

appear

WITH FUNDING FROM
 AUSTRIAN
DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION

IVANE JAVAKHISHVILI TBILISI STATE UNIVERSITY



PROSPECTS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE BOROUGH STEPANTSMINDA TRANSDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE CAUCASUS REGION



Tbilisi
2019



The logo for APPEAR, consisting of the word "appear" in a red, lowercase, serif font.

WITH FUNDING FROM



AUSTRIAN
DEVELOPMENT
COOPERATION

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The project CaucaSusT – Transdisciplinarity for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Caucasus Region is financed by APPEAR, a programme of the Austrian Development Cooperation.

PREFACE	5
KAZBEGI MUNICIPALITY: A BRIEF GEOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW	6
KAZBEGI MUNICIPALITY: A BRIEF SOCIO- ECONOMIC OVERVIEW	10
THE GOAL AND FORMAT OF THE CASE STUDY	13
RESEARCH METHODS	15
FIRST, SECOND AND THIRD PHASES OF THE STUDY	16
SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT	34
MAIN FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS	36
CONCLUSION	38

P R E F A C E

From 8 to 22 July, 2019 a student field practice/Case-study by using a transdisciplinary approach to research was carried out. The Case-study was supported by the Austrian Development Cooperation Scientific Fund (OEAD) and funded through the project 'Transdisciplinarity for Sustainable Tourism Development in the Caucasus Region (CaucaSusT)'. The Case-study was conducted in the borough of Stepantsminda, Kazbegi municipality. 24 students and 5 professors of master's programs of three faculties (of 'Human Geography' of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, 'Tourism and Hospitality' of the faculty of Economics and Business, and 'Regional Geography and Landscape Planning' of the Faculty of Exact and Natural Sciences) of Tbilisi State University (TSU) have participated in the Case-study. In the course of the Case-study Austrian scientists - Professor Andreas Muhar and Dr Tamara Mitrofanenko of BOKU, and Professor Cristian Maurer of the University of Krems - have also participated and delivered lectures/presentations.

From the Tbilisi State University, besides the authors and supervisors of the present report the following master students have

participated in research and case-study activities: Teimuraz Dvalishvili, Archil Khuskivadze, Tinatin Archvadze, Tamar Odilavadze, Mariam Revazishvili, Giorgi Kapanadze, Mariam Datishvili, Nato Tezelashvili, Ana Tskvitinidze, Neli Kveladze, Khatia Meskhia, Nino Arachemia, Mari Tsotskolauri, Marry Kakhelishvili, and Khatia Gelashvili. Additionally, PhD students of Tbilisi State University – Gvantsa Salukvadze ('Human Geography' program) and Temur Gugushvili ('Sociology' program), as well as BOKU doctoral students – Lela Khartishvili and Tigran Keryan have participated and supervised the master students. The involvement and support of TSU professors Nodar Elizbarashvili and Ioseb Khelashvili, and the project manager Tatia Mzhavanadze had strongly contributed the Case-study. 10 Austrian students of BOKU also participated in the case-study.

During the Case-study students closely cooperated with local stakeholders representing public, civil and private sectors. The students conducted interviews with representatives of local population, entrepreneurs, tourist service providers and local administration. Based on acquired data they elaborated scenarios of sustainable development for Stepantsminda and recommendations for stakeholders. The local actors expressed big interest towards presentations and recommendations prepared by students and expressed willingness of future cooperation.

The Case-study participants and supervisors express their cordial gratitude to the authorities of Kazbegi municipality, local community representatives, stakeholders and tourists who contributed to successful fulfilment of the Case-study objectives.

KAZBEGI MUNICIPALITY: A BRIEF GEOGRAPHICAL OVERVIEW¹

Kazbegi municipality is situated between the Main Greater Caucasus Range and its side ridge. Its average altitude is more than 3,000 meters above sea level. In the north it is bordered by the Russian Federation, and in the west - by self-declared secessionist region of Georgia, so called South Ossetia, which is currently outside of effective control of the Georgian government. Such a geographic situation contains certain threat of reactivation of ethno-political conflict, in particular over Truso gorge which is a part of Kazbegi municipality and is a subject of Russo-Ossetian territorial claims. One main road crosses the territory of the municipality, connecting Georgia with Russia, while several smaller local roads run along river valleys.

The area of Kazbegi municipality is 1,081.7 square kilometres. There is an acute shortage of **agricultural land** which represents only 37 per cent of territory of the municipality; furthermore 92 per cent of agricultural land is hayland and pasture. Consequently, main branches of agriculture are sheep and cattle breeding, while arable plots are very scarce. Fishery and bee-farming have good potential for development in the municipality.



Fig. 1. Geographical location of Kazbegi municipality

Topography of Kazbegi municipality is characterized with big diversity, however, mainly it is high mountainous and tectonically active area, which causes a prevalence of forms of tectonic relief, steep slopes, picking heights, as well as existence of young volcanic and old glacial structures. Such geomorphological diversity makes the region interesting and attractive not only for researchers, but also for regular visitors and tourists. The main **orographic** units are Khevi Caucasioni and Khokhi ridges which have latitudinal direction, and Shani, Khuro and Kidegani ridges with longitudinal direction. Jvari pass is built by young volcanic rocks, particularly quaternary effusive and intrusive diabases (greenstones).

¹ This section is written based on the lecture of prof. Nodar Elizbarashvili "Landscape-ecological and touristic-recreational peculiarities of Kazbegi".



Photo: 'Chaukhi' mountain ridge – view from Juta village

The mount of **Kazbegi** (Mkinvartsveri – in Georgian) elevated to 5,054 meters above sea level is the highest point of the eastern Caucasus Range. It has volcanic origin. A few glaciers such as Suatisi, Mna, Ortsveri, Devdaraki, Gergeti and others are found in this area. They occupy about 135 square kilometers in total. Kazbegi Mountain is a beloved destination for alpinists. Near Gergeti glacier a meteorological station is allocated which is used also by alpinists during their rise to Kazbegi.



Photo: A view on Kazbegi Mountain and Trinity (Sameba) Church

The **River Terek** (Tergi in Georgian) takes start from these mountains and runs to north towards Russia. It forms two gorges in the limits of Kazbegi municipality – Dariali Gorge and Truso Gorge. Along **Driali Gorge** the main way connecting south Caucasus with north Caucasus is situated. It is historically important and touristically attractive area which contains several waterfalls like Gveleti waterfall, as well as heritage sites like Dariali castle of V century. In several kilometres from the borough Stepantsminda there is a Georgian checkpoint controlling traffic to Russian Federation. **Truso Gorge** is situated between the Main Caucasus and Khokhi ridges. Its length is 25 kilometers with the lowest point of 2,000 meters above sea level. Currently this gorge is very sparsely populated.



Photo: Dariali checkpoint on the River Terek

There are several karstic, volcanic and glacial lakes (e.g. Archvebi, Khelitsadi), waterfalls (e.g. Arshi) and caves (e.g. Ghamura) in the region and they make attraction sites for tourists. Additionally, the complex topography provides plenty of potential standpoints for overlooking magnificent sceneries.

It is important for tourism not only to designate natural monuments, but also to identify new points of view that are not practically defined in the Kazbegi municipality except for the Gergeti Trinity and Hotel Roms.



Photo: A view from Hotel Roms



Photo: A view from Gergeti Trinity

Climate in the municipality is characteristic for mountainous regions – the winter is cold, and summer – mild and comfortable with the maximum temperature of 32° C. Low precipitation in the warm season makes this place comfortable for local population as well as tourists and visitors; however, in the severe and snowy winter much effort and expenditure are required for heating.

Hydrography, besides River Terek and its several tributaries with many waterfalls and river thresholds, is represented by numerous mineral springs.

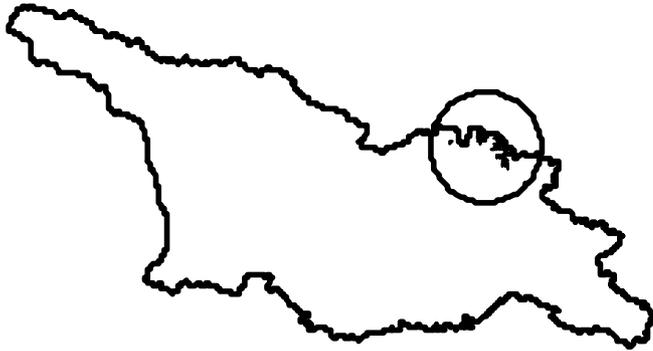


Photo: Groundwater - Truso Gorge

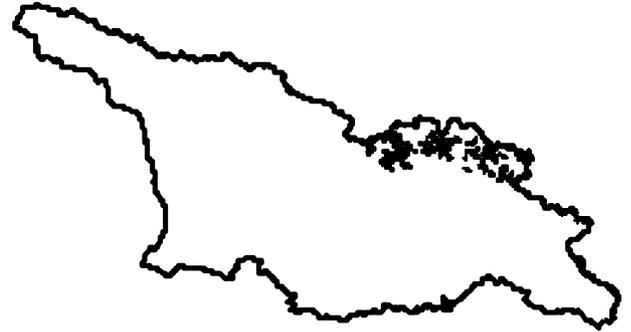
Vegetation is quite scarce, sub-alpine and alpine meadows prevail. Several herbs have curable traits and have traditionally used in medicine. In general, wild curable herbs (e.g. rose hip, chamomile, nettle, etc.) may be seen as one of valuable natural resources of this area. From timber species birch, pine, ash, maple and some others are presented, some of which are forming mountain slope forests and groves. **Fauna** is typical for the Caucasus region with some species found in the 'Red List' such as east Caucasian tur, chamois, and brown bear.

Three main types of landscapes are represented in the region:

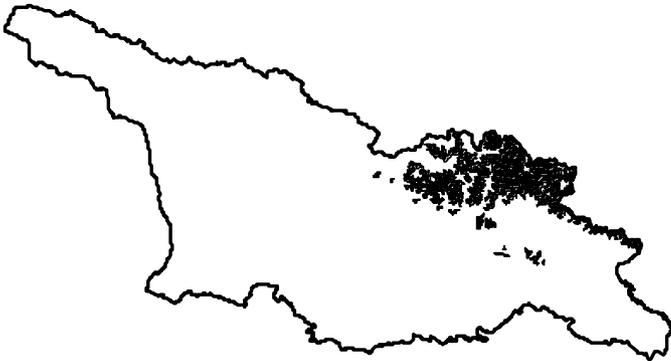
1. Erosional-denudation landscapes of upper mountains, paleoglacial in some places, with pine and birch forests. This type is well-preserved in the Kazbegi National Park and non-accessible areas.



3. Paleoglacial high mountainous landscapes with alpine meadows. It has broad in some places undergoes anthropogenic impact.



2. Denudation and paleoglacial landscapes of higher mountains with subalpine meadows, bushes and rare forests. It has broad distribution but near settlements undergoes strong anthropogenic impact.



KAZBEGI MUNICIPALITY: A BRIEF SOCIO-ECONOMIC OVERVIEW

According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia (2016) Kazbegi municipality consists of 6 sub-municipal entities: Stepantsminda, Goristsikhe, Gudauri, Kobi, Sioni and Sno. As the general population census of 2014 reveals, the total number of residents in Kazbegi municipality is - 3 795. The **population** showed dramatic reduction over period of independence: it dropped from 6,411 persons in 1989 down to 5,264 – in 2002, further to 3,795 in 2014, and continues to decrease (according to the National Population Census of 2014). Interestingly enough, 47 villages are in consistency of the municipality, within merely 19 have the permanent residents (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2016).

Year	Number of Population
1989	6411
2002	5264
2014	3795

Table 1. Kazbegi region population dynamics by years

According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia² agricultural land in Kazbegi municipality by 1st October of 2004 and 2014 remained steady with 480 hectares. The main part of this area was natural meadows and pastures i.e. extensively used agricultural land, comprising 378 hectares, which is 79% of the whole lands under agriculture. It is notable that potato growing is the most common annual crop to all villages in

Kazbegi municipality. In spite of this, potatoes are not taken off as cash crops in the target area. However, they are mainly grown for personal consumption, while there is no marketing channel for selling them and generate income for family's needs. According to the Agricultural census of 2004, the total area under potatoes cultivation was 85 hectares.

Compared with statistics of 2014 vegetables occupied 1 hectare less than in 2004. According to the last agricultural census of Georgia the number of livestock has fell spectacularly and is comprised by sheep (4315), followed by buffaloes (2593), and pig (247).

² http://geostat.ge/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.

KAZBEGI NATIONAL PARK (KNP)

Kazbegi National Park, established in 1976, is located on a historic ridge on the northern slopes of the Caucasus Range. According to the Kazbegi National Park Administration, only 35% of the national park is covered with forest, the rest with snow-covered peaks and inaccessible cliffs. The park is home to many rare species of animals and birds, including endangered species and Georgia's Red List. It is also noteworthy that Kazbegi National Park is not distinguished by the existing tourist infrastructure, though it occupies one of the leading positions among the frequently visited Georgian protected areas.

