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The Erasmus logo is a stylized, handwritten-style script of the word "Erasmus" in a dark grey color.

Tourism development in Georgia.

A Research Paper by:

Anvar Ernazarov

MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

GDP

Supervisor:

Dr. Georgina Gomez

Second Reader:

Dr. Peter Knorringa

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Disclaimer:

This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the International Institute of Social Studies. The views stated in this research paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the Institute.

Inquiries:

International Institute of Social Studies
P.O. Box 29776
2502 LT
The Hague, The Netherlands.

telephone:	+31 70 426 0460
email:	info@iss.nl
web site:	www.iss.nl
facebook:	http: // <u>www.facebook.com/iss.nl</u>
twitter:	@issnl

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List of acronyms:

GEOSTAT – Georgian National Statistics Agency

GNTA – Georgian National Tourism Agency

UNEP – United Nations Environmental Protection

UNWTO – United Nations World Tourism Organization

WB – World Bank

WMO – World Meteorological Organization

WTTC – World

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Abstract

This paper examines tourism development in Georgia and the importance of tourism for sustainable development in Georgia. Tourism usually explained as “positive” sector. Rarely, tourism was linked to sustainability or sustainable development. However, in the last few years there has been a dramatic change in the tourism field. Many destinations around the world has reached their capacity and local communities went against tourism. The problem of tourism sustainability has been recognized for the last few years. With the huge increase of our world population and with more potential tourists from emerging markets like Russia, China and India, it is crucial to pay more attention to sustainability in the tourism sector and tourism management. Especially, in the case of Georgia, which is the country with huge tourism potential. Georgian government has to analyse new problems in tourism sector and learn from mistakes made by European destinations which are already struggling from mass tourism and over tourism.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Nature of the problem

Tourism has become an integral part of the life of modern society. The rapid development of tourism in the second half of the twentieth century was caused not only by the growth of recreational needs, but also by expanding the range of people's needs in obtaining direct information about various phenomena, processes, objects of the surrounding world. The informational aspect of the data used is multifaceted and reflects all aspects of environmental reality. There are many different types of tourism: cultural, educational, business, extreme, sports, ecological, tourism with the purpose of recreation and entertainment. Since the beginning of the 1980s, two interrelated trends have clearly manifested themselves in the development of tourism: the global spread of high-tech standardized tourist services and the diversification of demand. Moreover, not only new tourist destinations and regions develop, but also new forms of tourism.

INTERNATIONAL TOURIST ARRIVALS 1950 - 2030

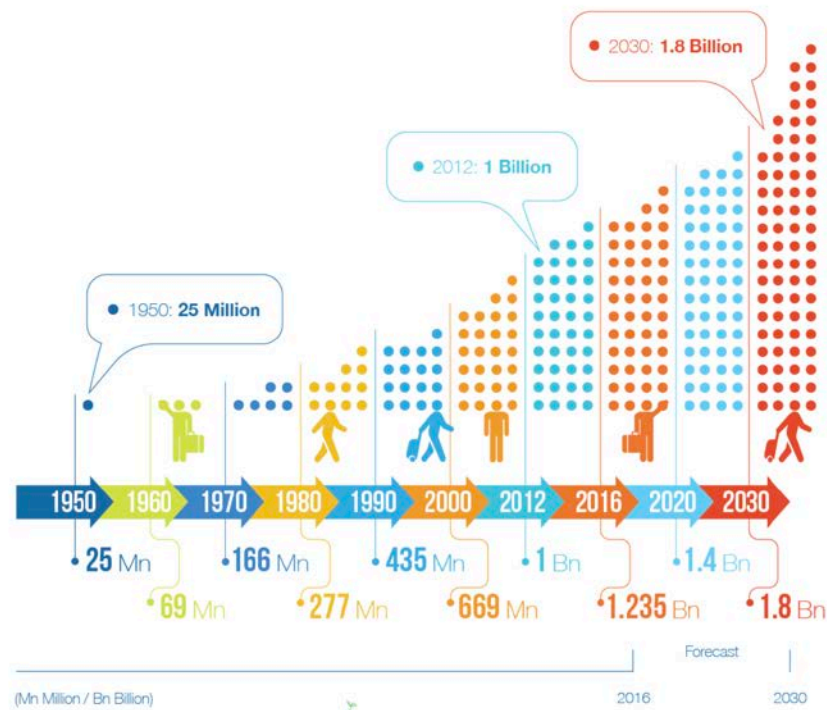


Figure 1: International tourist arrivals 1950 - 2030. Source: UNWTO Tourism highlights 2017

Modern mass tourism is rightly called the phenomenon of the twentieth century, and the twenty-first century, according to experts, will become the century of tourism. Today, out of 195 countries of the world, 155 countries are involved in tourism. World tourism demonstrates continuous growth. In 2012, annual global tourist flows exceeded a billion arrivals for the first time and amounted to 1 billion 35 million (in 2017 - 1 billion 323 million), and tourism revenues for the first time exceeded a trillion US dollars and amounted to 1 trillion 6 billion US dollars (www.unwto.org, 2018). According to UNWTO forecasts, the tourism growth in the world will be 1.8 billion by 2030 (www.unwto.org, 2018). From figure 1 we can clearly notice rapid growth in international tourists' arrival. In addition to the trends of recent decades, characterizing the development of the tourist market and manifested

in expansion and restructuring of the market, consolidation and conversion, horizontal and vertical integration, the widespread distribution of network business between various sectors of tourism, the trends brought by the era of globalization, the century of information and communication, and the new information society have been clearly reflected in world tourism.

By the end of the twentieth century tourism took a leading place in international foreign economic relations, began to have a serious impact on the development of the economy of individual countries and the world economy as a whole. Tourism today is not only the largest, but also the fastest growing industry in the world economy. In order to prove my words I would like to give an example, a senior official of the UNWTO has recently referred to the potential of tourism in the following terms: Tourism can deliver more than most sectors for the economy as a whole. Mobility is hard- wired into the human gene. Tourism-for business and leisure underpins trade, communication and modern lifestyles. (UNWTO, 2008, p. 1) The need for tourism development is highly obvious: the benefits that it gives both to individuals and the economy of some countries and entire regions do not raise any doubts.

The economic importance of tourism

Unlike a few other sectors, tourism has experienced continuous expansion and diversification over the past six decades, turning into one of the largest and fastest growing sectors of the economy in the world. According to UNWTO forecasts, 1.8 billion international tourist arrivals are expected by 2030. Between 2010 and 2030 arrivals in newly emerging tourist destinations (growth plus 4.4% per year) are expected to double by the rate of growth in a developed economy (plus 2.2% per year). By 2030, Northeast Asia will be the most visited

region in the world (UNWTO, Tourism Highlights, 2017). In line with the substantial increase in arrivals, international tourism revenues over the past decades have steadily increased, making it the fourth most important export sector in the world (after fuels, chemicals and automotive products) with a purchasing power of \$ 1 trillion per year. Thus, tourism makes up 30% of the global export of commercial services or 6% of the total export. Taking into account all direct, indirect and induced effects, the tourism economy represents 9% of global GDP. This contributes to 8.7% of full employment (261 million employees). (UNWTO, Tourism Highlights, 2017)

It is believed that one job in the main tourism sector creates about one and a half additional or indirect jobs in the tourism - related economy. Tourism growth is of great economic importance to the least developed countries. In approximately half of these countries, tourism accounts for more than 40% of GDP and is the most important source of foreign exchange. In addition to the source of foreign currency for destinations and job creation, the tourism sector has other positive direct and indirect effects on the global economy, such as providing an incentive to trade small, medium and micro enterprises, growth of incomes and entrepreneurship (especially in the service sector). This activity also causes the creation of a new public infrastructure, preserves and finances the preservation of the natural and cultural heritage. Practical leading projects around the world demonstrate the positive changes that can be achieved through sustainable tourism practices, making tourism a model sector for a green economy. The greening of the tourism sector strengthens its employment potential with an increase in the recruitment of local staff and an increase in tourism opportunities oriented towards local culture and the natural environment.

