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# THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON CULTURE AND CHALLENGES FOR THE HOST COUNTRY

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**ABSTRACT.** In Georgia, as in other developing countries, tourism has positive and negative importance and influence. It may affect the national cultural values, and to get economic benefits, the host may temporarily forget the so-called “disguised arrogance”, which is typical for a local Georgian resident based on the perception of the uniqueness of his own culture and give priority to the cultural values characteristic of a tourist.

Today, the tourism industry in Georgia pays quite highly. Besides, it allows culture to be an aesthetic resource and beneficial. Interaction between these two spheres and proper management promotes culture’s direct and indirect influence on the economic potential of Georgian regions. Under direct impact, we mean cultural institutions (such as cinemas, museums, theatres, concert halls, galleries, etc.) which bring economic income, and under indirect, those events which may have a more significant influence because they contribute to social stability, population employment growth, the reduction of unemployment, and an increase in the well-being of the local population through the development of “associated professions” like transportation, catering, and more.

Communication in tourism increases relations between people of different backgrounds, reduces conflicts between cultures, and instils a sense of pride in local people in the need to preserve their cultural heritage and identity.

**KEYWORDS: VALUES, CULTURAL HERITAGE, IDENTITY, CULTURAL DIFFUSION.**

## INTRODUCTION

Undeniably, current global processes have significantly impacted tourism worldwide and caused its unprecedented boom. Today, tourism represents one of the most promising socio-cultural and economic phenomena, one of the most promising fields for entrepreneurial activity. Tourism has emerged as a valuable resource, stimulating various processes that contribute to a country’s economic, social, and cultural development. “Global and Ethical Code of Tourism”, adopted on October 1, 1991, at the General Assembly of the World Tourism Organization in Chile, emphasized the fact that the field of tourism uses the cultural heritage of mankind and contributes to its enrich-

ment, that tourism is equally valuable and profitable for the countries and peoples participating in it. It stimulates the development of a positive image of the host country and its people for the tourist-consumer. [1] Therefore, tourism can be considered as a means of socialization, education and upbringing.

However, one of the main issues is the following: Can the increase in the number of tourists from Europe, Asia and the Middle East affect the culture of developing countries and Georgia in particular, and will it lead to a change in the value system of the host country.

Values determine human relationships with society, relatives and themselves in any culture. They create a particular order. They establish spe-

cific norms and standards within their cultural framework. A person is connected with traditions, beliefs, and morals, ultimately shaping fundamental and general values.

In cultural anthropology, cultural values are divided into four types: lifestyle, ideology, religion, and artistic culture. Among these, lifestyle plays an essential role in tourism. Apart from representing the origin of fundamental and general values, its specificity provides the development of values that have a basic meaning in inter-ethnic communication. The values of the existing culture are formed by observation of everyday life and have applied value. Therefore, the perception of the country's existing culture is enough for the person who came as a tourist to get to know the basics of the host country's culture.

However, most hosts evaluate the tourists coming to Georgia from an ethnocentric standpoint. Researchers believe that perceiving the world from one's cultural prism is natural and has positive and negative meanings. The positive thing is that ethnocentrism allows us to separate people of "my" and "other" cultures from each other, and the negative thing is that you consciously try to form humiliating relations with people of other cultures to isolate people from each other. Perceiving the superiority of its cultural values, Georgia takes one of the first places (85%) and is behind only Greece (89%) among European countries. [2]

However, in reality, in my opinion, even though a Georgian recognizes the uniqueness of his culture, being a host, he always tries not to make the guest, the tourist, feel his so-called "hidden arrogance", which he does pretty effectively. In this context, financial benefits seem to play a pivotal role.

Research distinguishes the direct and indirect influence of culture on the economic potential of regions. The economic income that generates cultural institutions (cinemas, museums, theatres, art salons, galleries, etc.) is direct and indirect, which may have a greater impact because it contributes to the population's employment growth, reduces unemployment, and improves the local population's well-being. This is carried out by the so-called "ancillary professions" – transport, catering, etc. (V.V. Novoselskaya. 2020). [3] However,

it should be noted that the desire to obtain financial profit in the tourism sphere, especially in tourist services, leads to changes in priorities.

A number of values, characteristic of Georgia (selfless aid, hospitality, etc.) have moved to the background and have been replaced by the promotion of elements of the tourist's culture for the purpose of obtaining benefits in order to meet his cultural standards.

In this regard, a change could have both positive and negative results. On the one hand, it may help bring elements from other cultures into the host culture if they are acceptable to your cultural values, but it may also threaten the authenticity of your value system. This change is dependent on the visitor's length of stay. If the visit is short, changes may be less significant. In Georgia, especially in the Imereti region, most tourists come for a quick visit and are primarily interested in the first stage of cultural integration, referred to as the "honeymoon stage". [4] At this stage, tourists are keen to discover new places and local communities, their traditions, and local festivals, show affection and appreciation for different ethnic groups and indigenous cultural identities, and seek to understand their way of life and unique features. To validate this, the Imereti region can offer organized events such as cultural evenings hosted by the management of the hotels, participation in local festivities, providing tourists with the opportunity to engage in local daily life and share their cultural heritage, which instils love and respect for the host country in the tourist. Tourist firms and hotels offer tourists different tours, which can arouse interest in discovering the country's different regions and unique cultural characteristics.