In Georgia there is an active trend of rapid expansion of protected areas, which has been particularly evident over the last ten years. A mountain of data collected within the protected areas (PA) of Georgia reveals the rapid increase in the coverage of PA. According to [the Agency of Protected areas of Georgia](#) (APA, 2018), between 2007 and 2018 the coverage of PA expanded by 91,833 hectares from 7.1 percent to 9.6 percent of Georgia's total land mass. Currently, there are 86 protected areas of five categories (IUCN), which comprise almost 10 percent of Georgia's total territory. Furthermore, the expansion process of several PA is continuing, and in the coming years the establishment of new PA has been announced. It should be emphasized that in this process the institutional development of the APA (e.g., increased number of rangers, new administrative buildings) is clearly visible, with the support of several international foundations.

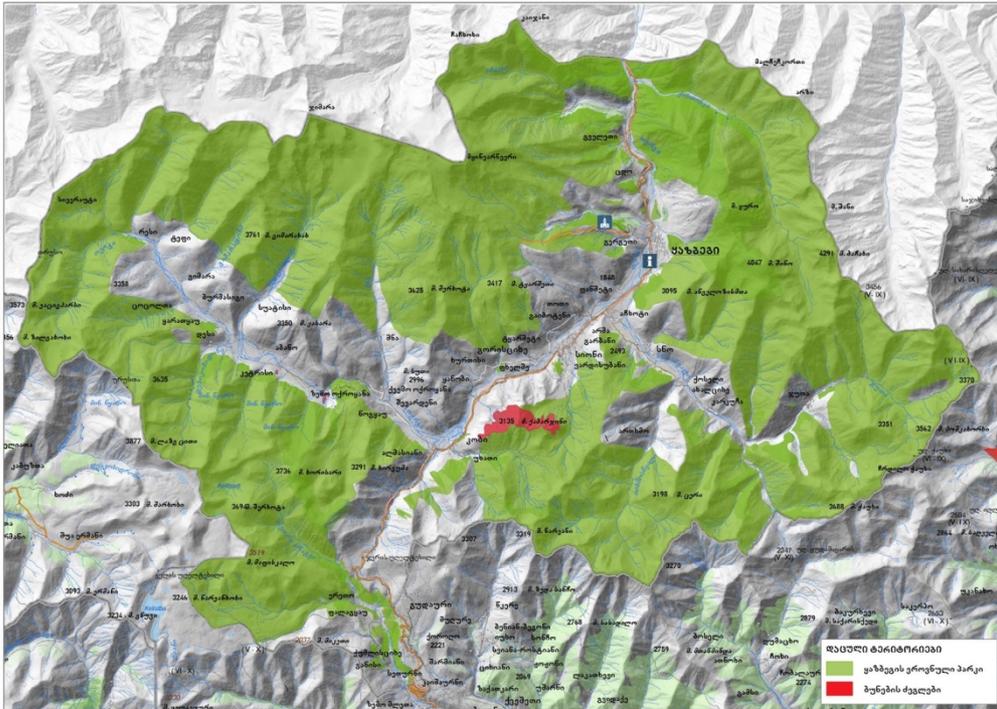
In this transformation process, KNP was not left behind, which triggered the unrest of the local community, because of unannounced and hence unexpected extension plans. This case, with its aim to improve the functioning of the ecosystem and enhance economic development of the region, caught the attention of the project researchers. It is important to note in such cases that, in the process of integrating new territories during the expansion, local residents who are functionally connected to the selected areas will have to adapt to the new reality and regulations. In this context, this blog article focuses on the level of awareness of local communities regarding the ongoing process and the formation of relationships between stakeholders.

Moreover, when a petition was filed by locals to stop the extension of the boundaries of the Kazbegi protected area and make a change in the Law on Protected Areas. The Parliament of Georgia amended the change in the Law on Protected Areas on December 27, 2018³. Prior to the legislative amendment, a draft law was developed on the basis of the extension project that envisages increasing the area of the National Park, from 8686.6367⁴ ha to 69523.3633 ha and amounting to 78210 ha⁵.

³ <https://info.parliament.ge/#law-drafting/16495>

⁴ Presented by the 1997-2007 Project "Forest Management Organization and Development of Kazbegi State Reserve"

⁵ Amendment to the Law of Georgia on the Status of Protected Areas <https://info.parliament.ge/file/1/BillReviewContent/202184?>

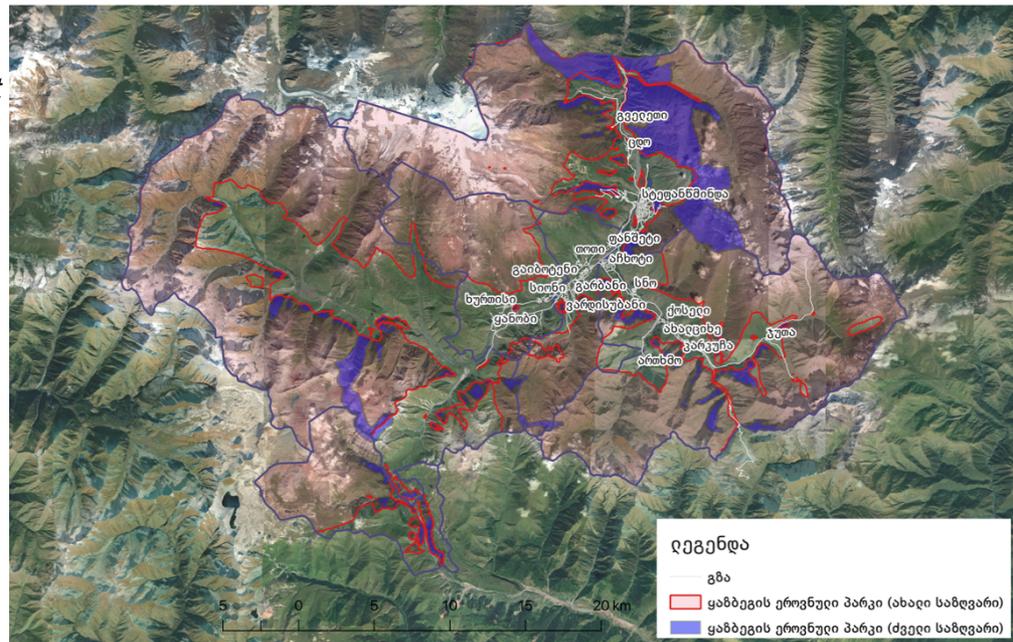


Map 2. Kazbegi National Park
Source: Agency of Protected Areas (APA), 2019.

<https://apa.gov.ge/uploads/other/4/4842.pdf>

ყაზბეგის ეროვნული პარკი

Map 3. Old and New borders of Kazbegi National Park
Source: Map was created by the project team member, Temur Gugushvili based on Agency of Protected Areas (APA), 2019



THE GOAL AND FORMAT OF THE CASE STUDY

On 8-9 July 2019 a preparation phase of the Case-study/Students field practice was launched. One of the supervisors of the Case-study prof. Joseph Salukvadze presented to students the purpose and a format of field-work. The Case-study aims at providing students with new knowledge and practical skills in the field of sustainable tourism development by means of conducting a field research. For achieving this goal **Transdisciplinary approach** will be used, which means conducting multidisciplinary research (human geographical, economic, landscape study) and analysing results in cooperation with a local community, based on a strong involvement/inclusion of local actors/stakeholders.

The chart below depicts the phases and procedures implemented within the project during transdisciplinary teaching:

In the frames of the Case-study acquisition of data for further analysis for the five following thematic topics was decided:

CASE STUDY #1

Tourist infrastructure and services;

CASE STUDY #2

Connection of tourism with other sectors;

CASE STUDY #3

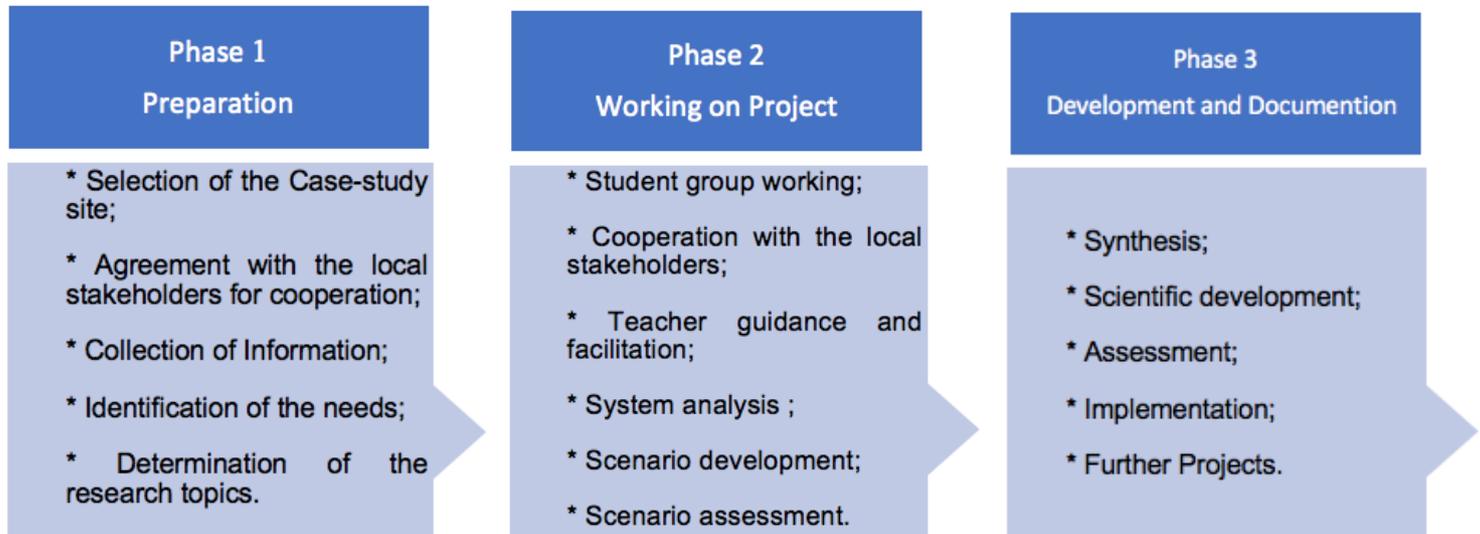
Existing resources for tourism development and their perception by potential users;

CASE STUDY #4

Tourism management and challenges for development (visions of stakeholders and students).

CASE STUDY #5

Development of Kazbegi National Park: the issues of nature protection and land-use.



Scheme 1. Phases and Procedures of Transdisciplinary Research Practices. Scholz, R. W. and Tietje, O. (2002).

For the Case-study the following main objectives and activities have been formulated:

- Collection of basic data (by interdisciplinary groups, on zonal basis);
- Data collection for the main thematic issues (interviewing);
- Data analysis and presentations; Elaboration of recommendations;
- Scenario development based on system analysis;
- Cooperation with stakeholders in problem analysis, their participation in formulating research findings and common discussion of recommendations.

Additionally, the Case-study will aim at the identification of those stakeholders who are interested to cooperate with us, and assisting them in drafting proposals/applications for getting funds for their projects.

Data collection activities have been carried out in three directions: (i) character of general socio-economic conditions of local population; (ii) information on tourist objects and service units; and (iii) identification of landscape and cultural monuments.

Format of the Case-study envisaged 14 days of work; it included the following phases and activities:

- 08-09/07 – The preparatory stage at TSU: logistics, introductory lectures, organizational issues.
- 10-12/07 – Arrival in Stepantsminda; First meeting with stakeholders; Collection of basic data; Identification of local grant seeker stakeholders.
- 13-16/07 – Collection of thematic data, processing and analyses;
 - 17-18/07 – System and SWOT analyses, elaboration of scenario development;
 - 19/07 – in Truso Gorge; Finalizing meeting with stakeholders;
 - 20/07 – Returning to Tbilisi;
 - 21-22/07 – Final reporting and students' assessment at TSU; Summarizing the Case-study.

On the first day of arrival in Stepantsminda the participants of the Case-study met local stakeholders and listened to their information on the existing problems and important issues of the community. This was a fruitful day as the students get acquainted with stakeholders, exchanged information and opinions with them, and got better understanding on the way of life of local population, as well as tourist potential and existing challenges.

Research Methods

Preliminary training in research methodology.

Prior to the research, professor of KREMS University and Head of Tourism Department Christian Maurer had delivered a lecture on the development of tourism experience. He reviewed the tourism experience components, services and activities, clusters of tourist products, the processes of strategic planning and service planning, as well as prototype methods, which implies the transfer of already existing experience. In his presentation, profess. Maurer introduced to the students a "Double Diamond Method".