WHY TOURISM MATTERS



Source: World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) ©
¹ Source: World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTTC)

Figure 2: Why tourism matters. Source: Why tourism? UNWTO website.

The negative impact of tourism

However, tourism is significantly different from other sectors of the economy: it is a very complex sector, what we can see from figure 2. Tourism is able to influence the economy of the region or country in which it develops, on its economic, social and humanitarian foundations. Like other economic sectors, tourism consumes resources, creates waste, generating environmental, cultural and social costs and benefits. Tourism has become

cheaper, there are low-cost airlines, hostels, couch surfing, it has become easier to travel. At the same time, few people know what damage mass tourism does to local economies and global ecology. We have heard about the drowning Maldives, the protests "Tourists go home" in Spain, we know that corals are dying, and Stonehenge is taken apart for souvenirs. There are a number of negative consequences of tourism development. There are two groups of researchers one group keep thinking that tourism has only positive effects such as economy growth, reduction of unemployment and poverty. On the other hand, there is another group of scholars (Simpson et al 2008, Smith et al 2010, Perkumiene 2019, Lumsdon 2009) whose are calling for emergency action in tourism field. This block of researchers argued that tourism has negative impact on climate change. Also, tourism cannot be showed as a "medicine against all diseases" especially in developing countries.

The following main negative impacts of an ecological, economic and socio-cultural nature can be distinguished: environmental pollution; deterioration of the aesthetics of landscapes; problems of disposal of waste and household garbage; damage to historical and natural monuments; large anthropogenic pressure on the territory; cultural degradation of the territory; excessive commercialization; aggravation of complex socio-economic problems associated with drug addiction, alcoholism, prostitution, and the outflow of currency from the country; the need for enhanced security measures. Trends and forecasts indicate that with the continued expansion of the sector, such possible negative effects will only increase in the coming years. Emerging destinations may also be affected by direct and indirect environmental impacts. In the normal course of business (without reducing emissions), by 2050 tourism growth will boost an increase in energy consumption (154%), greenhouse gas emissions (131%), water consumption (152%) and solid waste management (251%) (UNWTO and UNDP, 2017). Given all the problems that arise as a result of the rapid

development of the tourism industry that tourists have to face, local residents, management structures at various levels, it is obvious that there is a need for a comprehensive solution to the situation based on the concept of sustainable development.

At the UN conference in Rio de Janeiro (June 1992), the international community officially proclaimed sustainable development as a guide and goal for the 21st century. It was noted that sustainable development provides future generations with sufficient resources to maintain a normal standard of living, and long- term planning and participation of all people is necessary in this process. How will the concept of sustainable development sound relative to tourism? Sustainable tourism development (or sustainable tourism) meets the current needs of tourists and host regions, protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future.

Management of all resources should be carried out in such a way that, while satisfying economic, social and aesthetic needs, to maintain cultural integrity, important environmental processes, biological diversity and life support systems (DeLacy, 2014).

1.2 Background of the study

Recently, there has been different thoughts from researchers about dramatic growth of tourism. In particular we can see more negative opinions on tourism development. It is crucial to understand that while European destinations, such as Amsterdam, Barcelona and Venice struggle with over tourism issues, developing countries like Georgia are on another level of tourism evolution. Georgia as the country is still trying to attract more tourists and increase level of service. This research shows that Georgia carry huge potential in tourism and statistics which I will show later can prove it. However, it is crucial that Georgian government and people working in the tourism field should understand the consequences of

poor tourism management. Tourism, is a promising direction for achieving the goals of development in Georgia. The adopted tourism development strategy is aimed at maximizing the degree of satisfaction of tourists and developing the tourism industry, as well as expanding opportunities for creating new jobs and eradicating poverty. The nature of the Caucasus has great potential for sustainable tourism.

In the Caucasus, the development of the tourism industry can be considered as one of the important directions for the countries of the region to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals for the period until 2030. A unique variety of landscapes from mountains to the Black Sea coast, biodiversity of flora and fauna, favorable climatic conditions, mineral and medicinal waters, historical and cultural heritage from ancient times, folklore and traditions of indigenous peoples, a variety of national dishes, winemaking and other sectors of the economy - all this creates great potential for the development of various types of tourism.

The World Wide Fund for Nature has recognized that not a single country in Europe has such rich flora and fauna and such a variety of landscapes as Georgia. Among the countries of the world that are distinguished by the diversity of their landscape and geologically uneven surface, Georgia occupies the twelfth place (Schüle, 2018). The nature of Georgia is multifaceted, but somewhere simply unique, which represents great potential for the development of ecotourism. National parks and protected areas make up 7% of the country's territory, while 75% of protected areas are forests. Georgia has 14 national reserves, 9 national parks, 17 protected areas, 14 national monuments and 2 protected landscapes, where the corresponding infrastructure for ecotourism has already been created or is being created. (GNTA, 2018)

For many tourists, Georgia is attractive for its biodiversity. In Georgia, in comparison with other countries, more species of animals and plants live, due to the significant forest area and high alpine zone. According to Georgia National Tourism Agency, endemic flora and fauna are very numerous, that is, plants and animals distributed in a relatively small area. Only the plant world has about 500 species of endemic plants. On rocky cliffs along the banks of the Rioni River, the world's only small grove of endangered Eldar pine has survived. Among the endemic species of the fauna, one can note the “king of game” - the Georgian and Colchis pheasant, the Prometheus mouse, found only in Abkhazia, Svaneti and the mountainous part of Adzharia, as well as the Caucasian ibex, famous for its unique twisted horns.

Georgian tourism industry is actively developing. In the period 2009–2013 Georgia showed one of the highest tourism growth rates in the world: the total number of tourists arriving in the country increased by more than 300% - from 1.5 million to 5.4 million people. Total tourism revenues grew over the same period from \$ 475 million to \$ 1.8 billion, exceeding the global average by more than 20 times. (GNTA, Georgian tourism in figures, 2015) This was main impulse for Georgian government to create Tourism Development Strategy.

Georgia has developed a tourism development strategy for the period until 2025. In 2015, the Government of Georgia adopted the “Tourism Development Strategy in Georgia - 2025”, which was developed by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia together with the National Tourism Administration with financial and technical support from the World Bank. Representatives of government, tourism and the public participated in the preparation of the strategy. In particular, consultations and in-depth discussions were held with the participation of national and local authorities, administrations of specially protected territories and objects of cultural heritage, investors, tour operators, hotel owners and representatives of educational tourism. The “Tourism Development Strategy in Georgia - 2025” sets out a vision for the development of the industry for the period 2015–2025.

together with the strategic plan of government measures to increase the value and importance of tourism in the interests of the country's economy and - in the end - for the benefit of its citizens. The industry development plan was developed as part of a partnership between the government and the private sector in order to maximize tourist satisfaction, diversify the market and products offered, achieve a steady increase in the size and profitability of the tourism industry, and improve job creation opportunities. The strategy is expected to increase the contribution of the tourism industry to Georgia's economic development. The strategy stipulates that by 2025 the country should significantly increase the income of tourism revenues: from 1.8 billion lari (about 670 million US dollars) to 5.5 billion lari (2 billion US dollars) (World Bank, 2015).

