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INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE AS AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN GEORGIA

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ABSTRACT

The article offers an alternative innovative approach to tourism product (Intangible Cultural Heritage-based) development in Georgia. As the trends of global travel market assume, increasingly demanded products become the ones offering unique and profound cultural experience, deep emotions and feelings that derive from a participation in the authentic cultural activity. The study suggests to explore and further promote Georgian intangible cultural heritage for the purpose of supporting better representation of regions of Georgia in tourist offers, creating „Niche” products, raising awareness and increasing self-involvement in the process.

1. INTRODUCTION

Georgia joined Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of UNESCO in 2007. The country recognized the need for protecting intangible cultural heritage and assumed the obligations implied by the convention: identification, documentation, exploration, protection, preservation, revitalization of the intangible cultural heritage for the purpose for safeguarding its living culture; raising its awareness through formal or informal

education, transferring to new generation, reviving different aspects of the intangible cultural heritage.

According to the convention, intangible cultural heritage is considered as traditions, habits, art expressions, knowledge and instruments, artefacts, cultural spaces as tangible aspects of these expressions of the specific groups or individuals of the community, such as: oral traditions and expressions (legends, fables, etc.) art and performance (singing, dancing, theater, etc.), common practices, celebrations (games, festivals, holidays, gastronomy, etc.), practices related with the environment (folk medicine, traditions related with natural forces) and crafts' directions and techniques (craftsmanship: Felt, metal, ceramics, carpets, etc.)

Intangible cultural heritage is found in the communities in a form of traditions, habits, oral traditions, songs, games, etc. They are also documented in private and state archives, museums, scientific and research institutes and similar organizations. Georgian intangible cultural heritage is represented on UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage list of the humanity (Georgian polyphonic singing (2001), traditional Kvevri wine-making (2013), the living culture of the Georgian alphabet (2016), Georgian wrestling "Chidaoba" (2018). The National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation Georgia has been actively implementing the activities and measures for identifying and safeguarding of the Georgian intangible



heritage. In 2012, The Minister of the Culture and Monuments Protection of Georgia issued an order #3/28, which approved the form for identification of the cultural heritage monument of Georgia and instructions for completing the form.

2. ABOUT OF GEORGIA

Georgia, due to its strategic location in the Caucasus region where Europe meets Asia, is a home to biodiversity and cultural interactions. Georgia is neighbored by Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey. Being a part of the historic Silk Road route as well as a target of continuous invasions from various empires throughout the centuries has had deep impact on the local culture development. Nowadays, Georgia, referred to as a hidden gem of the Caucasus, attracts increasing interest of travelers from around the world. Once in Georgia, visitors discover distinct unique culture which is not comparable with others. Increasing interest of travelers has been a main driving factor for tourism development during the last 10 years in Georgia. Despite rich potential for tourism potential development in Georgia, the country still struggles with identifying and offering niche products and increasing awareness at an international level. Using intangible cultural heritage assets while developing tourism product is one of the potential tools of positioning the country as having and offering unique cultural experience, originating from traditions formed before the centuries. In addition, using intangible cultural heritage for tourism development is an effective way of showcasing and promoting regional diversity, which itself is an important supporter of regional development.

In order to refer to intangible cultural heritage as a tool for tourism product development and enrichment, measures need to be taken in order to ensure having a complete database of the explored, well-known or forgotten traditions according to regions of Georgia. As mentioned previously, The National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation Georgia has introduced the document, a form which is used for nominating the intangible cultural heritage asset as a

monument. The document identifies the domain/category of intangible cultural heritage asset, aims to obtain photo/video/audio material for presentation purposes; tries to identify historic and geographic area where the tradition/practice is common; the origin and original function of it; the community or individuals bearing the tradition/cultural expression; the document also tries to identify all relevant attributes such as gender, age and social characteristics of the bearers of the tradition; its current status and any risks/dangers it might be facing. The document is a very useful tool for identifying new monuments and further provision of valuable material for better presentation.

3. INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF GEORGIA

Prior to the searching and identifying somehow forgotten or unexplored or less explored expressions of the intangible cultural heritage, it is important to analyze already existing list, representing districts/regions of Georgia or the country in general, as follows below:

Table 1. Intangible Cultural Heritage List Recognized by the National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation Georgia