Empirical data collection. In the first phase of the study, for the purpose of studying the socioeconomic condition of Stepantsminda, including the assessment of the extension of Kazbegi National Park, the area of the borough was divided into five working zones: three in the Stepantsminda area itself and two in the Gergeti settlement (see Appendix # 1). Within the boundaries of these areas, student groups were assigned for fieldwork and data were collected using a quantitative research method. Respondents were selected on the basis of random sampling and therefore no pre-established selection criteria existed. **Finally, 48 households were surveyed in the first phase of the survey.** Locals of borough Stepantsminda regarding the Kazbegi National Park were surveyed (n=73). It is noteworthy that in parallel to the survey, a large number of structured information (gender, age, education) was obtained through registration forms, from the selected respondents.

In the second phase to collect the empirical data for the research, the discussion guide with relevant questions was formulated based on the brainstorming of students and professors.

Based on the discussion key issues were formulated and grouped around three key themes, such as (i) attitudes towards tourism development; (ii) the socio-economic and environmental challenges of the Kazbegi municipality and (iii) the attitudes towards the expansion of the Kazbegi National Park. As a result of the discussion, five thematic issues were identified that had to be studied by five groups, namely:

- **Tourist infrastructure and services;**
- **Connection of tourism with other sectors;**
- **Existing resources for tourism development and their perception by potential users;**
- **Tourism management and challenges for development (visions of stakeholders and students).**
- **Development of Kazbegi National Park: the issues of nature protection and land-use.**

For an in-depth study of current processes, the study was conducted using a mixed methods design. The concept used a combination of different methods, namely Participatory Mapping, participant observation (Mapping Important Tourist and Other spots through georeferencing method) and Qualitative Interviews with Targeted Respondents. It should be noted that the duration of each interview was approximately 35-40 minutes.

Analysis of empirical data. Quantitative data collected during the first phase of the study were statistically analyzed using SPSS software. Qualitative information, including in-depth interviews and participatory mapping, was analyzed using the principles of a systematic approach. Geographic information was actively collected as part of the fieldwork, which was eventually processed through Geographical Information Systems (ArcGIS).

First phase of the study (Quantitative research of socio-economic conditions)

Outcomes

During the survey randomly selected 48 local respondents were interviewed: 20 men and 28 women. More than half (56.2%) of respondents have higher education, followed by respondents with secondary education (41%) and general education (2.1%). The big majority of respondents are permanent residents (75%) and 25% - seasonal residents. Their main economic activity is tourism (29 respondents), and therefore, positive attitude towards tourism is very high (89%).

Most of the interviewees mentioned that tourism development brings economic benefits for them (42 people), while for others tourism development is associated with promotion of their region/settlement – Kazbegi/Stepantsminda; for some respondent's tourism forms new cultural relations.

According to Stepantsminda residents, the benefits of tourism in terms of environmental protection are extra incomes for the care and preservation of cultural sites. This is what 66% of the population (respondents) thinks, and some (20.8%) think that the interest of tourists helps to preserve the local culture.

When asked what hinders tourism development, respondents' responses were as follows: poor road infrastructure and transport links (37.5%), low level of utilities (4.2%), instability and shortage of water supply (14.6%), unorganized landfills and garbage disposal (6.3%), insufficient assistance from government and NGOs (10.4%), and low level of qualification of employees in the service sector (6.3%).

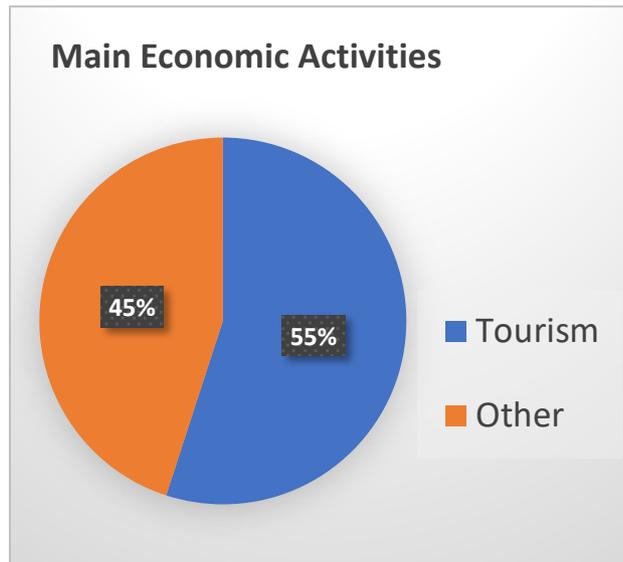
Interestingly, the overwhelming majority of respondents perceive natural conditions and Kazbegi National Park as a contributing factor to tourism development.

As mentioned above, most of the population has a positive attitude towards tourists and tourism, but there are also a number of challenges. Respondents indicated that tourists and holidaymakers were in some cases a hindrance to local culture (54.2%), with some reporting that they polluted the environment (22.9%).

The most important problems reported by the respondents are insufficient jobs (62.5%) and excessively limited means of earning income (16.7%). Indeed, the share of tourism in the economy is so high that virtually the entire population is either already employed in it or intends to become involved in the sector in the near future.

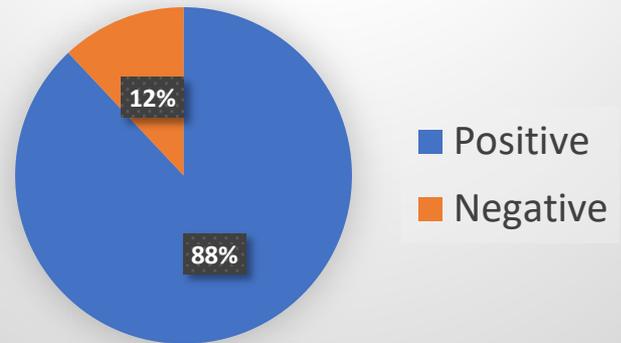
It is very important to note that the population does not talk about ecological problems (except for environmental pollution), because the situation in Stepantsminda in this respect in the borough and municipality is quite good. The interviews revealed that Stepantsminda is a very safe region for both tourists and locals.

Scheme 2. Attitude of the population towards tourism and share of tourism in their economic activities



The positive results of tourism have in themselves led to the return of young people from the region back to the region, often in permanent and sometimes seasonal housing. Tourism developed in Stepantsminda allows residents of the surrounding villages to be employed in the lowland area during the season.

Attitudes Towards Tourism Development



Most of the interviewees mentioned that the high prices in Gudauri are giving tourists the incentive to spend nights in Stepantsminda. The opening of the Kobi-Gudauri ski lift enabled Stepantsminda to develop 4 Season Tourism throughout the year.

It is noteworthy how the respondents assess the extension of Kazbegi National Park. The survey revealed that the majority of respondents agree that the existence of Kazbegi National Park contributes to the conservation of natural resources and also to the development of the settlement. According to them, the administration of protected areas effectively manages the park and some also point out that there is a friendly attitude between them and the administration. Overall, the majority of respondents are happy to have a park in their area of residence. However, in contrast, 60% of respondents stated that they were not aware of the National Park Expansion Initiative. Only a small proportion of respondents report that their daily activities are related to the existence of the park, and only 4% of respondents confirm that they have received business development support from the park administration.

Qualitative research results

After the completion of the first phase of the study through the summarizing process of the primary outcomes, students have moved to the second stage in which five main working dimensions were identified, such as:

- Tourist infrastructure and services
- The linkages between tourism and other economic fields;
- Perception and evaluation of local tourism resources;
- Nature conservation and land use issues of protected areas;
- Management and development challenges.

Before the students were divided into groups, Tamara Mitrofanenko - Doctor of BOKU University delivered her first presentation within the summer school for students regarding the research methods (Particularly the method/concept of network analysis was discussed). Prior to the study

they acquired new knowledge as well as specified all existing questions.

After the presentation, the students in conformity to their interests were allocated in newly-established, four thematic groups. Each team had one or two mentors (*See Appendix #2*). The students conducted the qualitative study in all above-mentioned four dimensions within which the representatives/stakeholders of tourism-related areas were interviewed, namely visitors, farmers and entrepreneurs, hotels and hotel-type establishments (guesthouses), authorities of local community and municipality. The groups also studied and evaluated the natural and cultural resources located within the area of Tsagveri community. The main aim of this phase was to identify the inter-linkages between the tourism subsystems and therefore, to conduct the systematic analysis of tourism potential in Tsagveri.

Below is presented a brief overview of the actual purpose, activities, findings, and results of each thematic group.

First Group |

Tourist Infrastructure and Services

A) Road infrastructure

The number of tourists is increasing in Kazbegi municipality, which in turn requires development and improvement of tourist infrastructure and services. The locals are quite positive about these changes, as evidenced by the increase and abundance of accommodation and service facilities. However, along with these positive changes, there are several challenges that must be addressed for sustainable tourism development.

It is obvious that the first visual impression is very important for tourists. Upon arrival in Stepantsminda, a tourist sees and “feels” the improperly maintained road infrastructure on which traffic generates dust and, in many cases, this bog is set up in an area where open food units are allocated.

Roads, smart cameras, so-called "police cops" are posted on the roads, making traffic safe, but on the other hand, there are no drawn lines of infantry (so-called "zebra") near the traffic signs. There is a noticeable irregularity of pedestrian crossing pavements, which creates a danger when moving, especially when large trucks are running in the area.

In Kazbegi municipality, infrastructure improvement is underway. The municipality's

website contains information on an ongoing infrastructure project, which informs that on July 11, 2019, the Deputy Mayors, together with representatives of Construction Expert LLC, met with contractor construction companies conducting construction work in Kazbegi Municipality. Ongoing projects and challenges were discussed: construction of a bridge and a road in the direction to the village of Khanobi; Reconstruction of the bridge connecting villages Sioni and Garbani and the so-called Kobatubani shore protection works; Rehabilitation of administrative building # 2 in Stepantsminda.

B) City Centre Turned into a Parking Lot

In Stepantsminda municipality there is abundance of transport facilities and heavy traffic along the main road, which in turn causes the problem of car parking. There are several parking areas in the municipality, one of which is located next to the Alexander Kazbegi (famous Georgian writer of 19th century) monument on the main square of the city, where cars are chaotically stopped and parked. The contextual load of this public space would be better used for recreational and cognitive purposes. Some of the hotels in the empty area

that need to be redesigned have become arbitrary parking lots, making it impossible to use the area properly, i.e. as a public space.

There is another parking area adjacent to the Gergeti Trinity Church, which is located directly on the drive. Given the complexity of the terrain and the scarcity of land, it is understandable that it is difficult to select an alternative parking area, but in our view, for better visual effects, it is preferable to use pavement instead of asphalt, where grass cover can fill up spaces between tiles, making it more suited to the environment.

Most notably, "New Parking", which is best localized among other parks, is a bit remote from the settlement, does not harass and threaten the movement of citizens and does not distort the appearance of public space.

C) The strengths of infrastructure and its challenges

The abundance of guesthouses and hotels, which help to attract large numbers of tourists, is a definite strength. Furthermore, it should be taken into consideration that the accommodation facilities are not focused only on one type of visitors but rather on different income tourists, and more or less successfully meet their needs and requirements. Consequently, this allows to satisfy not only the interests of a specific, narrow group of high-income tourists, but also the broader

masses of holidaymakers and visitors. Examples include International Hotel Rooms in Stepantsminda, which is geared towards higher-income tourists (with its spa center, indoor pool, restaurant, etc.) and "guesthouses" at affordable prices for lower-income tourists.

Strong aspects of infrastructure should also be attributed to a good street-cleaning system, in particular the disposal of waste bins. People in Stepantsminda do not complain about their lack neither in the center nor in the distance. The bins were at a reasonable distance from each other and observations made during fieldwork showed that bins as well as their adjacent areas were always clean, indicating the systematic nature of the cleaning process. Among the infrastructure challenges, the most important are the poor sanitary-hygienic environment caused by lack of public toilets and their proper maintenance. It is noteworthy that existing public toilets are very small and their sanitary and hygienic conditions are not satisfactory. This is largely due to the fact that toilets are old-fashioned and not provided with water from the central water supply system, but are supplied with small pre-filled water vessels.

Temporarily closed museums that could be of particular interest to certain groups of tourists are not operational (due to ongoing rehabilitation works), and it is also a significant challenge. When operational, they can be considered as an additional source of income for the Kazbegi municipality. Take, for

example, the Alexander Kazbegi House Museum, which was granted the status of a National Heritage Site. It should also be noted that several dysfunctional buildings, most of which are in the shape of ruins, have amazing panoramic views. One notable example of this is the former cab (cable-car) building, which can be transformed into a cafe (one of the options), from which tourists will enjoy stunning views.

An important challenge is the issue of building construction regulations. During the research, buildings were identified that were out of context. One of them significantly overrides the roadway and distorts the look of the site. It is also important to focus on the state of green parks and squares. It is important to increase their number and to clean them, as well as redesign and improve their appearance by regulating vegetation, planting new trees and flowers, etc.