Types of tourist services in Georgia

Hospitable Georgia offers a wide variety of leisure activities that can satisfy the demand for both active and even extreme tourism, and for a more relaxed vacation on the seashore, with therapeutic procedures, visits to local cultural attractions and wineries. The national cuisine and the wines of Georgia attract gourmets to the country from all over the world. Tourists can enjoy both targeted and combined tours, which allow vacationers to maximize their impressions of visiting Georgia.

The following types of tour services are offered for both domestic and international tourism markets:

- business tours, including for conferences (due to its location and an extensive network of large hotel brands such as Radisson, Intercontinental, Holiday Inn, Georgia provides business travel services);

- cultural and religious tours (cultural tours allow tourists to see historical and cultural monuments, which Georgia is very rich in; the Georgian Orthodox Church has a rich history: ancient temple and monastery complexes are located in each region of the country);
- ski tours (winter ski resorts - Gudauri, Bakuriani, Mestia - offer a full package of services);
- Ecotours (in the country there are many protected areas with unique flora and fauna);
- mountain tours (mountains make up 85% of the country's territory, in the north it is bordered by the Caucasian ridge with the peaks of Shkhara and Kazbek, which causes keen interest of climbers, both professionals and amateurs);
- rural and agritourism (thanks to the long-standing experience of farming and animal husbandry, Georgia has great potential for the development of this type of tourism, especially wine);
- medical tourism (in Georgia there are unique resorts with a healing climate, water, mud, etc.);
- adventure tours and canyon river tours;
- resort tours (this type of recreation is concentrated on the resorts of the Black Sea coast).

According to report on Green Tourism in Georgia, it offers tourists 103 resorts and 182 resort places, as well as 2,400 types of mineral and thermal waters. The resorts are developing and improving the appropriate infrastructure, expanding opportunities for medical tourism. There are few places in the world where landscapes change so quickly and literally in one day you can have time to swim in the sea water and enjoy the local natural and cultural values in the highlands of Svaneti. According to the national tourism development strategy, Georgia aims

to become a leading tourism country by 2025, capable of providing world-class service at any time of the year (Schülein, 2018).

1.3 Types of tourism

Responsible tourism

The phrases responsible tourism, social tourism and ecological tourism, until recently, were perceived as special terms. For a relatively short period of time (10-15 years), it tightly entered the vocabulary of official scientific conferences, national tour operators of dozens of countries and the everyday speech of millions of tourists from all over the world (Bramwell et al, 2008). This is one of the rare cases when the world, divided by many borders, racial prejudices and cultural barriers, began to speak little by little in a language accessible to all. What caused the mass spread of this phenomenon? According to Goodwin & Front (2012) “responsible tourism is about using tourism to make better places for people to live in, first; and second, better places for people to visit. The aspiration is to use tourism rather than to be used by it. Over tourism is the antithesis of responsible tourism; it occurs when tourism’s priorities override the interests of the local community. Responsible tourism requires that the destination and its citizens use tourism, that tourism contributes to sustainable development.” (Goodwin & Front ,2012, p. 10)

Based on UNWTO and UNEP report, the average daily water consumption per tourist, ranges from 300 to 500 liters. Water is taken into account for cooking, for swimming pools, for irrigation in hotel and entertainment complexes. Where it is lacking (India, Africa, the Middle East), such squandering can turn into a disaster for the local population. The

destruction of coral reefs, tropical forests, pollution of clean reservoirs and national parks is a direct consequence of tourist invasion of humans. (UNWTO & UNEP, 2017) In the world, an average of one out of 10 people works in the tourism industry. Moreover, 5 billion “arrivals” and 600 million “departures” in tourist destinations are registered per year. (UNWTO, 2018b). The development of transport communications contributes to the globalization of the tourism industry. On such a scale, it is not surprising that tourism has received the name "phenomenon of the twentieth century." Until recently, its main characteristic was the intensive consumption of natural resources of the host country. The new tourism strategy is based on the wise use of natural resources, including the use of new technologies, on the sustainable development of the tourism industry in the long term and on the support of socially weak sections of society in countries where tourism is extremely productive. One of the priorities of this concept is to support the cultural exchange between tourists and the local population, taking into account the identity of each nation, and a reasonable redistribution of income from tourism. A significant innovation in the strategy of responsible tourism is the reduction of costs and excess consumption, which can have a positive effect on the ecological balance.

The Sustainable Tourism Program for the 10-year framework of programs on sustainable consumption and production patterns (10-RP) will be led by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), a specialized agency of the United Nations, and the Governments of France, the Kingdom of Morocco and the Republic of Korea with the support of the United Nations Program Nations Environment (UNEP), which hosts the secretariat of the program framework. However, if tourism management is not ensured, it can contribute to the depletion of resources leading to water shortages, loss of biodiversity, land degradation, as well as climate change and pollution - along with other impacts. The contribution of tourism

to global warming is estimated at 5% of total global CO₂ emissions. A UNEP report “Towards a Green Economy 2011” indicates that under a normal development scenario, projected tourism growth rates by 2050 will increase energy consumption by 154%, greenhouse gas emissions by 131%, water consumption by 152% and solid waste management - by 251%. “As tourism continues to grow, pressure on the environment and wildlife will also increase. Without proper management and protection, as well as investments in greening the sector, ecosystems and thousands of beautiful species will suffer,” said Achim Steiner, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNEP (UNEP & UNWTO, 2012). UNEP has identified tourism as one of the ten sectors best suited to contribute to the transition to a sustainable and inclusive green economy. This important initiative is to guide industry towards truly sustainable development - a path that takes into account challenges of our time: namely, along the path of promoting the development of a global green economy, which is developing, first of all, at the expense of interest, not capital, of our important economic and nature-based assets, he added. UNWTO Secretary-General Taleb Rifai said: “As a leading tourism organization, the World Tourism Organization seeks to optimize tourism's contribution to development while minimizing its negative effects. The UNWTO is pleased to be able to lead such an important initiative and collaborate with governments and institutions in implementing the Sustainable Tourism Program for a ten-year program framework” (UNEP & UNWTO, 2005).

Sustainable tourism

Starting from the 1995 World Conference on Sustainable Tourism in Lanzarote, the concepts of “sustainable tourism” and “responsible tourism” have continuously appeared on the political agenda of the United Nations and the United Nations World Tourism Organization

(UNWTO), resulting in significant declarations, guidance documents and initiatives and becoming, in essence, a priority area for UNWTO activities. At the same time, in UNWTO documents, the concepts mentioned often began to be used as synonyms. In general, the recommendations on the development of sustainable tourism and the practice of managing sustainable development are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of tourist destinations, including various segments of tourism, including mass tourism. Sustainability principles relate to the environmental, economic and sociocultural aspects of tourism development, and to ensure long-term sustainability, a balance must be struck between these three dimensions.

In order for tourism to become a factor in the socio-economic development of the region, tourism must be developed in accordance with the principles of sustainable development. Using the principles of the concept of sustainable development, tourism can not only overcome difficulties, but also bring other industries operating in the region onto the path of sustainable development. To date, there is no widely accepted unified definition of sustainable tourism, and this is logical, since the concept of "sustainable development" is also not yet specified. Existing definitions are highly fragmented. Analyzing the existing definitions, I came to the conclusion that it is necessary to separate the concepts of "sustainable tourism development", "sustainable tourism" and "sustainability in tourism", while often in the literature these concepts are used as synonymous. These definitions may look like this:

- Sustainable tourism development is a long-term tourism development, which achieves a balance in the implementation of economic, environmental, social and cultural development goals, takes into account the interests of all interested parties (tourists,

receiving and sending destinations, the local population), on the basis of rational use of tourism resources and comprehensive partnerships.