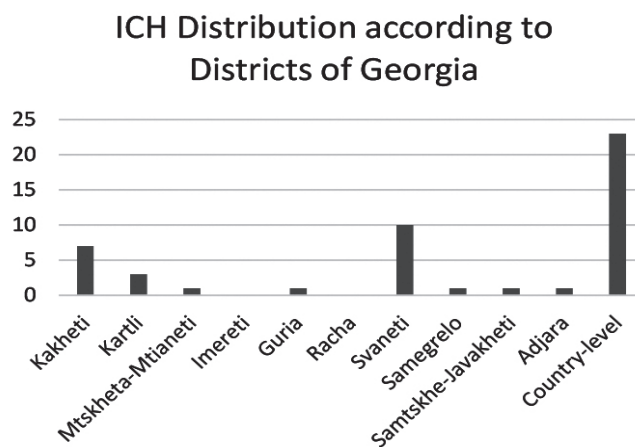


Figure 1. ICH Distribution according to Districts of Georgia

Districts/Regions	Name of Intangible cultural heritage	Number of ICH
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Pshavian “Dambalkhacho” (mold cottage cheese) producing technology and culture	1
Guria	Leloburti (Georgian handball rugby)	1
Imereti		0
Racha-Lechkhumi		0
Samegrelo	Abkhazian Salt „Apirpiljika” and Megrelian ajika (Capsicum) making technology	1
Samtskhe-Javakheti	Traditional technology of producing Meskhian cheese “Tenili”	1
Adjara	Dance Khorumi Cooking tradition on Borano	2
Kartli	Urban (Kalakuri) Mravaljamieri Tskhavatian pottery Ksnian Ulami – tradition of community members helping out each other with laboring works	3
Kakheti	Kvevri Wine-making Kvevri Kakhetian Mravaljamieri Traditional technology of baking Kakhetian bread (Mother’s bread) Traditional technology of producing Kakhetian Churchkhela (sweets with walnuts and boiled grape juice) Traditional technology of weaving Kakhetian hat Traditional pottery in Vardisubani	7
Svaneti	Svan folk instrument “Chuniri” traditional crafting technology Svan traditional hat weaving technology Svan cuisine – Millet Khachapuri (cheese pie) baking technology Svan cuisine – Kubdari (pie with spicy chopped meat) baking technology Svan cuisine – Traditional technology of Svan salt producing Svan cuisine – Traditional technology of cooking Tashmjabi (mashed potatoes with melted cheese) The tradition of using sour mineral healing waters “Mugviri”, Artskheeli”, “Kakhrld”, “Legab”, “Seti”, “Kvedilashi” and “Shdegi” in Upper Svaneti Traditional method of crafting Svan folk instrument “Changi” Wood carving tradition – carvings in the Svan dwelling and domestic crafts Svan traditional mourning funeral ritual	10
Country Level	Polyphonic singing “Dedaena” - The method of alphabet teaching in primary schools by Iakob Gogebashvili Perkhuli (dance) Berikaoba (performance) The tradition of issuing periodical for children “Dila” Student inauguration ceremony of the University of Theater The continuous tradition of issuing periodical “Tsiskari” (Dawn) Georgian Wrestling “Chidaoba” Living culture of three writing systems of the Georgian alphabet The tradition of learning poem “Knight in the panther’s skin” by heart The continuous tradition of issuing periodical “Gantiadi” (Sunrise) Falconry hunting Culture and traditions and of the Georgian traditional feast Culture and traditional technology of producing Blue Tabla (tablecloth) Georgian folk medicine traditions and application The unique tradition of 26-century-long friendship between Georgians and Jewish Traditional technology of producing Georgian silk Traditional technology of baking Khachapuri (cheese pie) Laghidze Water Producing Technology and Culture Georgian wheat culture (Endemic types and local breeds) Georgian Folk Horse Races (Isindi, Tskhenburti –Horseball, Kabakhi, Marula) Traditional technology of Danelia family wines	22

The table #1 and figure #1 shows that intangible cultural heritage list is poorly represented on a regional basis. It is also undoubtable that remaining unexplored or less explored regions such as Racha-Lechkhumi Kvemo Svaneti, Imereti, Guria and Samegrelo have rich intangible cultural heritage with distinct traditions that can proudly be represented on the list of Georgian Intangible Cultural Heritage (National level). It is a topic of further research, based on primary and secondary sources, to identify and nominate intangible cultural heritage assets for further recognition and promotion.

4. BENEFITS OF INTANGIBLE CULTURAL AS NICHE PRODUCTS

Except for distinct economic benefits, which intangible cultural benefit niche products can bring, they can also deliver other equally important values for the local as well as global community:

- ICH-based tourism can revitalize intangible cultural heritage of the local community and give a new life to it;
- It can provide and strengthen a sense of identity and continuity within local communities;
- It can lead to job creation, support better state of economic and social well-being of local communities through involving them in developing, maintaining and offering authentic products to tourists;
- It can help with intercultural dialogue and encourage mutual respect among cultures;
- It can support sustainable development relying on cultural authenticity and creativity as mean resources;
- It can create a possibility to offer an innovative

tourism product replying to the new demand of the travelers eager to sense unique experiences;

- It can potentially increase interest of tourists to places despite their seasonality and geographic non-attractiveness;
- It can create an opportunity of capacity building of the local community and women empowerment especially in patriarchal communities;
- It can encourage re-inhabitation of the abandoned remote places by communities to showcase their authentic culture in its original birthplace;
- As a manifestation of the freedom of expression, ICH-based cultural tourism can be considered as a defender and promoter of human rights within communities and worldwide;
- It can, if effectively managed, significantly reduce the negative effect of globalization, which tends to erase differences among cultures;
- Revenue generated from ICH-based tourism can provide funding for initiatives aiming at revival of local cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

The positive trend of travelers' seeking for in-depth cultural experience and emotion are driving factors of quick growth of ICH-based tourism. ICH-based tourism brings multiple benefits for communities, among which are revitalization and strengthening its identity as well as income generation and job offers. ICH-based tourism can successfully serve the purpose of sustainable development of the communities if risks of irresponsible use of living culture and over tourism are considered.

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SUMMARY

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