D) Hotels and Catering: Services and Recommendations

Most hotels have catering, booking systems, WiFi supply, utilities, and other essentials. A relatively small number of hotels have online bookkeeping, social networking and credit card payments, and even a smaller hotel management system is in place. As for additional services, hotels mainly offer tourists

excursions and horse rentals, sometimes culinary master classes, guide service, transfers, car rentals, etc.

The upside of eating out is that the majority of catering units have a card payment system, video controls, WiFi, information boards, and stickers, which is an added comfort for tourists. Their disadvantages include monotonous food rations (often mentioned by tourists as a problem), lack of qualified staff, lack of master classes, and so on.

There are also problems with the relevant qualification of human resources in the hotel sector. There is no vocational training center on site, most of the large hotel staff comes from Tbilisi, which is less favorable for locals. There are also low quality of services and problems due to language barriers as many service-providers do not speak English. To solve these problems, it is advisable to create a system platform where knowledge can be generated and shared.

Based on the above, it is possible to make the following recommendations: revitalization of non-functioning buildings; staff qualification trainings, the lack of which is obvious and noticeable in the case of employees in various positions in Stepantsminda; in addition, it would be desirable to arrange a variety of festivals and to add different entertainment venues, and to refine the existing infrastructure discussed above.

Second Group | The Linkages Between Tourism and other Economic Fields

The development of the tourism sector depends on many factors, especially on the development of other economic sectors. These sectors include agriculture, construction, education, healthcare, transport and other auxiliary branches.

It is noteworthy that **agriculture**, whose high level of performance will greatly contribute to the tourism sector, is nowadays less developed in local communities and households. The locals are unable to produce locally sufficient products for tourist supply. This is explained by their economic inconsistency, so that they have to buy agricultural products from outside markets, often from foreign import. This implies additional costs for local tourist suppliers. The survey confirms that most hotels and food units are supplied from Tbilisi; not enough meat and dairy products are produced on site. As for fruits and vegetables, during the season there is a good quality product and it is possible to get supplies from the villages near Stepantsminda, however, at other times of the year products are brought from Tbilisi. The percentage of fruit imported according to the study was distributed as follows: from Iran - 17%, from Turkey - 28%, and non-domestic production from other regions of Georgia - 55%. There are some exceptions: for example, one of the most distinctive locally

grown vegetables is lettuce. It is distinguished by its broad assortment and high quality, and is grown by a local farmer who determined a big demand for this product among tourists and visitors.

As for other local production, beekeeping has developed here (since 2004 in Gergeti), they have 12 beehives and 70% of the production costs are financed by the local municipality. There is also a tradition of beekeeping in the village of Khurtisi. The main selling area is the local market (including local people). With the development of agriculture, the village will be able to provide tourists with their own products.

According to the hotels demand, separate projects are planned in Stepantsminda, in particular cultivation of raspberry culture. This is Elkana's project "Trial Farming - Raspberry Culture".

The study also identified challenges related to **construction**: insufficient qualification among local population necessitates the recruitment of technical personnel from other regions (Terjola, Telavi, Gori, Zestafoni, Guria, Samegrelo, Marneuli). The choice of building materials stores is also limited - only two stores of construction materials are in place. As part of the study, an interview was conducted with the manager of the Mtskheta-Mtianeti construction enterprise, who said that Stepantsminda facilities are being supplied by building materials from Mtskheta-Mtianeti region. In Stepantsminda mostly family hotels and private houses are built. Only 20% of Georgian building material is used.

We also present the Booking platform analytics regarding construction. The dynamic shows that massively hotel loads have begun since 2014. The highest percentage was recorded at 22% in 2017 and 28% in 2018. The results of the surveyed respondents, from when their facility started functioning, coincide with the high rate of 20-26% in 2017-2018. Based on this data, public attitudes towards tourism growth are clear. They believe that exactly the tourism industry is the leading sector for improving the economic situation.

The **education** sector is no less important and is intertwined with the tourism industry. A number of issues inevitably have been identified in this field as well. It is important that there are no vocational training centers in the municipality. Consequently, as mentioned above, there is a lack of qualifications among staff at hotel and food establishments. Because of this, there is a noticeable increase in the number of staff arriving from Tbilisi, mainly in large hotels. The two most important barriers are: the language barrier and the quality of service.

After analyzing the interviews, the level of staff qualification according to the responses of the local respondents was as follows: high - 52%, medium - 44%, low - 4%. Also, the criteria for determining priorities in the selection of personnel are not relevant. The majority of hotel owners stated that they preferred personnel with foreign language skills and relevant experience when selecting staff, while the reality shows that personal connections and kinship are the top priorities. If the municipality considers that the main area of development in Stepantsminda is the tourism industry, then we recommend the creation of a systematic platform where knowledge can be generated and shared to eliminate the barriers mentioned above.

Another important issue is **health protection**. During the research, the group studied ambulances and first aids. A survey of pharmacists found that the supply of medicines is satisfactory. The hospital is equipped with state-of-the-art equipment, though not enough staff. A rescue helicopter and, in rare cases, a Hotel Room's helicopter, can be assisted but a serious emergency situation has been also reported.

Stepantsminda does not have facility for resuscitation, there is no disaster brigade, and a license is suspended for childbirth. This is a very hindering factor for locals and tourists too. It is necessary to rectify the current situation in order to promote tourism development. The good news is that a local honors student is funded with tuition, but a minimum of three years of local clinic experience is required. This is a very positive factor for the development of the health care industry and for replacing older staff.

The **transport sector** is directly connected with tourism. During the survey, we found that free transport is provided to administration staff, though transport hours are limited and, most importantly, there is no means of transport between nearby villages. The population survey also raised the following problematic issues: there is no fixed transport price; a proper ticketing system does not exist; security and maintenance are not regulated; automobile repair service is inconsistent; traffic rules (especially speeding) are frequently violated; the noise and dust produced by trailers and tracks cause discomfort. The most beloved and frequently used transport by locals, especially for tourist services, is Mitsubishi 'Delica', which one will often find in the downtown area, but service fees are not fixed, which is major inconvenience for holidaymakers.

With the funding and efforts of the Consortium 'Legal Aid Georgia' the **Local Action Group (LAG)** is

implementing different projects. Thanks to such projects, the municipality has acquired formerly non-existent important additional service areas such as Beauty Salon ('Barberia'), laundry unit, etc. Additionally, due to financial support of the all-Georgian governmental program "Produce in Georgia" from 2018 a car-washing facility was opened in Stepantsminda. Those auxiliary service areas are equally essential for both the local population and holidaymakers.

Third Group | Tourist Resources and Experiences

The purpose of the third group's research was to **evaluate local tourism resources and determine new sightseeing sites and vantage points**, with a view to landscape planning. Throughout the research, team members, by interviewing locals and visualizing the area, identified places, facilities and natural resources that are not used as tourist sites so far but have a potential to be used for this purpose. The sites were selected based on the principles of landscape planning perception and according to relevance of those facilities to successful practices.

According to the study most tourists arriving in Stepantsminda have a similar route, which is limited to very few destinations such as, for instance, town centre, Trinity Church, Rooms hotel, etc. The group members identified six sites that could be used for tourism to increase both the flow of tourists and their better distribution, which would reduce the concentration of their large streams in just few places:

- ❖ Fanchet Mineral Water Spa - is a carbonated mineral water that can be used for medicinal purposes, in particular for the treatment of synovial joints. Initially the

group members had difficulty of finding the facility due to the lack of information boards and were only able to approach the place after interviewing locals.

- ❖ Big and Small Arsh Waterfalls - the group members only reached the small waterfall of Arsh, also called "Woman's Hair" due to the irregular paths. There is also a large waterfall near Arush, which has no access by the trail. Like the mineral water of Fanchet, there is no information board there.
- ❖ Achkhoti Sulfur Water - medicinal water used to treat gastrointestinal problems. There is no information board either, and the team members found the place again with the help of locals. The water is contaminated.
- ❖ A football stadium at the entrance to Kazbegi - the natural conditions of Kazbegi allow for the development of sports tourism. Sports tourism is a journey to participate actively or passively in a sporting event. Sports tourism is becoming one of the most popular forms of leisure and entertainment worldwide. Georgia has a synthesis of sea and mountain air. This allows for the perfect execution of sporting activities: both sporting events as well as

training sessions for professionals and amateurs. Kazbegi municipality is an attractive location in this direction. Many tourists are attracted to visit a sports stadium in the mountainous place like Stepantsminda. Putting the appropriate infrastructure at the Kazbegi football stadium may serve to attract such tourists. The successful practices of similar football stadiums in the mountainous region can be found in Madeira, Portugal and Andorra - Estadi Comunal d'Andorra la Vella.

- ❖ Pine and poplar trees grove around the village Gergeti - it is a very beautiful place that can be used as a tourist destination by installing some kind of lighting/illumination or some other beautification. A similar practice can be found in the "Forest of Light" located in La Canada-Flintridge, Los Angeles, USA.



Photo. Stadium in Madeira, Portugal



Photo. Pine and poplar trees grove



Photo. Kazbegi football stadium



Photo. "Forest of Light"

The research also outlines the Panorama Kazbegi Revival Initiative, based on approaches used in other Georgian cities.



Photo. Panorama Kazbegi

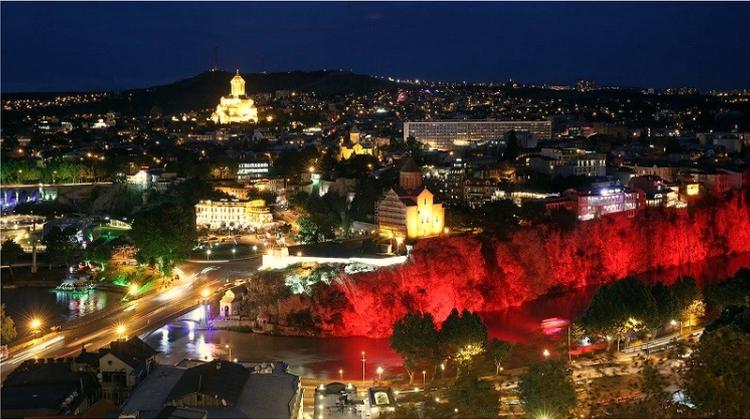


Photo. Metekhi, Tbilisi

The survey identified natural resources and, consequently, some issues that could be used as a basis for building on a tourism development plan including natural resources (mineral waters, waterfalls, groves) for medical tourism, sports tourism, landscape aesthetics and landscape design.

However, for the development of the tourism sector it is also necessary:

1. Identifying and inventorying nature sights.
2. Identifying and inventorying points of observation (effective landscapes).
3. Tourism-recreational assessment of water bodies (mineral waters, rivers, lakes, waterfalls, etc.).
4. Ecological assessment of the environment (noise, erosion, degradation, pollution, etc.).
5. Evaluation of the ethnocultural environment - historical sites and buildings.
6. Opportunities for development of sports tourism - rocks, groves, caves, fields.
7. Studying potential and traditions of use of medicinal waters and herbs.
8. Compilation of new tourist routes.

Fourth Group | Kazbegi National Park – issues of nature conservation and land-use

In the framework of the study, the fourth group of students was studying the issues of nature conservation and land use in the Kazbegi municipality. In the second phase of the study, the topics covered by the fieldwork included: villages of Stepantsminda and four communities of Kazbegi municipality (Kobi, Gorisikhe, Sioni, Sno). It should be noted that qualitative methods were used to conduct 10 in-depth interviews with several target groups:

- Responsible national institutions;
- Representatives of APA;
- Mountain people living around the villages of KNP;
- Stakeholders of local institutions (e.g., diocese).

The in-depth interview discussion plan included the following main discussion topics:

- Conflicts of interest (expected economic impacts)
- Awareness and involvement
- Tourism and Kazbegi National Park

It is noteworthy that the systema analysis of the stakeholders revealed the main actors and their interrelationships with the whole system in different dimensions.



Awareness and involvement: Are locals left behind?

Besides the establishment of 'Friends of KNP' and a Regional Advisory Board with various functions for awareness raising, the KNP administration implemented additional education activities on the local level. Despite these efforts, the survey results show that 60 percent of the respondents were not informed regarding the extension process. This deficit of information left room for the spreading of misinformation and misunderstanding around this initiative; a large proportion of the respondents who had information regarding the changing borders noted that they were not clearly aware of the purpose of national park expansion.

KNP and Locals: Competitors in Tourism?

It is not new for KNP that part of its resources is spent on the construction of a new administration center, developing tourist infrastructure in order to attract more visitors to the municipality. Based on the narratives gathered, it was observed that such activities hinder cooperation between the locals and PA for conservation purposes. Interestingly, from the perspective of local actors, a PA which owns more resources than them has a better opportunity to become a tourism service provider and develop 'mass tourism' that will compete with the community's own tourism business. They clearly highlight that the KNP administration should ensure the sound involvement of local people in tourism activities.