- Sustainable tourism is a type of tourism that ensures the optimal use of environmental resources, supports the socio-cultural characteristics of the host communities, ensures the viability of long-term economic processes, taking into account their benefits for all interested circles.
- Sustainability in tourism - implies a positive overall balance of environmental, socio-cultural, and economic impacts of tourism, as well as a positive impact of visitors on each other. (UNEP, 2011 & UNCTAD, 2013)

According to DeLacy (2014) tourism “industry’s sustainability agenda has also advanced from ecotourism and conservation, through responsible, pro poor and fair trade tourism. Industry greening and supply chain extension programmes have multiplied. Progress was made from basic awareness, to certification, towards global sustainability indicators for communities. All this has broadened the vision of our environmental engagement, highlighting carbon impacts – particularly from transport and old inefficient buildings. It also began to place increasing attention on local jobs as well as lifestyle impacts. Visitor impacts are finally considered along with visitor benefits to ensure that local populations do not suffer from tourism’s unplanned influx, while enjoying the increasingly well-recognised value added of economic growth and jobs” (De Lacy, 2014, p.30). Following the path of sustainable tourism development, it becomes possible to reduce the negative consequences of tourism development and the most effective use of the positive effects of tourism activities.

In accordance with the proposed concept of sustainable tourism development, it is necessary not only to create conditions for the development of tourism, but also to think about the consequences of this process. First of all, take care of local residents, their working conditions and environment, that is, it is important to take into account the social and environmental consequences of tourism development.

Stakeholders, in the desired direction of tourism development, should be the government at both the local and national and international levels. It is the state that can act as a regulatory force, capable, using laws and taxes, economic and legal levers, to determine the conditions for development. The trinity of economic, environmental and social goals in the policy pursued by the state will be the key to the success of tourism activities. However, there is an opinion that not every type of tourism can be made sustainable, therefore, the question arises: is it worth doing this at all? Studying this issue, one can come across the following assumption that, unlike beach tourism, which is not initially compatible with the concept of sustainable tourism, some types of tourism, such as ecotourism, cultural tourism, rural tourism, are basically more sustainable types of tourism. The same can be said about mass and individual tourism. In literature, the idea that some types of tourism are not compatible with the concept of sustainable development is a key issue in the debate about the sustainable development of tourism. It encourages in the further development of sustainable tourism those who are initially engaged in “sustainable” types of tourism, and at the same time confound those who develop initially “unsustainable” types of tourism, as they may not be able to succeed in this matter. In this regard, we are talking about the need to strive to make any type of tourism more sustainable. Standards and practices for managing sustainable tourism development can be applied to all types of tourism. Now, in essence, most types of tourism do not meet the criteria for sustainable development, and it is necessary to try to

make them such, to switch to new principles of development. Based on this, it can be determined that the economic goals of tourism development are an integral part of the sustainable tourism development policy. Today, it is necessary to rethink the economic development goals as an integral part of the sustainable development of the state as a whole.

The development of sustainable tourism is strongly associated with the quality of tourism services. In many respects, the quality of services is more important than their quantity, since too large volumes of tourism can easily exceed the limits of the load that the corresponding region can bear, thereby jeopardizing tourism in general. (Budeanu et al., 2016) The tasks related to sustainability can be solved within the quality that the region (destination) can offer tourists and local residents: peace and quiet, lack of traffic lanes, clean water and air, untouched nature - all these are “quality labels” for tourist centers and zones, which at the same time are indicators of sustainable development. High quality tourism is ensured by the following conditions: the presence of minimum standards, the most complete satisfaction of the interests and expectations of tourists, the optimal combination of quality and price of services.

Since the very concept of sustainable development is still under development, and there are still a lot of unresolved problems in the tourism economy, the mechanisms for sustainable development of the tourism sector are also not fully understood. Sustainable tourism is a very extensive, complex and intractable issue. Nevertheless, in recent years, some ideas have been proposed, which can mainly be considered as prerequisites for sustainable tourism or as tools to help achieve sustainability in tourism. Currently, the main problem in the concept of sustainable tourism development is the lack of tools for implementing the principles of sustainable development in practice. Existing tools do not yet allow the development of

sustainable tourism everywhere and require further research and development. In the modern theory, the following instruments for sustainable tourism development are distinguished: throughput potential, indicators and monitoring of sustainable tourism development, demarketing, tourist fees, visitor management, education and training of tourists and local residents, public-private partnerships, exchange of information and experience, eco-certification and codes of conduct. Evaluation of practical results in the field of sustainable tourism development is also complicated for us by the complexity of the process of assessing the scale of some problems. It is difficult to assess the magnitude of the problems resulting from the development of tourism, for example, the negative impact of tourism on the environment or the social sphere. That is, subjective assessment plays a major role in the process of identifying the main problems, their scope and results of activities. Also important is the difficulty of determining the actual results of activities in the field of sustainable tourism.

1.4 Research question and objectives of the research

The purpose of this paper is to analyse how Georgian government is developing tourism in the country. Especially to what extend Georgian government aware of sustainability issues in tourism sector?

- Identify the factors behind the growth of tourism in Georgia.
- Stating the negative consequences of poor tourism management.

- Analyse the key documents and policies implemented by the national government in tourism field.
- Finding evidence about sustainability initiatives and actions from the government.
- Report actions taken by Georgian government in order to increase sustainability in tourism sector

1.5 Justification and relevance of this research

In order to justify the research topic we can have a look on the main statistics of tourism industry. Tourism sector is one of the fastest growing in the world. We can witness the impact of tourism around the world. In some places tourism brought financial stability and development, other place were damaged with huge number of tourists. Tourism in Georgia has a huge potential in terms of sustainable development. This country has a lot of unique historical places and big variety of natural resorts. The government has an ambitious plan to transform Georgia into the leading tourism destination in the world. This study shows that this particular topic is relevant nowadays, because of the some reasons. First of all, development of tourism in Georgia is relatively new concept. From the national statistical data we can see that in the last years Georgia had a rapid growth in tourism sector. The second reason why tourism in Georgia is an interesting topic for research relate to the location of Georgia and it historical background. Georgia was a part of USSR and it is very important to analyse the transformation of Georgia. Compare to other ex – soviet countries Georgia was able to adopt new policies and reforms, which help to attract foreign businesses

and tourists. In addition, it is interesting to analyse the role of Georgian National Tourism Plan in sustainable tourism development in Georgia.

1.6 Methodology

In order to write this research paper, I decided to use desktop research. Desktop research is a type of research where the researcher does not gather primary data. However, the person uses secondary type of data in order to answer the research question. In my case all the results and statistics were collected from current available data.

The main aim of this research is to investigate the level of sustainable tourism development in Georgia. In particular how Georgian government can find the right balance between income from the tourism industry and sustainable tourism development. As I mentioned earlier, this research paper is based on desktop research. This method was chosen for the following reasons. First of all, in order to study such a broad topic like tourism in Georgia, it was important to collect different types of data, such media, official governmental statistics, existing literature on tourism, sustainable tourism and responsible tourism and official data from organizations like UNWTO, UNEP and World Bank. Secondly, this method helped to gain old data as well. Within the help of this method, I had an opportunity to compare data over time period. In the case of Georgia, it was crucial, because we can see that significant change in Georgian tourism sector was happening for the last few years.