However, the host's behavior may change if he is forced to adapt to the tourist's needs and standards of behavior for a longer period. Changes in host behavior can occur not only at the genotypic level, but also at the phenotypic level as both host and tourist try to achieve their goals. Not infrequently, such an approach increases the number of both dissatisfied tourists and hosts. As an example, we can cite a large influx of Russian tourists due to the Russia-Ukraine war, when they may not be willing to compromise their cultural standards.

In developing countries, including Georgia, pursuing financial benefits promotes the commercialization of various areas of culture; that is, culture samples can be treated as trade objects, and consequently, we can lose their authenticity. One example is the increased demand for tourist products, particularly souvenirs, when poorly executed pseudo-artefacts replace authentic samples. This type of mass production harms the activities of folk crafts masters and artists both materially and spiritually. In addition, copies of Georgian artefacts, souvenirs, and culinary samples can be found in different regions and even in neighboring countries, which compete with authentic Georgian samples and give tourists a wrong opinion about our culture. Unfortunately, the state currently has less control over this sector, which threatens the country's cultural heritage.

On the other hand, tourism contributes to the flourishing of applied arts and folk crafts and the revival of forgotten industries. An example of this is the increase in demand for Georgian ceramics, woollen socks, felt clothes, handmade rugs and carpets from Tusheti and Khevsureti regions, Georgian culinary products, etc. Tourists are especially interested in getting to know the technology of putting wine in kvevri, visiting private wineries, tasting different varieties of grapes and wines, getting to know Georgian historical wine vessels, often they take part in grape picking and wine pressing process. For example, in Kutaisi, the management of the "Sani" hotel always organizes autumn events, which are expressed in the pressing of wine in the wine press, the making of churchelas accompanied by traditional folk songs. Such events contribute to the growth of cultural ties between nations, increase collective spirit, establish friendship between the host and the guest, and give opportunity to the guest to promote the country, its culture, and a friendly bond with the host and his friends who live in foreign countries. (Md. Shabzalal. 2016). [5]

However, the promotion of such tours is hindered by their seasonal nature. High-season tours in Georgia include cultural and specialized tours (including three seasons); medium-season tours include religious and ethnic tours; low-season tours include vacations at resorts, wine and sight-seeing tours, and medical tours. The seasonality

of tours can become a factor hindering the development of tourism. (N. Kvaratskhelia, 2009). [6]

The competitiveness of cultural tourism directly depends on the value and infrastructure of the tourist object. Today, local governments and residents are trying to make their region attractive for tourism to promote local historical and natural monuments, protected areas, national parks, etc. This increases local pride and respect for the monument and self-awareness of how valuable the object is. They want to protect them, which is not only motivated by economic benefits. The economic benefits derived from tourism contribute to the safeguarding of cultural heritage for future generations. UNESCO endorsed this approach during the 33<sup>rd</sup> session of the General Conference in 2005, "Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage", which urges the preservation and promotion of diverse forms of cultural heritage worldwide. [7]

But in some tourist places, the opinion of the local population is ignored and isolated from the tourism sector, when the tourist-attractive areas of the country are alienated from individual companies. This threatens natural landscapes, which can become irreversible and destroy natural and cultural monuments. (e.g. currently ongoing disputes regarding Balda Canyon and Racha protected areas). In such cases, access to resources is limited for the local population; services become more expensive, and their suffering doubles.

We cannot ignore cases when tourists from neighboring countries (Iran, Turkey, etc.) are accompanied by local guides who distort the history and culture of Georgia in favor of their own countries, which unfortunately not only promotes friendship between peoples but also causes alienation between each other and the formation of cultural hostility between nations. Georgians, the autochthonous population of the Caucasus, are very sensitive to the distortion of their historical and cultural past, and similar behavior of foreign guides leads to a clash of values. They seem to want to legitimize their misconceptions while simultaneously insulting the values of the host country. Such behavior is the result of different views and perceptions of the world, and the dichotomy: "East-West" still does not lose its relevance.

Internal tourism, which has a long history in our country, plays a significant role in promoting the protection of Georgia's cultural heritage. Kutaisi newspapers: "Kolkhida", "Imereti" and "Samshoblo" pointed to the role of excursions and travelling as early as the first decade of the 20th century. The Georgian Gymnasium of Kutaisi was at the head of organizing tours in our region, which aimed to describe the monuments of Georgian antiquities, history, and culture, as well as propaganda, fixation, recording of legends, celebrations, meetings with the local population, to mitigate the negative impact and ambiguous consequences of the Russian colonization policy and inculcate in young people love for the motherland and respect for the past ("Kolkhida", 1911-1912). [8] Today, internal tourism is very attractive. According to National Statistics Office of Georgia data, "Distribution of visitors of the resident population of Georgia aged 15 and above by region", from 2016 to 2022, the Imereti region is steadily in second

place after the capital. [9]

Internal tourists are well acquainted with their country's culture, climate, and national language, which sets them apart from foreign tourists. As for the places visited, the primary means of transport are vehicles, which reduces time and travel expenses. Internal tourism is less seasonal and promotes income distribution between urban and rural settlements. Also, it is less sensitive to economic shocks and crises in the world. It helps the local population and young people enrich their knowledge about their country's historical and cultural past.

Currently, the competition in the field of tourism has increased, and the development of tourism in Georgia is moving to a qualitatively new level. At this transitional stage, there are still many obstacles to be overcome. Still, Georgia has the greatest tourism potential, allowing its culture to represent an aesthetic resource and a profitable field.

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