- The population has a fear that the National Park Administration will independently launch "mass tourism" for commercial purposes, bypassing local actors / communities and placing them in unfair competition.
- Kazbegi National Park should ensure the involvement of local people in tourism activities.

They emphasize the need for the Kazbegi National Park Administration to ensure the healthy involvement and participation of local people in tourism activities.

Based on the analysis of the results of the research, the members of the group have devised practical ways of solving the challenges that have been submitted to the Kazbegi National Park Administration as an offer and illustrate the following:

- Involve young generation in protected area activities - Provide education, increase responsibility (eg promote / promote young ranger programs);

- Creation of new tourist paths and spatial distribution of visitors (applying the practice of Mestia municipality example);
- National Park Visitor Monitoring App - according to their interests. Offer itineraries and gather traffic information for visitors (for example the NPHK app).

Fifth Group | Management and development challenges

The topic of the fifth group was to study how the **management** is implemented in the municipality and how to cope with the **development challenges**. During the survey, the interviews have been conducted with three key management agents at the local level: the mayor of Kazbegi municipality, the head of the Kazbegi Development Team, and the Kazbegi National Park Administration.

As it was mentioned in the previous sections, the results of the first phase of survey showed that the majority (88%) of the population has a positive attitude towards tourism development, while 55% of the respondents' main economic activities is also related to tourism. Tourism has become a major sector of Kazbegi's economy. Accordingly, we wondered how much attention the local government is paying to tourism development. Although the authorities emphasize the role of tourism, tourism priorities are not reflected neither in the structure of the City Hall nor in the Kazbegi municipality budget. The City Hall structure does not have a department whose main function would be to address tourism-related issues.

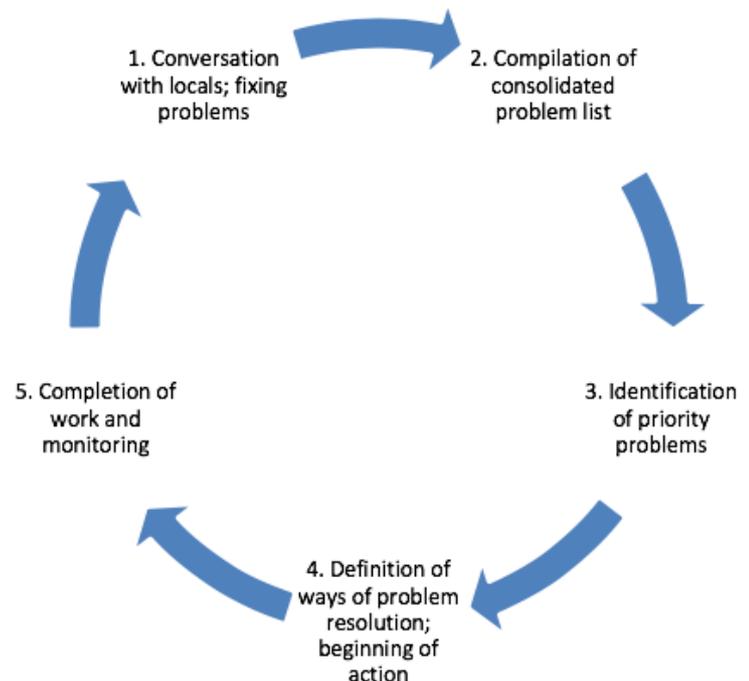
The municipality's budget which will allocate funds for 2019-2022 identifies 5 priority areas, namely:

1. Infrastructure construction, rehabilitation and operation;
2. Education;
3. Culture, religion, youth and sports activities;
4. Health and social protection of the population;
5. Governance and defense.

It shows that tourism is not considered a priority area in the budget.

The meeting at the municipality outlined how the municipality and the community are collaborating, how much the local community is involved in the management process, and how this engagement is implemented. Before, in case of complaints, problems, and recommendations, the population had been approaching directly the mayor, however, since very recent an advisory group is formed to focus on meetings with local people: listening to their requests and suggestions, and looking for ways of problem resolution. For this purpose, a newly renovated special space was allocated in the Kazbegi municipality building. An existing pattern of problem identification and resolution by local administration is shown as a chart below:

Scheme. Cyclic process of the research



This is a cyclic process and after identification and resolution of each particular problem a new round for a new problem starts.

Another issue highlighted in the research is the cooperation between the municipality and the Kazbegi Local Action Group (LAG). The research revealed that a Memorandum of Understanding was already prepared to be signed in the near future between Kazbegi Municipality and LAG. Speaking to the mayor, LAG expressed its willingness to cooperate with the Kazbegi Development Group and requested to delegate certain functions from the municipality to the LAG which is now officially fixed by the agreement.

During the research, the group members faced the problem of access to certain information. In particular, Municipality priorities, strategic and action plans, municipality projects and programs were not available on the Kazbegi Municipality website - Kazbegi.gov.ge. We were told in the municipality that due to the rapid change of the action plans it is not possible to timely and accurately post information. Obviously, this shortcoming needs the fast improvement.

Another issue concerns a general land-use plan of Stepantsminda - planning and construction regulations of the settlement. During the meeting in the municipality it was confirmed that there is a general plan that has not been approved yet, at the time of the survey. However, in order to reduce uncontrolled construction, which has a negative impact on the appearance and functioning of the borough, especially when it comes to replacing old, traditional buildings (mainly wooden houses) with new concrete and metal structures, there are regulations and norms that must be observed during construction.

The regulations relate to the location, height, length and width of the building. The regulations were also not approved at the time of the study.

During the first phase of the survey, the challenges have been identified regarding Stepantsminda's infrastructure, namely: (1) transit traffic, (2) road rehabilitation, (3) lack of well-equipped public space. At each meeting in the municipality it was stated that there are ongoing projects seeking to address these issues, namely: the construction of a 9 km long tunnel is underway at Tsikere-Kobi, which will relieve traffic congestion; a project is underway for the rehabilitation of the Stepantsminda center and various roads.

As for the meeting with the Kazbegi National Park Administration, one important issue point to be outlined: the administration emphasized that the main function of Kazbegi National Park is to protect biodiversity and not to attract tourists, so some regulations are needed to prevent tourists from going everywhere and damaging the nature.

The management and development challenges associated with tourism development in Kazbegi can be summarized as follows:

1. Unplanned tourism development, lack of long-term strategy; non-existence of effective place management organizations (DMOs).
2. Lack of strategic and coordinated marketing.
3. Infrastructure problems and inadequate waste management.

According to the internationally accepted classifications, tourist destinations can be marked in red, yellow or green zones. The red zone implies that the situation is critical and requires strict regulations (such as overcrowding, uncontrolled construction, distortion of appearance, impairment of local culture and traditions, etc.), yellow zone - the situation is still acceptable but requires precautionary measures. and the green zone - tourism development is sustainable.

Based on the results of the study, we can say that Stepantsminda belongs mostly to the yellow zone, from which it can move either to the red or to green one. In order to assure transition to green, not to red zone, a strong governance body is needed to develop a long-term strategic development plan with specialization in tourism-related issues. This can be done by setting up a service(s) within the existing management body or by setting up an independent entity. Such an entity could be DMO, whose main function will be to manage the tourism activities of the place, in this case of the borough Stepantsminda.

DMO functions may include management, marketing and/or branding. The DMO can accomplish all three functions as well as it can concentrate on only one of those. In addition, functions can be implemented at the national, regional and local levels. DMO practices already exist in other regions of Georgia (Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kakheti, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti). A successful example can be also seen in the mountainous resorts of Austria where DMO "Austrian National Tourism Office" functions on national level.

Third phase of the research

In the third phase, on the basis of the information obtained by the groups, were unified the knowledge gained in a different sphere, and the groups managed to draw overall and more comprehensive picture. The groups created one common, properly structured presentation reflecting the information received from the previous stages of the research.

The presentation reflected the works, which included: field research, collecting basic data (based on zoning principle), interviews with the stakeholders, data analysis and conclusions, development of possible scenarios, and recommendations.

Based on the above mentioned, the research revealed the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Borough Stepantsminda and Kazbegi municipality. **SWOT analysis has been developed.**

Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)	Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Favourable location (regarding Tbilisi and in the border zone), good accessibility; • Existence of transit routes (between Georgia and Russia); • Unique local culture and traditions; • Affordable prices (compared to Gudauri ski resort); • Attractive environment and climate; • Mineral waters; • Cultural-historical monuments (e.g. Gergeti Trinity Church); • Kazbegi National Park; • Low level of crime; • Active involvement of the most part of local population in problem resolution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonality of tourist activities; • Underdeveloped agriculture; • Scarcity of locally produced goods; • Non-existence of specialized tourism entity; • Lack of tourist infrastructure (entertainments, parks, attractions); • Location of transit motorway amongst the borough centre; • Insufficient quality of services (except few cases); • Shortage of local qualified personnel and lack of on-job training possibilities; • Paucity (monotony) of offered tourist activities, products and services; • Weak cooperation and mistrust between local population and KNP administration; • Strong dependence on a single economic sector – tourism; • Non-existence of long-term vision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploration of unused tourist resources and diversification of tourist products/offers; • Preparation of promotional image-making clip of Stepantsminda; • Activation of winter tourist season by developing tight links with Gudauri ski resort; • Stronger and broader usage of information technologies; • Implementation of internal quality assurance system for tourist products and services; • Exhibition and dissemination of local products, souvenirs and printed items at guesthouses and hotels; • Organization of open markets/fairs and exhibition-sell of local products; • Opening of training centres for training of local personnel; • Maintenance of the borough centre (regulation of car parking, re-design of public spaces); • Giving new functions to obsolete and ruined old buildings • Establishing local festival, organizing cultural cognitive events; • Adoption of the Stepantsminda land-use master plan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertain and instable political and economic situation (geopolitical aspect); • High dependence on tourism economy; • Ecological threats (natural risks, car emission, hydro energy station construction, uncontrol landfills); • Outmigration of young local population; • Loosing authenticity, including conflict of newbuild structures with natural landscapes and local traditions; • Increasing conflicts between local communities and Kazbegi National Park administration.

Scenario Development

Prior to the elaboration of the final presentation Dr Tamara Mitrofanenko delivered for students 2 more academic presentations on: (1) System analysis, and (2) Scenario development. The first presentation was focused on tourism sector sub-systems and connections/interactions between them, while the second one explained a technic of developing different scenarios and their analyses, and it also embraced examples from different foreign countries.

Based on the acquired theoretical knowledge, collected field information and personal experiences during the field-study, the students have formulated two scenarios (short- and middle-term) for tourism development in Stepantsminda.

Scenario 1 - Anticipated (current stage) Scenario

Stepantsminda remains focused on the already existing tourism trends

- The income of population grows slowly.
- Tourism remains the only source of income.
- Diversification of tourism spaces is slow.
- The adjacent sectors are lagging compared to tourism.
- Local agricultural production cannot meet existing demand.
- Stepantsminda remains a seasonal (summer) tourist destination.
- Trends of newbuilt development contradicts and ruins Stepantsminda's authentic image.

- Qualification of local workforce remains unsatisfactory.

Expected results: Tourism remains the only main source of income for the population of Stepantsminda and the entire municipality. The local facilities of accommodation are competing with each other for getting visitors and tourists; the level of cooperation is limited. Local tourist suppliers are falling short in meeting growing tourist demands. The communities/villages adjacent to Stepantsminda do not benefit sufficiently from increasing tourism flows. Much of revenues acquired from tourism business flies outside the municipality. The income and welfare of local population grows slowly and is distributed unequally. Outmigration of young population remains an acute problem.

Threat: In case of even small scale of deterioration of outside political and economic situation (e.g. crises in Russia) economic stability of the municipality becomes vulnerable. Overtourism during short touristic season causes deterioration of ecological conditions, Most of younger population prefers outmigration (internal or international).

Scenario 2 – Preferable scenario

Crucial preconditions:

- (i) Rising of collective awareness of local population;
 - (ii) Efficient communication and collaboration between local population, local government and Kazbegi National Park administration.
- The number of tourists increases;
 - Stepantsminda continuously increases the use of existing natural resources and landscapes for offering them to local holidaymakers and foreign tourists (e.g. waterfalls of Bigger and Smaller Arshas, Achkhoti sulfur water, Fanshet mineral water, etc.).
 - Tourist streams more actively visit formerly less-explored sightseeing sites of Kazbegi municipality such as the village Sno, Truso gorge, etc.
 - The diversification of tourist products in underway (new hiking paths, alpinist and cognitive tours and trails, etc.).
 - Local agriculture production increases in order to supply increasing touristic demand on food; some other tourist-related branches, such as handicrafts and different services, also increase.
 - Delimitation and demarcation of Kazbegi National Park is done and infrastructure is provided. Local communities are benefitting from goods and privileges provided by the Park.
 - Stepantsminda develops and grows according to the adopted land-use plan.
 - Qualification of local workforce rises thanks to training programs.