However, desktop research method has few limitations. In the case of this particular research I can point out the main limitation. Due to the fact that the rapid growth of Georgian tourism is a relatively new phenomena, there is a big limitation of available data and literature. Another limitation of this method is the reliability of the data. During this research I collected statistical data from Georgian National Tourism Agency and also policies towards tourism from the Georgian government. In this case we can assume that GNTA could present the data in the positive way. Developing countries like Georgia mainly focus on profit maximization from tourism sector. That is why GNTA could ignore negative aspects of tourism in their reports.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

2.1 Concept of sustainable tourism

The emergence of the concept of sustainable tourism is associated with the growth of mass tourism and its negative consequences, which have aggravated a number of environmental problems in the world, as well as with a change in public views on environmental problems and awareness of the value of natural resources. It should be noted that modern mass tourism has a negative impact not only on the environment. In places often visited by tourists, serious socio-cultural problems arise. Tourism is turning local cultures into commodities. Religious rituals, traditional ethnic rites and festivals are being modified to meet tourist expectations. In some countries, tourists ignore existing moral values: for example, in many Muslim countries, where women are obliged to observe a number of rules, Europeans dress in

accordance with their ideas (Bramwell and Lane, 1993). From figure 3 we can see the difference between sustainable tourism and mass tourism in different aspects, such as tourists behaviour, relations between tourists and locals.

Modern tourism leads to the emergence and exacerbation of the following sociocultural and environmental problems:

- excessive commercialization, accompanied by the loss of the region's identity (customs, folklore, crafts);
- discontent of the local population, if they do not feel significant economic benefits from the development of tourism, if the development of tourism is subordinate to interests alien to the population;
- unacceptable increase in population density in recreational areas;
- large anthropogenic pressure on the territory, deterioration of the aesthetics of landscapes;
- environmental pollution, violations of the ecology of natural zones (parks, reserves and other natural protected sites).

Comparison factors	Sustainable tourism	Mass (traditional) tourism
Tourism attraction	The volume of tourism services is consistent with the socio-economic, environmental capabilities of the territory, which determine the nature of tourism activities	Tourism activities are focused on a constant increase in tourist flows. The volume of tourism services is limited only by the capacity of the material and technical base
Tourists behaviour	Visitors during their stay follow a certain model of behaviour in accordance with the culture of the territory visited. The behaviour of visitors does not prejudice the natural resources, traditions and customs of the local population	Visitors bring their lifestyle and behaviour to the leisure area
Behaviour towards nature	For visitors, the very value of the existence of natural objects is important, not their consumer value	The consumer attitude of visitors to natural objects dominates. Natural objects are evaluated based on their usefulness to humans.
Behaviour between tourists and locals	Friendly, respectful relationships, the purpose of which is to learn a new culture	Formal relationship. Visitors consider themselves to be the hosts to be served.

Figure 3: Difference between sustainable and mass (traditional) tourism. Source: Created by author, based on the literature review.

We must not forget that in the concept of sustainable tourism all its components (economic, environmental, social, cultural) are in harmonious unity. Moreover, the likelihood of achieving such harmony decreases with increasing degree of urbanization of a tourist region. Currently, sustainable tourism for most regions is an elusive model (Huggins – Disbioless, 2010). Indeed, paying attention to, for example, environmental safety, we jeopardize

economic benefits, and, carried away by profitability, we destroy the environment. To bring tourism closer to its ideal model, not only a well-thought-out educational, educational and awareness-raising work among the population is required, but also a clear tourism regulation policy both at the national and regional levels. The main direction of sustainable tourism development is to reduce the gap between rich and poor, to improve living standards in developing regions. Since the proper development of the tourism industry can contribute to increased prosperity and the removal of social tension (Lansing and DeVries, 2007).

As a factor in the development of the national economy, tourism contributes to the economic development of structurally weak regions. Most often these are areas with predominant development of agriculture. The development of sustainable tourism in such places is especially favourable, since it makes it possible to locally sell agricultural products, local crafts, and crafts, and thus helps to improve the welfare of the local population.

Tourism development has an impact on spatial, geographical mobility of tourists and migratory mobility of labour resources. An example of geographic mobility is interregional and international tourism. However, if a change of status is added to a change of place, here we mean people employed in the industry, then geographical mobility turns into migration.

Tourism should be developed in such a way as to strengthen the local economy, rationally and carefully use natural resources, benefit the local population by ensuring stable employment, promote the development of local crafts and crafts, develop infrastructure and services for tourists so as to benefit local residents. The sustainable tourism development system will help to solve important social problems - to increase the standard of living of people, maximize the employment of local residents, preserve the cultural and natural heritage.

Therefore, according to Mihalic (2016) sustainable tourism should:

- 1) ensure the optimal use of natural resources, which are the main element of tourism development, supporting significant environmental processes and helping to preserve natural resources and biodiversity;
- 2) respect the sociocultural characteristics of host communities, preserve their cultural heritage and traditional values, and promote intercultural understanding and tolerance;
- 3) guarantee viable, long-term economic operations, providing and fairly distributing socio-economic benefits for all participants - sustainable employment and income generation opportunities, social security in host communities, thereby contributing to poverty reduction.

The development of sustainable tourism requires both the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders and strong political leadership to expand the circle of participants and reach agreement. Ensuring the sustainable development of tourism is an ongoing process and requires constant monitoring of impacts in order to take preventive and / or corrective measures whenever necessary. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure that they gain significant experience, increasing awareness of sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Twelve Sustainable Tourism Goals

Currently, UNWTO has formulated the following priority goals for sustainable tourism development:

1. Economic viability - to guarantee the viability and competitiveness of tourist destinations and enterprises so that they are able to continue their prosperity and ensure their long-term benefits.
2. Local prosperity - to maximize the contribution of tourism to the prosperity of destinations, including maintaining proportions of the tourist load on the region.
3. Quality of employment - increase the number and quality of local jobs created and supported by tourism, including the level of remuneration, conditions of service and accessibility for all without discrimination on the basis of gender, race, disability or other reasons.
4. Social justice - seek to disseminate widely the principle of sharing the economic and social benefits of tourism throughout the host community, including the improving opportunities, incomes and services available to the poor.
5. Affordable tourism - to provide safe and comfortable tourism for all visitors regardless of gender, race, physical disabilities, etc.
6. Local control - involve local communities in planning and authorize them to make decisions on the management and future development of tourism in the region (after consultation with other interested parties).
7. Welfare of society - to maintain and improve the quality of life in local communities, including social structures and access to resources, amenities and life support systems, avoiding any form of social degradation or exploitation.
8. Cultural wealth - respect and enhance the historical heritage, genuine culture, traditions and characteristics of host communities.
9. Physical integrity - to maintain and improve both urban and natural landscapes, to prevent their visual or physical destruction.

10. Biological diversity - to support the conservation of natural areas, habitats and wildlife and minimize the damage caused to them.

11. Resource efficiency - minimize the use of insufficient and non-renewable resources in the development of tourism and tourism activities.

12. Ecological cleanliness - to minimize the production of waste and pollution of air, water and land by tourism enterprises and visitors. (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005).

These goals allow us to formulate the problem and subject of research and development, to take the necessary measures for the sustainable development of tourism, when necessary.

They also help maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and their awareness of sustainability issues. The goals are a confirmation that the main objective of sustainable tourism is to achieve a balance between the host country, the tourist and the environment.

However, finding a balance in order to protect and preserve resources, taking into account the needs of all participants (present and future), is a complex task and a very important research problem. In the case of Georgia, we will see the comparison of those 12 Sustainable tourism goals with current national policies. In order to trace what have been done in terms of sustainable tourism development in Georgia.

2.2 “Responsustable” tourism and Triple A model as instrument for sustainable development

Taking into the account all criticism in tourism sector, which I mentioned above, we can see the importance of the new term “responsustable” tourism. The number of scholars agreed that the key issue of tourism sector is ineffectiveness of sustainable tourism policies. Moreover,

the authors stated that sustainability as a concept, requires a responsible attitude from each stakeholder in order to match the sustainability standards. Mihalic (2016) also called for urgent action. He introduced the new concept “responsustable” tourism (Mihalic, 2016). It is a combined concept, which demonstrates that actual concept of responsible tourism was based on the idea of sustainable tourism. Thus, argument actually relates to the low tourism responsibility or low application of sustainability principles in the tourism industry, which “... remains alarmingly unsustainable” (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2010, p. 117).

