therefore exact data is not shown in the database of the National Statistics Office. That is why it is impossible to accurately estimate the number of existing accommodation units. As for the hotels and Guesthouses (hotel-type establishments), in 2013 their number was ten in Kazbegi Municipality (Without resort Gudauri). Number of beds in hotels and guesthouses has increased from 2007 to 2013. Almost 10,000 foreign tourists visited the area in 2007

and after six years (in 2013) number increased threefold (See Fig. 2).<sup>6</sup>

Figure 2. Number of places in Hotels and Hotel-Type Establishments



Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat)

<sup>6</sup> National Statistics Office of Georgia Note: Mentioned information we requested from National Statistics Office of Georgia

and it is not available online/on site, we got it in written form by them.

We can outline two kinds of services that are presented in hotels and guesthouses: formal and informal. Formal service includes a range of services, which are officially announced in booklets, sites and in other official sources; for instance: Wi-Fi, meals, guides provision, etc. However, most of guesthouses are characterized by informal services, which are not published but are distinguished by their unique value (Georgian hospitality). In particular, when being at a guesthouse, a host willingly offers clients his help with solving such problems as guide hiring, tour planning, horse rental, information about sightseeing, taxi services, excursions, etc. They also could redirect travelers to other relevant persons in order to get required services. This kind of assistance is free of charge. The above-mentioned service through its exceptionality attracts more tourists. We believe that this is due to the Georgian hospitality, which is reflected in such tourism services. The quality and service is improving every year that is due to the competitive environment in tourism business in Kazbegi region. From the catering point of view, the situation is different in hotels and guesthouses. In the latter, there is no menu and it is entirely focused on individual requests of tourists. Some cafes, which are in hotels, have the same services and menu like other cafes/restaurants in Kazbegi.

## 6. Cafés and kiosks

There are lots of cafes in Kazbegi. Tourists have a wide choice where to go. However, it should be noted, that all these places, are having almost the same menu and good location or nice interior/exterior is the main tourist attraction. The research revealed that most of these food joints belong to the owners from Tbilisi. Also it is evident that the local people are not employed in these cafes. Basically their staff is from Tbilisi or other regions of Georgia.

There is a variety of menu in the cafes and it includes both European and Georgian dishes. Interviews with managers revealed that some of them are focused on realization of local products in their food joints. They named a list of local products– fish (trout), beef and mutton, nettle, honey, cheese and bread – which they offer to clients.

Kiosks are presented as fast food joints, wine, food and agricultural products stores. In butcher's shop assistants say that the locals buy meat. As for the fact

that they do not sell meat to cafes/restaurants, they answered that they have never thought about it.

There is not a wide choice of souvenirs in Kazbegi. The first possibility to buy handmade/knitted items is on the way to Stepantsminda, they are exhibited on displays in the open stands. In the center, there is no separate shop for souvenirs, except for a single section in a mixed shop. There are several types of souvenirs: refrigerator stickers, wine jugs, cups, etc. According to the seller, tourists often buy souvenirs.

## 7. Suggestions for further research

In the process of analyzing collected data and information, research limitations were identified. The main challenge was to solve problem of “Cultural Intimacy”. In 1997, the concept of cultural intimacy has entered the anthropological lexicon by Michael Herzfeld. "The recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with their assurance of common sociality...“Cultural Intimacy” includes set of values, which in most cases are not typical for each country and nation (Herzfeld 1997).

In the following research we faced the problem to explain the meanings of local terms without losing their unique and cultural value. Due to the fact that our study reflects many typical things of Georgian culture and traditions, we had to find a way by which we could make some local terms clear for foreigners. The only way to solve above-mentioned challenges was – Visualization.

During the fieldwork we collected photographs, without any purpose of the research. It should be emphasized that these materials became essential to present clearly research findings and conclusion. To overcome the limitations fully the study also revealed the importance to collect photographs as well as video information.

It is not easy to collect, administer and analyze video, photo, audio and other type of information. We suggest to researchers who plan to conduct researches in the field of tourism, use i) perfect tool for fieldwork – MaxAPP. The mentioned app allows collecting different kind of information (notes, photos, videos, audio) (MAXApp for Field Research 2015) ii) Professional software program MAXQDA. In this tool

it is possible to make text and multimedia analysis. Namely, all researchers will be able to import data from interviews, focus groups, photos, video files and mark important information in the data with different codes by using regular codes, colors, symbols, or emoticons. The existed code system can be expanded or refined just like the research. Therefore it is helpful to manage the whole research (MAXQDA - QDA Software for Win & Mac OS X 2015).

It should be noted that most studies inevitably lead researchers to findings that they did not anticipate from the start. Therefore suggesting a research strategy can be used to explore such findings in future.

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