Probable outcomes:

- The links of Stepantsminda with other resorts of this region becomes stronger, and the tourist period increases (e.g. in winter hotels and guesthouses of Stepantsminda provide accommodation and transport to Gudauri to visitors coming for ski-tour).
- Strong internal links between local enterprises and widening of local supply chain (tourist services, production and food supply, etc.).
- The flows of in- and return migrants increases, and the number of population in the municipality grows.
- Investments are allocated from outside of the municipality.
- Tourist flows become decentralized and more scattered over the territory of the municipality.
- The income and quality of life of local population grows.

MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the case-study the students have elaborated the following recommendations for local administration and other stakeholders:

Improvement of the infrastructure

- Restoration and rehabilitation of functionless obsolete buildings.
- Installation of different attraction units for tourists and locals.
- Organization and maintenance of the existing infrastructure (green parks and loans, revitalization of non-functioning museums, road repair, installation of information boards).

Increasing diversity and quality of local product

- To increase variety of locally produced production.
- To support agri-tourism (bee-keeping, cattle breeding).
- To promote local agriculture.
- Development of tourism-adjacent branches of economy (e.g. handicraft and souvenir
- To establish tourist information centre. E-dissemination of tourist information, systematic update and marketing;

- production, broadening of service sector, etc.).
- To conduct trainings in the demanded issues of local population (tourism service sector, agriculture).

Intensification of internal and external cooperation

- Strengthening relations between the owners of accommodation units and tourist organizations;
- Creation of local sectoral and professional groups/unions/associations and their participation in larger (e.g. nation-wide) networks.

Development of local tourism supply-chain

- To create and strengthen a supply chain between tourism service providers, farmers and food producers, as well as other entrepreneurs (e.g. local souvenirs).
- Distributing local food and handicraft products, as well as printed promotional flyers, in local guesthouses and hotels.

Marketing activities

- Increasing knowledgeability of the place by means of branding and advertising.
- Establishing a local festival in Stepantsminda during the high tourist season.
- Organization of an annual fair in Stepantsminda.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

On July 19, students and supervisors visited Truso gorge, which is a gorge of Terek River on the northern slope of Caucasus Mountain, between the Main Caucasus Ridge and Khokhi Ridge, from Truso pass to Kobi village (length 25 kilometers). The lowest part of the gorge is 2,000 meters above sea level (at Kobi village). The entrance to Truso Gorge is some 20 km south of Stepantsminda.

Our trip to Truso Gorge started at the almost deserted village Kvemo Okrokana. Follow the road by the river we passed several abandoned houses and eventually enter beautiful Kasari canyon. After a few kilometers, we cross a bridge to the right bank of the river. Shortly behind the bridge, the trail turned to the west and the whole valley opened up before us. There we saw the first travertines, formed by local mineral springs. There are also several small mineral springs emerging in the area. On the opposite bank, we saw a small basin filled with water. Following the main road led us to another group of forming travertines, this time of mostly red color.



Photo: A group of TSU students and teachers in Truso Gorge

Further down the road lies Ketrissi village, mostly in ruins, but few houses are still occupied. At the end of the village we found a monastery and a nunnery. Then it's only a short walk to the ruins of Zakagori fortress. There is a Georgian check-point preventing to go deeper in the valley, as it borders with breakaway so called South Ossetia district. However, we were allowed to climb the hill and explore the ruins of the fortress.

CONCLUSION

The 10-day field works conducted in Stepantsminda showed how important transdisciplinary approach is to identify the tourist potential of the place, to study the socio-economic situation and the sustainable development of the region, in general. On the basis of such a complex approach, it was possible to find out many important details or moments characteristic for the Kazbegi region. With the involvement of students of three different disciplines through sharing their knowledge to each other in the research process, successful completion of all stages of research was possible. Using the quantitative research method, along with the study of natural resources, natural and cultural monuments, on the first stage the group created the socio-economic picture of Stepantsminda borough. On the second stage, using the in-depth interview method, it became possible to get acquainted with the specificity of actions, views and attitudes of different stakeholders to tourism business. This made it possible to create the SWOT analysis, the most realistic and necessary recommendations were done and finally two scenarios of development were created.

Finally, it should be mentioned that the Kazbegi region is indeed an interesting place with its tourist potential; it has enough resources to develop '4 seasons tourism'. That may happen only if local communities will efficiently utilize most of their resources, and will learn to deal with existing challenges and resolve most acute problems.

Annexes

Annex N1 - The distribution of students in the second stage by sector (into 5 groups)

Tourism Infrastructure and Services:

Tamar Gelashvili
 Gvantsa Melanashvili
 Mariam Mkervalishvili
 Nino Sikharulidze
 Nino Arachemia
 Khatia Gelashvili

Leader: Nino Pavliashvili

Tourism ties with other sectors:

Mary Kakhelishvili
 Mariam Datishvili

Mariam Tsotskolauri
 Khatia Meskhia

Leader: Merab Khokhobaia

Kazbegi National Park:

Nana Deisadze
 Mariam Khizanishvili
 Tamar Odilavadze
 Ivane Khrikuli
 Leaders: Gvantsa Salukvadze, Temur Gugushvili

Tourism resources and management:

Temo Dvalishvili
 Tinatin Archvadze
 Archil Khuskivadze
 Mariam Revazishvili
 Giorgi Kapanadze
 Leader: Gia Meladze

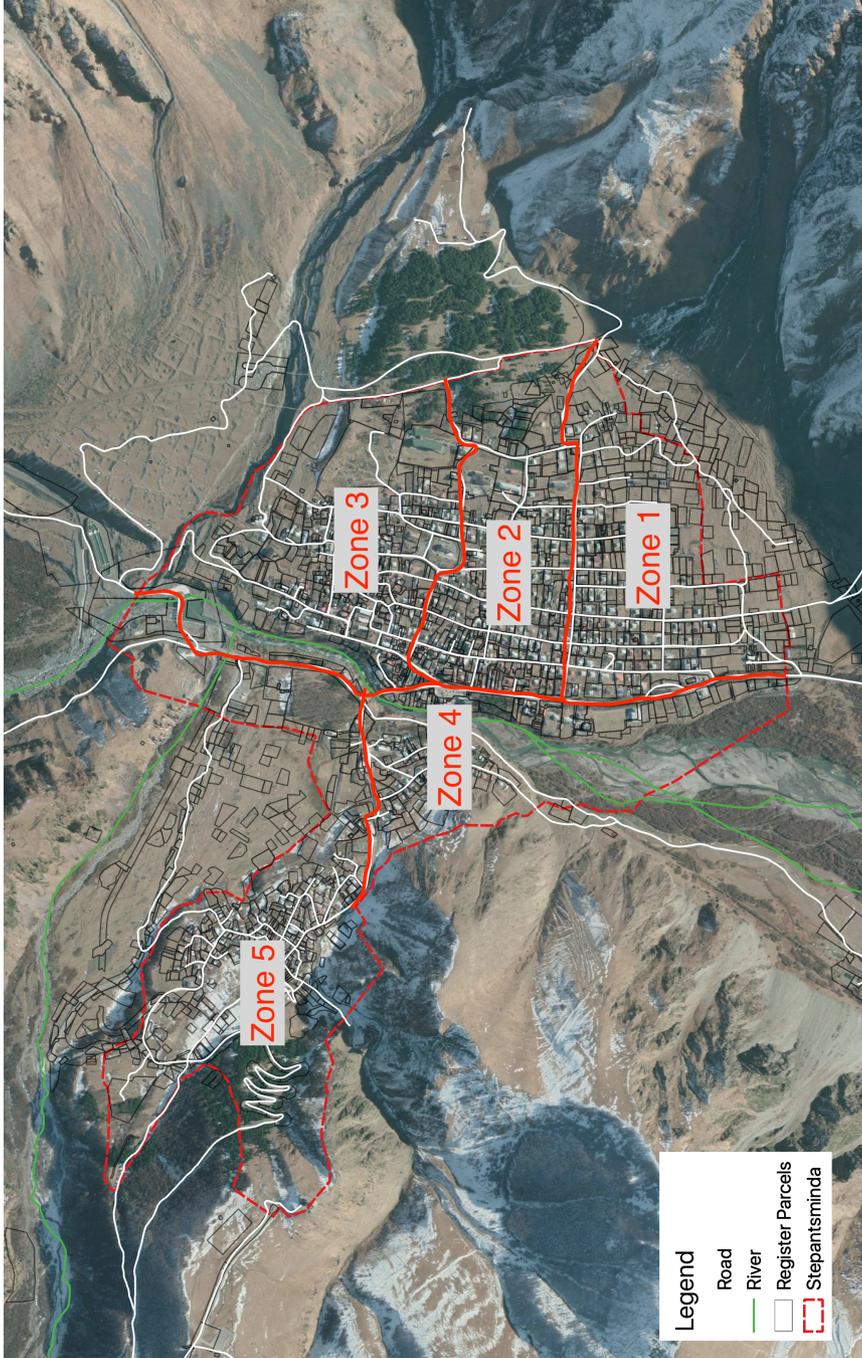
Management and development challenges:

David Nadiradze
 Neli Kveladze
 Ani Tskvitinidze
 Nato Tezelashvili
 Leader: Joseph Salukvadze