The model which helps to understand how sustainable policies can be applied and the position of countries on different stages of sustainable tourism development. For the first time the idea of Frey’s social stages was implemented in tourism sector by Mihalic and Kaspar (1996). Initially there were four stages in this model. However, Mihalic and Kaspar decided to remove the first stage, which is called ignorance. This stage related to the cases when the destination does not consider environmental and social problems. At this stage all the actors ignore sustainability and key issues in the tourism sector, that is why Mihalic and Kaspar agreed on ignoring this stage in their model. They argued that the next stage Awareness is crucial. At this stage destinations are aware about environmental impacts and they cannot be ignored by destinations. However, at an early stage of Awareness we can see some limitations. For instance, “the awareness- and ethics-driven transition towards responsible tourism might be slowed down for many reasons. One study found that European tour operators have a high level of awareness about tourism's negative impacts and recognised their responsibility to reduce them. Nevertheless, facing low customer demand for responsible tourism practices and having little regulatory pressure to behave in a more

environmentally” (Mihalic, 2016, p. 468). The next stage in the Triple A model is Agenda. Agenda adopts theoretical sustainability concept and transform it to the policy with specific problems in the sector and actions against these issues. At this stage countries formulate their policies and national tourism agendas. UNWTO (2018d) highlighted that policies and national agendas can be created independently by national government or collectively with other countries or international organizations. For example, the case of the Sustainable Destinations Alliance for the Americas can be a great example how countries come together and make the tourism sector more sustainable. In the case of Georgia, we can see crucial role of World Bank. The last stage of our Triple A model is Action. This is the stage where countries start to implement their policies in order to bring sustainability.

Moreover, this model will help to improve the level of sustainability and responsibility by evaluating the national agendas and environmental policies. Also, within the help of this model we can analyse the conflict between different actors in the tourism sector. In addition, Mihalic (2016) pointed out that this model “can be applied to tourism destinations of any level, tourism businesses, governments, non-governmental organisations, institutions and tourists. All of these relevant stakeholders have a responsibility to seek to reduce the negative and enhance the positive environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts of tourism. In this regard, more research is needed from the aspect of each group, focusing on awareness (and ethics) creation, instruments for achieving the goals and behavioural context.” (Mihalic, 2016, p. 468) The main limitation of this model is that in most cases destinations and local businesses do not know their position in the Triple A model. For instance, a country or local business might be aware of environmental problems, but might have limited capacity of resources and skills. We can see it from the examples around the globe, that some countries

already have special research centres, sustainability agenda and implementation of sustainable policies, while others are trying to maximize profit from tourism and ignore negative tourism impact.

Chapter 3

3.1 Tourism development in Georgia

Georgia, considered in the Soviet Union to be an economically quite successful republic with a well-developed tourism industry, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, like most post-Soviet countries, faced many political and economic problems, including problems in the tourism sector. Most of the once developed infrastructure collapsed over time and the part that has survived to this day has fallen into such decline that it is no longer advisable to restore it.

In the Soviet period, the number of tourists entering the country significantly exceeded the number of tourists. After the collapse of the USSR, the situation changed dramatically - today in the post-Soviet countries, outbound tourism is developing successfully and there is practically no inbound tourism. Domestic tourism is in the same deplorable state - the population's interest in the natural and cultural heritage of their country is falling. Among the many reasons that impede the growth of both domestic and inbound flows, several important ones can be singled out, in particular: low level of security; lack of reliable information about

the ecological state of the environment, both in the country as a whole and in its individual regions;; lack of qualified personnel (tour operators, travel agents, guides); insufficient number of ongoing scientific research in the field of tourism and recreation. According to UNWTO reports, there are good prospects for the development of sustainable tourism in Georgia, which is due to many factors, in particular: a large variety of natural landscapes, a wide range of climatic zones, and unique ecosystems. The development of sustainable tourism in the country will be an important process that will have a tangible impact on the economy of the country, especially its peripheral regions; will be able to stimulate the growth of inbound flows and activates activities aimed at protecting unique natural territories.

According to Travel Lemming (2019) Georgia named the best new tourist destination in 2020. A ranking of 30 destinations published by Travel Lemming web portal based on a vote by leading bloggers. According to the publication, Georgia is probably the world's largest hidden gem of travel, reports the Public Broadcaster. The author believes that Georgia is a fairly affordable tourist destination. “Where else can you enjoy a European-style vacation with a budget for a vacation in Southeast Asia?” the article says. Travel Lemming advises travellers to visit Georgia between April and October. Among the main attractions, he names the high-mountain Svan village Ushguli, the wine region of Kakheti and Old Tbilisi. The article also provides an assessment of one of the survey participants, blogger Kate Makkali. She explains why Georgia was chosen as the best tourist destination. “Georgia has a lot to offer: one of the coolest capitals, beautiful mountain landscapes, truly different food and wine. All this and its fantastic price. I fully expect Georgia to become one of the most popular destinations in the world in the next few years” (Travel Lemming, 2019). There are several reasons behind Georgian tourism development. First of all it is important to notice the

role of Georgian government. The boost from almost 100,000 tourists yearly to more than 6 million people in less than 20 years happened not only because Georgia being a beautiful country where to go (GNTA, 2018). These reasons are “Rose Revolution”, visa free policy, national tourism strategy and huge marketing campaigns around the globe. After the “Rose Revolution” Georgia moved away from ex – Soviet path of development towards European way, as a result a lot reforms took place on that time. First of all, it helped to attract more investors according to Forbes: “If you are looking for a new location for your business, you should definitely consider the eastern European country of Georgia, which is ranked #6 in the World Bank Group’s 2019 survey of ‘doing business’. Sixth place should not be taken for granted; it was the result of more than a decade long commitment from the country to become one of the most attractive investment locations in the world” (Barshovi, 2019). Why this important for Georgian tourism sector? We can see for governmental statistics that hospitality sector has the highest number for investments. Another important tool for Georgian government was the implementation of visa free policy. Currently citizens of 98 countries can visit Georgia without visa. It was a big stimulation of tourist inflow and as an example we can look at Morocco case, where there was a 3500% year-on-year increase in visa applications to Morocco for Chinese tourists after the new visa policies from the Moroccan government (Huang, 2016)

Currently, almost everyone from Georgian government is happy about massive tourism development. According to national statistics “about \$3 billion was generated from international tourism in Georgia in January-November 2018, which was \$485 million more compared to the same period of 2017” (GNTA, 2019). Georgian officials only focused on money accumulation from tourism sector. More tourists bring more money. On June 8, 2019, a government meeting of Georgian ministers was held. The optimistic words of the country's

Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili were heard on it. He said that positive trends remained in terms of growth in turnover, production and employment in the business sector in the first quarter of 2018. “We are all very pleased that a significant rate of economic growth was recorded during the current period of 2018. A few days ago, data were released confirming the high level of economic growth in April 2018. They indicate an economic growth of 6.5%, while the average rate of economic growth in the first four months is 5.5%,” he added (Sputnik Georgia, 2019b). From the beginning of the year on vacation or on business 7,237,560 travellers arrived in 2019, which is 6.6% more than in the same period in 2018. The first five countries of leaders from where they come to Georgia are as follows:

- Russia – 1 205 974 people (16,66%);
- Azerbaijan – 1 169 831 people (16,16%);
- Armenia – 993 114 people (13,72%);
- Turkey – 907 350 people (12,54%);
- Ukraine – 164 825 people (2,3%).

Citizens from these countries produce the main tourist flow in Georgia - 61.36%. It should also be noted the growing interest in this small Caucasian country among travellers from Israel (almost 151 thousand people) and Kazakhstan (74 794 people). Although Russian citizens are leaders in the ranking, it should be noted that due to unpleasant political events, in June, 2019 they began to come to Georgia less if compared with last year's data.

However, at the same time, a significant increase in visits increased among citizens of Israel (+ 24.23%), Kazakhstan (+ 56.43%), Germany (72 074 people, + 37.84%), Saudi Arabia (69 074 people. , + 45.63%), China (34 901 people, + 48.89%). Of the 7.2 million visits, 3.99

million were tourist, which is 5.8% more than the same period in 2018, the number of one-day visits also increased - by 6.2%, to 1.99 million (GNTA, 2019).

However, the key problem for sustainable tourism development for Georgia is the fact that the majority of all arrivals (almost 80%) come from low - budget neighbour countries such as (Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Turkey and Ukraine. The aim of Georgian government should be the improvement of the quality and the attraction of new tourists groups. For instance, an increase in the amount of tourists from European countries will increase the income from tourism sector. From the research we can see that its crucial for Georgia to learn from other European destinations in order to re- evaluate its own national tourism strategy. We also can clearly see this fact from literature related to tourism management. For example, Milano et al (2019) argued that “the rise of anti-tourism across Europe shows that when tourism is not managed correctly it has the potential to cause much damage and disruption. This movement is also symptomatic of a change of paradigm. Locals are now more interested in their quality of life than the income generated by the tourism industry. More importantly, this situation across Europe provides evidence that sustainability in tourism is something that has yet to be achieved, with the industry not fully comprehending how it is in fact to be achieved.”

(Milano et al, 2019, p. 2) Lansing, P. & De Vries, P. (2007) “argues that the focus of governments and businesses on profit maximization at the expense of the environment and social welfare results in local communities bearing the costs of tourism development without a proper share of the benefits.” (Lansing, P. & De Vries, P., 2007, p.79)

3.2 Georgian tourism development strategy 2025

The Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA) has revealed the country's long-term tourism goal is to develop the country as a world leading tourist destination, increase the international profile of Georgia and bring more benefits to the nation. The National Strategy envisaged increasing the income received from international tourism from \$1.8 billion USD, which Georgia receives today, to \$5.5 billion USD per year. Increasing the amount of time visitors spent in Georgia was also mentioned in the National Strategy. The aim was to see tourists increase their time spent in Georgia from an average of 4.3 days to 5.3 days. Georgia also will work to increase Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) flowing into the tourism sector by 63 percent – a growth from today's \$559 million to \$910 million per year. Furthermore, the tourism sector must contribute 6.7 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to the economy, up from the six percent it contributed today (Georgian Tourism, 2016, GNTA). Dimitry Kumsishvili, Minister of Economy and Sustainable Development announced that " Georgia's National Tourism Strategy clearly outlines the vision for the development of the industry until 2025. The Government of Georgia will progressively focus its efforts on diversifying tourism markets, raising awareness about the country, assisting the private sector in creation of higher quality and niche tourism product, improving service quality and further stimulating the domestic tourism market. With this, development of infrastructure and attraction of new investments will be the driving force of advancement and progress within the industry" (World Bank, 2015).

The strategy aims to achieve eight strategic goals:

- 1) the development of a respectful attitude, the regeneration and preservation of the cultural and natural heritage of Georgia;
- 2) the formation of a unique authentic experience of tourists on the basis of familiarization with the objects of this natural and cultural heritage;
- 3) increasing the competitiveness of the industry by providing tourists with world-class services;
- 4) attracting tourists from markets with a higher level of expenses by expanding and increasing the effectiveness of marketing and promotion of tourism services;
- 5) expansion and development in the country of the ability to collect and analyze data on tourism activities and assess the effectiveness of the tourism industry;
- 6) an increase in public and private investment in the tourism sector;
- 7) improving the business environment in order to increase the volume of foreign and domestic investment;
- 8) the formation of partnerships between the government, the tourism industry, non-governmental organizations and the public, necessary to achieve all of the above goals.

According to the data and Georgian government, we can conclude that National Tourism Development Strategy is the key element of tourism development in Georgia. First of all, according to my research this strategy was very successful. We can see that Georgia working very well in terms of profit maximization from tourism sector. From the secondary data, it is clear to see constant growth in each aspects of tourism. Initially Georgian government was planning to have more than 6% of the GDP share, but on figure 4 we can see that the share of tourism sector in Georgia is about 7.6%. All other key indicators are growing constantly as well.



Figure 4 : Main Georgian Tourism Figures 2018. Source: GNTA website.

While analyzing the governmental reports on tourism, one similarity was founded. In each report we can find similar texts, “the outlook for the tourism industry is highly optimistic. It is forecast that the sector will create more jobs and generate more income in the years to come. The number of arrivals to Georgia is expected to keep increasing thanks to various steps taken by both the government, in general, and the Georgian National Tourism Administration, in particular. The recently created Georgian Tourism Strategy 2025 presents a ten-year plan which should play a key role in accomplishing this aim successfully.” (Figures in Tourism,

2016, p.3). This statement from the report can prove that at the moment Georgia only focus on profit maximization. We can see it from another financial perspectives as well. For example, from figure 5 we can witness the constant growth for tourists expenditures. According to GNTA the expenditures of foreign guests in Georgia have a crucial effect on the balance of payments. Approximately 71.8% of Georgia's service export revenues come from tourism. On the asset side, the balance of payments reports Georgia's income from foreign visitors; On the liabilities side, it shows the expenditure of Georgian residents while abroad. In 2018, the foreign exchange income from foreign tourism in Georgia amounted to 3.22 billion USD, which is 19.1% higher than in 2017. Foreign exchange expenditures for foreign tourism in Georgia amounted to 0.52 billion USD; compared to 2017 this indicator also increased by 13.2%. In 2018, the balance of foreign tourism in Georgia amounted to 2.7 billion USD, an 20.4% increase over 2017 (Georgian tourism in figures, 2018, p. 29).