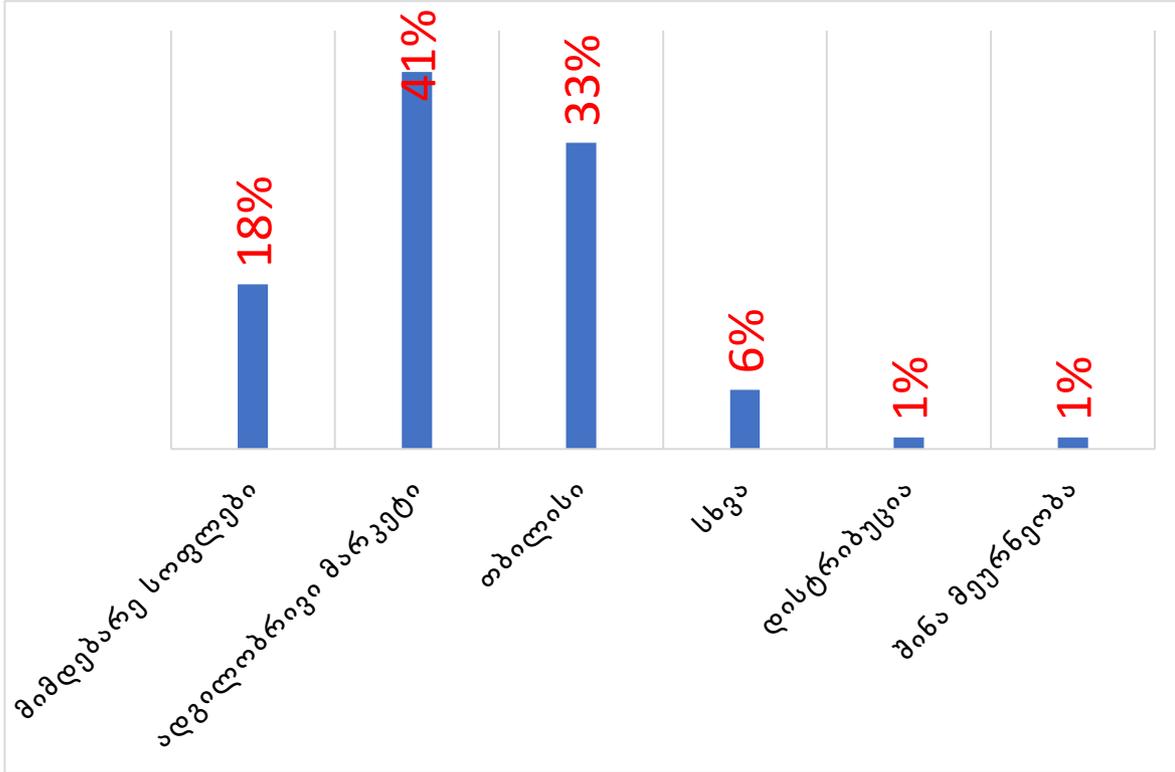
Thematic part of the Annex

Annex N3 - The Stepantsminda borough map divided into segments

Stepantsminda, Kazbegi Municipality



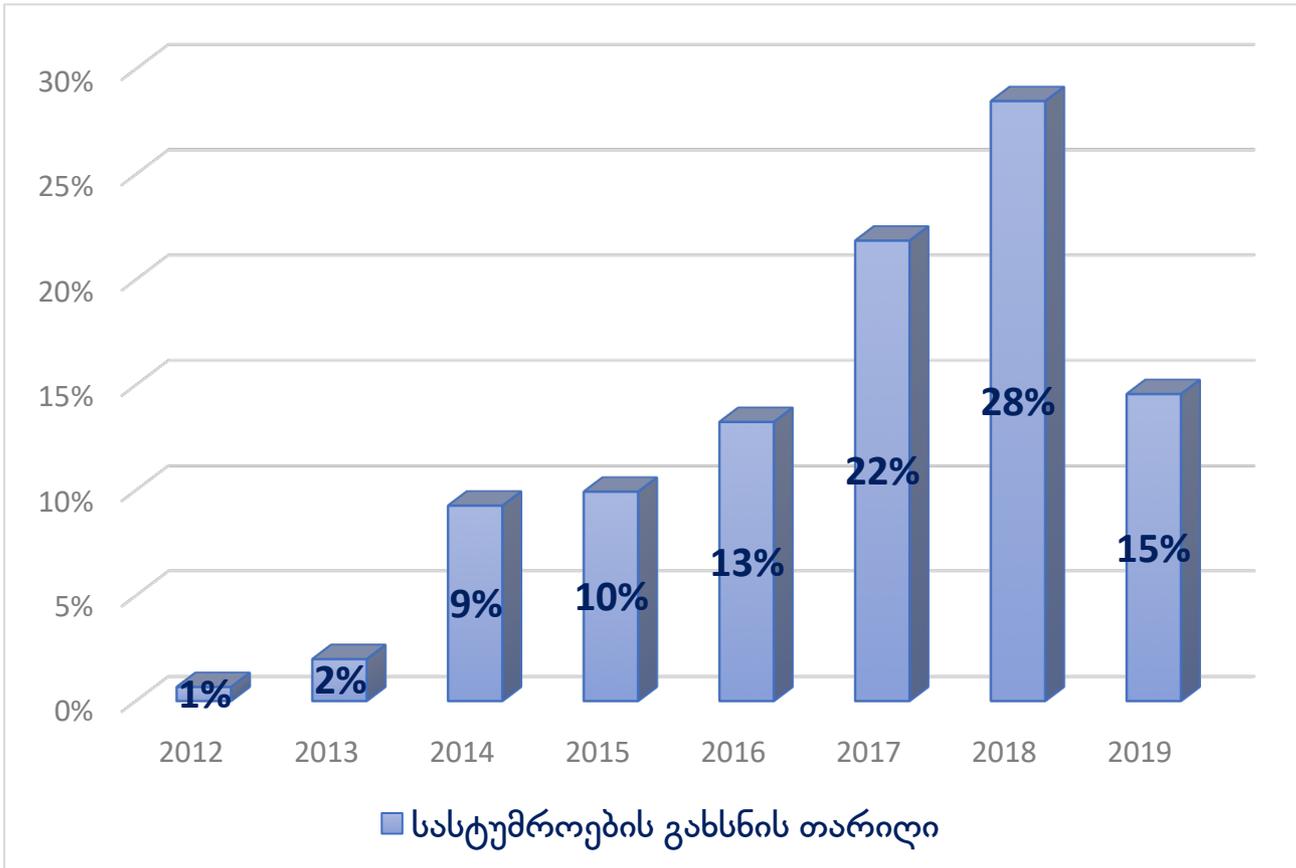
Annex N4 - Supply of Stepantsminda Borough with products



Description: 18% (surrounded villages), 41% (local market), 33% (Tbilisi), 6% (other), 1% (distribution), 1% (local household).

Source: Research

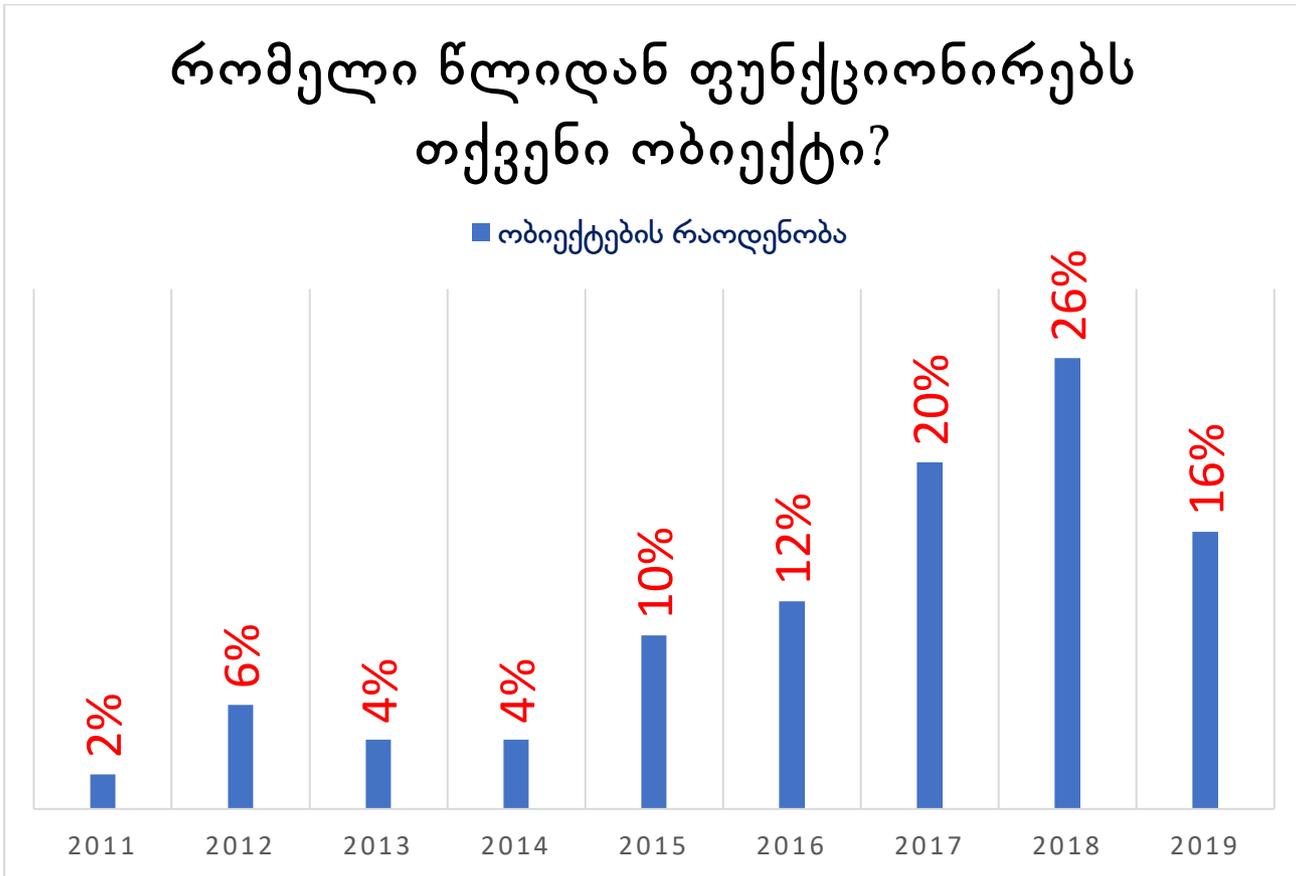
Annex #5 - Construction - Booking platform analytics as part of construction



Description: the year of the opening of hotels

Source: booking.com

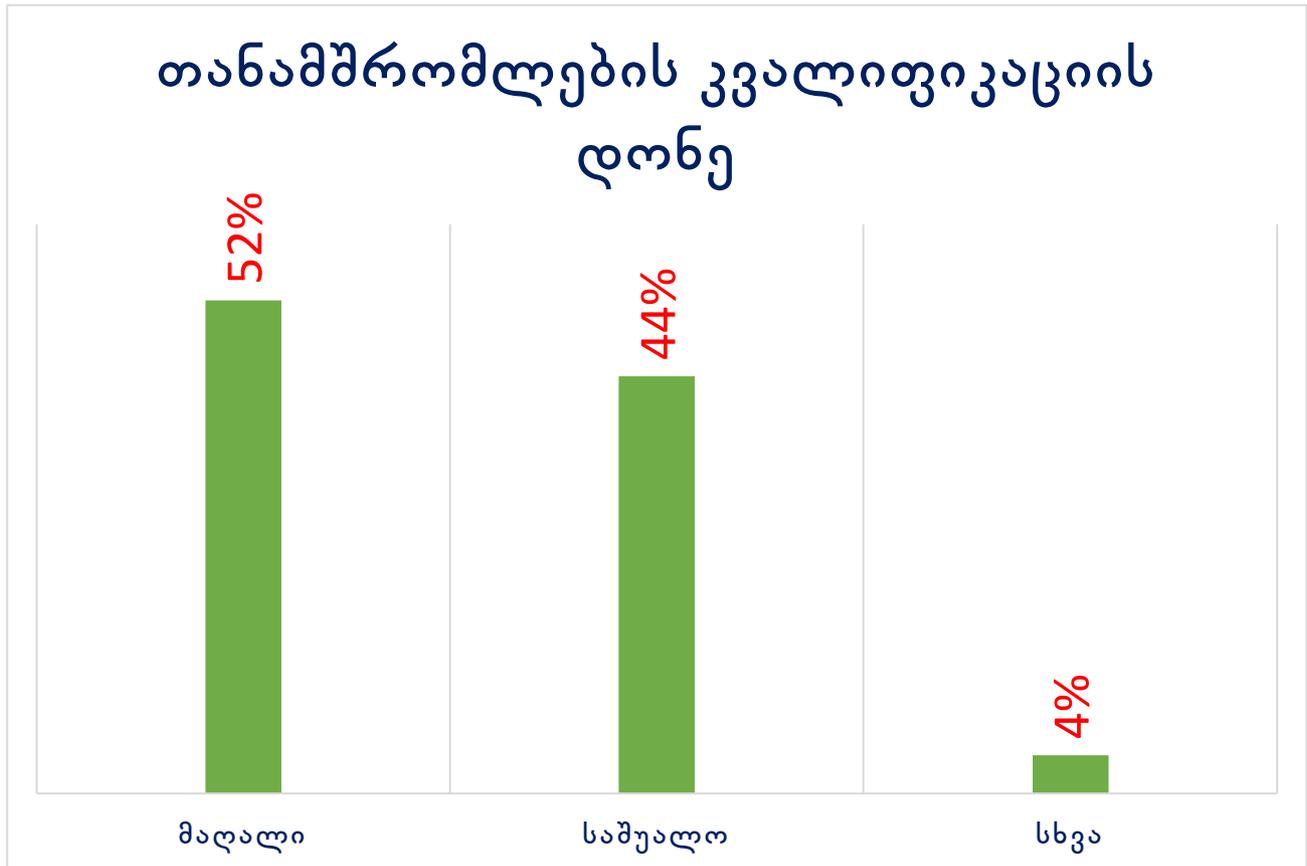
Annex #6 The Operation of the tourist objects



Description: The number of the tourist objects

Source: Interview

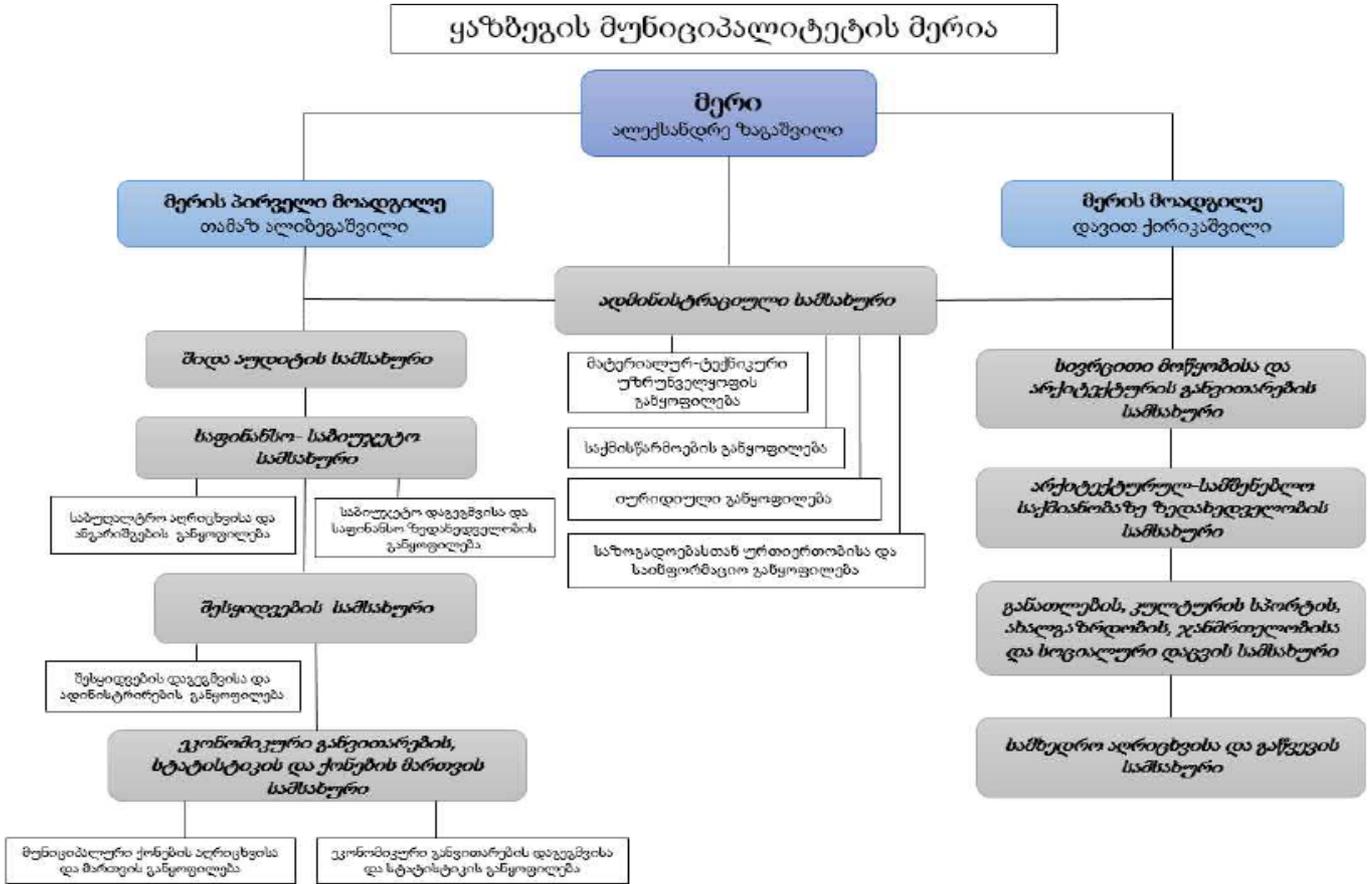
Annex #7 – Satisfaction level of the employees