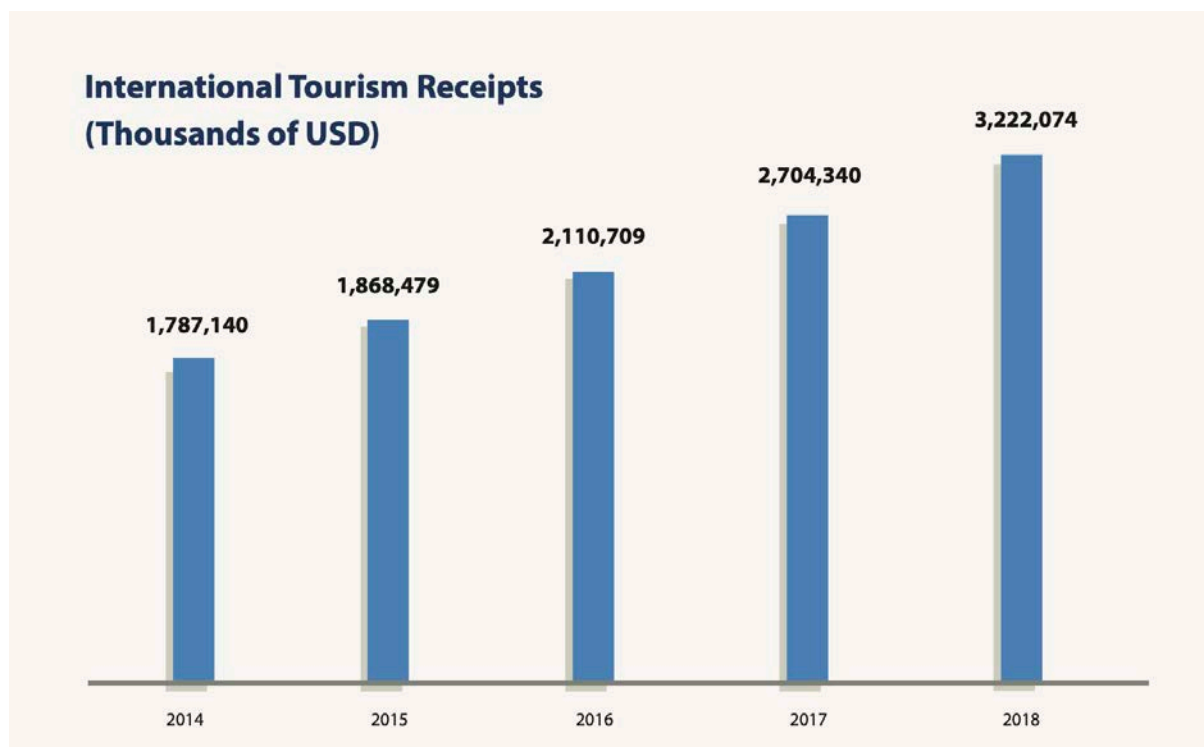


Figure 5: International Tourism Receipts (Thousands of USD). Source: Georgian Tourism in Figures, 2018)

3.3 Sustainable tourism in Georgia

Based on National Strategy 2025, we see that there is a limited number of initiatives for development of sustainable tourism. Only in 2016 GNTA started to publish information about protected areas in Georgia. According to latest statistics there is a high number of tourists in protected areas. (Figure 6). This is a big sign for Georgian government, they have to focus on natural area protection.

Visitors of Protected Areas by Year

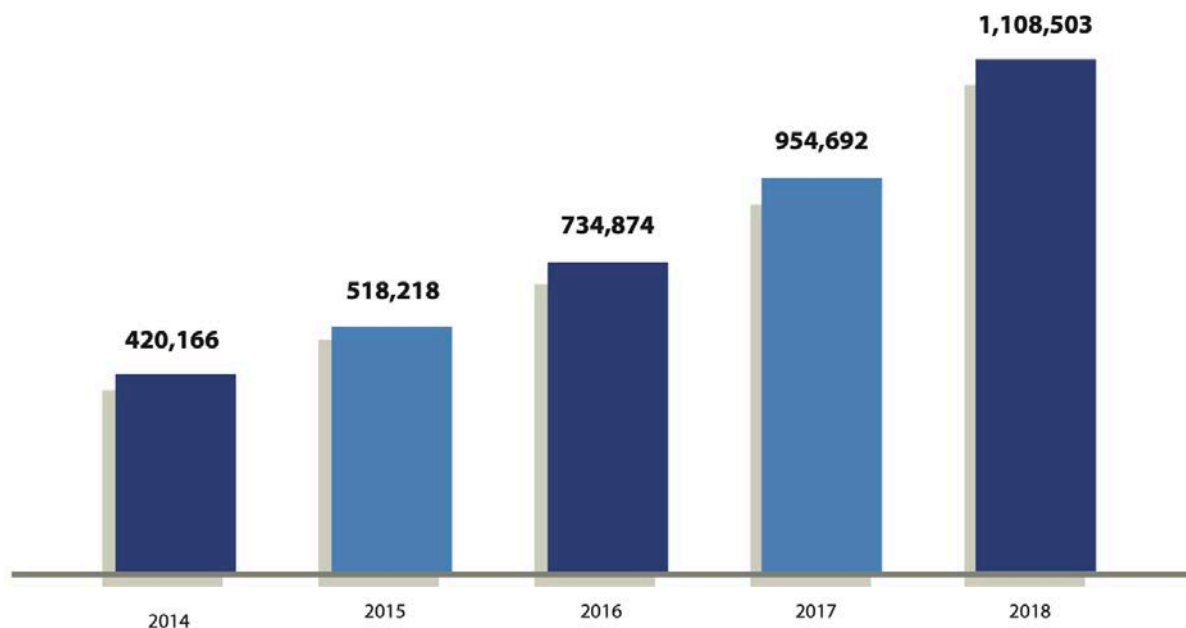


Figure 6: Visitors of Protected Areas by Year. Source: Georgian tourism in figures, 2018

On national level there is a limited number of initiatives from the government. Again it is crucial to understand that Georgia is currently on the stage of attracting more and more tourists. GNTA spending the huge amount of money every year on different campaigns. For instance,

n 2018, “the GNTA participated in 24 international and domestic tourism fairs and hosted 150 press and FAM trips (800 journalists and bloggers and 285 tour operators). In addition, the Georgian National Tourism Administration conducted an advertising campaign on the international online platform Tripadvisor.com in 15 countries, on Expedia in four countries, on Lonely Planet in European countries, and on National Geographic in European and Middle Eastern countries. Furthermore, the online campaign “Emotions are Georgia” was carried out on Youtube, Facebook, Instagram in 11 countries. Advertising campaigns were conducted on global leading channels, including: CNN, Euronews and BBC.” (GNTA, 2019, p. 3) As a result we can see the increase in the number of European visitors. In 2018, “385,181 trips were conducted by EU visitors (36% more than the previous year) in Georgia, which is 5.7% of total trips” (GNTA, 2019, p. 4).

Looking back to the Triple A model, we can put Georgia on the second stage (Agenda). It is clear that Georgian government aware of ecological consequences. Moreover, we can see that sustainable development, nature and heritage protection included into the agenda, but there is a few amount of actions from the government. Georgia has to increase the quality of their service in order to attract more high income tourists and as a result increase the income from tourism. With more income Georgia can attract sustainable projects, like eco friendly hotels. It is crucial for the government to see the real capacity of the country and do not take more tourist that they are capable of.

Conclusion

There are a lot of problems in the tourism sector. The main problem is sustainability and this issue became very complex. One destinations suffer with overtourism issues and another one still developing their national tourism policies. Sustainable tourism development contain a large number of different actors, such as government, local government, NGOs and different companies. From this study we can see that sustainability is very complex. The analysis and Triple A model presented could help to find solution for long term sustainability process in Georgia. However, all the stakeholders should agree on development of sustainable tourism.

In conclusion, we note that the development of tourism is a kind of art, when we need to find a balance between economic benefits from tourism and sustainable development. You need to find a clear and thoughtful concept of how to correctly fit into the unique natural landscape, while taking into account the interests of local residents and tourists, the state and business. The key point is the change in approaches to pricing, taxation, the pace of tourism development and the volume of tourist flows, which, combined with a holistic approach and long-term planning, can become effective mechanisms for implementing the strategy of sustainable tourism development. Reasonable restrictions, orientation on the needs of the destination, exchange of experience, the availability of information and preventive actions in management can serve as the basis for the sustainable development of tourism in our country.

Recommendations:

There are some recommendations based on my research. First of all, tourism planning is crucial. Planning should be a part of each tourism development plan. Tourism planning is very important for sustainable tourism and while few destinations manage tourism very well, others cannot understand the importance of tourism development. Secondly, Georgian government should involve local government in tourism development. Georgian government also should support water and waste management initiatives in the tourism sector. It can also create environmental management policies in accommodation sector. From this research we can see that it will be difficult in the case of Georgia, because there is a high increase in home stay accommodation, such as Airbnb. Another recommendation can be the investments in skills training programmes and cooperation with European schools in tourism management sector. This is one of the biggest issues in Georgia, as we can see from this research Georgia is still attracting low - income tourists from neighbouring countries. Tourists from these countries have a lower expectation compared to tourists from developed countries, such as European destination. In order to become fully sustainable developed destination Georgia has to increase quality of service and as a result attract high income tourists.

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