Description: 52% (high), 44% (average), 4% (other)

Source: Research

Annex #8 – Structure of the Kazbegi Municipality



Source : <http://www.kazbegi.gov.ge/ge/struktura-da-punkciebis-agcera>

Annex # 8 - List of local stakeholders

1. Shorena Sujashvili, Kazbegi Local Development Group (LAG)
2. Kakhi Janukashvili, Local Farmer, Owner of Family Hotel, Representative of Kazbegi Municipality Agricultural Service
3. Natia Sabauri, “Barberia” Beauty Salon
4. Otar Tsamalaidze, Director of Kazbegi National Park
5. Nino Geladze, Kazbegi Municipality
6. Ketino Sujashvili, Guesthouse owner
7. Zurab Chkhaidze - Kazbegi Municipality Infrastructure Service
8. Marina Chkareuli - Head of Administration of Kazbegi Protected Areas
9. Tamuna Kobidze - Representative of the Hotel "Stanzia Kazbegi"
- 10. Elizbar Janukashvili - Owner of Hotel "Stanzia Kazbegi"**

The Case-study photo-report

Photo 1,2,3: Group work and presentations with Austrian students

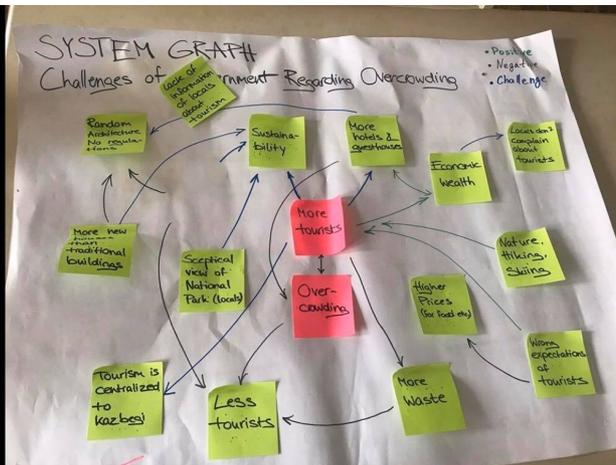


Photo 4. Summary of the first stage of the study with students by Gvantsa Salukvadze



Photo 5. Lecture of Christian Maurer



Photo 6. Brainstorming among students and professors

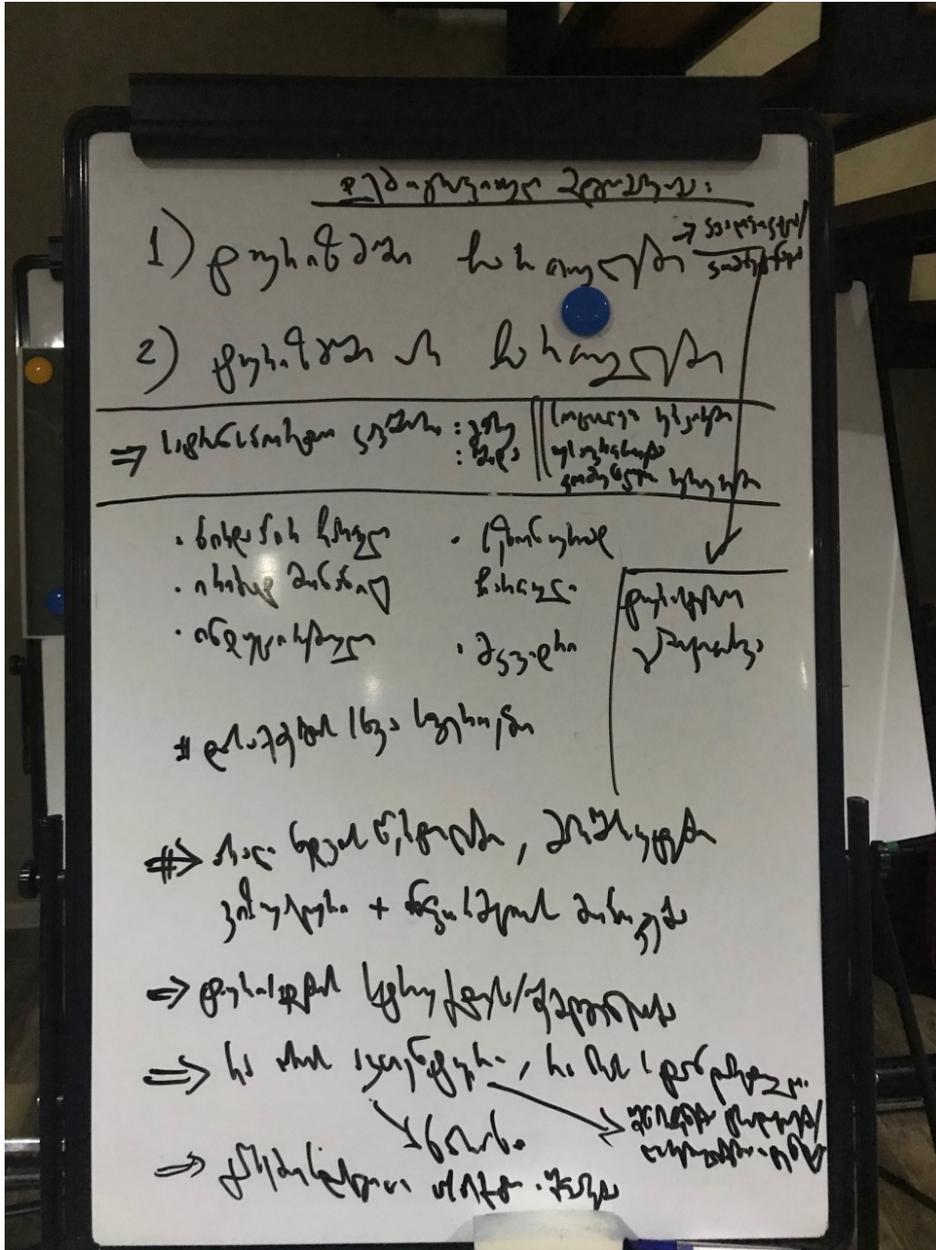
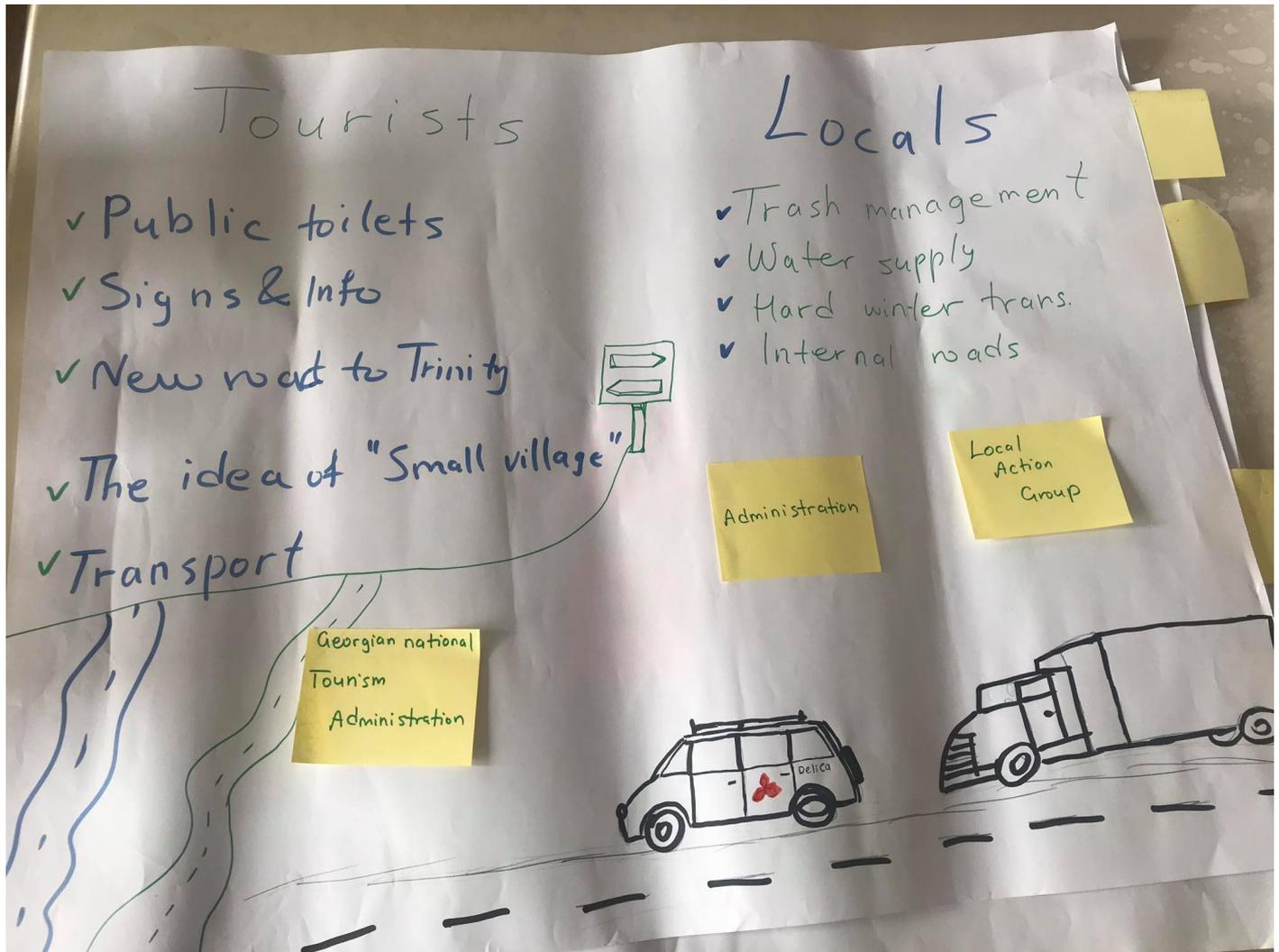


Photo 7.8. Presentation poster of Georgian and Austrian students



Challenges of government regarding overcrowding

Scenario I

- More tourists
- Locals with higher income move away because it is crowded
- Workers stay and can not afford the prices
- Local culture will be gone
- Prices will rise

→ Village of tourists (e.g. Hallstat)

Information event by National Park

Reuse of old buildings

Upgrade City Center

Provide information online for tourists

Land register & architectural guidelines

Trash bins

Trash info-signs

Scenario II

- Education and information of locals and government about the main problems and sustainable development.
- Regulations and possibilities/chances
- Solutions must be cheap.
- Wide range of training courses

→ Sustainable development in the village

Education & information of Government

Education, information, participation of Locals

Group 5

Photo 9. SPSS training with students by Temur Gugushvili



COLOFON

The report is made by the students

Tamar Gelashvili, Nana Deisadze, Mariam Mkervalishvili, Mariam Khizanishvili, Gvantsa Melanashvili, Nino Sikharulidze, Ivane Khrikuli, David Nadiradze

The summer school is supervised by

Prof. Joseph Salukvadze, Associate prof. Nino Pavliashvili, Associate prof. Giorgi Meladze, Assistant prof. Merab Khokhobaia

The summer school is co-supervised by Ph. D. Students

Gvantsa Salukvadze, Temur Gugushvili, Lela Khartishvili



Contact

joseph.salukvadze@tsu.ge