



Cities of the South Caucasus: a view from Georgia

Edited by David Gogishvili & Alessandro Coppola

QU3#15

iQuaderni di U3

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Rivista scientifica sottoposta a double blind peer review.

Scientific journal subject to double blind peer review

N. 15, anno sei, luglio 2018 | No. 15, year six, july 2018

In copertina | *On the cover:*

Tbilisi, "In the Caucasus"

Foto di Corinna Del Bianco

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Researching Georgian Cities

Structural Changes, Emerging Issues and Promising Paths of Enquiry*

David Gogishvili & Alessandro Coppola

Georgia
Transition
Post-Soviet Cities

After the collapse of the USSR and the regaining of independence, Georgia has experienced a dramatic set of political, economic and social changes which have had marked impacts on Georgian cities that further intensified with the early 2000s, political and economic stabilization and the greater role assumed by the state in leading urban restructuring initiatives. While similar developments in some other parts of the former Socialist Bloc have attracted much interest among urban scholars, the attention towards Georgian cities has been limited. With this special issue we make a step towards bridging this knowledge gap by providing contributions on topics such as spatial hierarchies and restructuring, urban regeneration, tourism, urban memories and lifestyles. The editorial that follows introduces the reader to the broader transformations in Georgia and its cities since 1991, an overview of the topics treated by the authors and some conclusive points on further research on Georgian and South Caucasian cities.

Introduction

Since the dissolution of the Socialist Bloc, the transformation processes that took place in former socialist cities have attracted increasing interest in the areas of human geography, urban studies and planning. A number of networks or projects – such as the “Cities After Transition”¹ and *ira.urban*² – edited books and special issues have extensively addressed it variably focusing in recent years on topics such as the metropolitan restructuring processes in former East European socialist countries (Borén and Gentile, 2007), the politics of urban collective memory and the construction of new urban landscapes (Diener and Hagen, 2013, Medvedkov and Salukvadze, 2016), the spread of mega events-centred urban development models (Müller and Pickles, 2015), the dynamics of change affecting neighbourhoods (Ouředníček and Pospíšilová, 2015) and the theoretical implications and potentials of research on post-socialist cities (Ferenčuhová and Gentile, 2016). More recently, after a first main publication focusing solely on the capital city of Georgia (Van Assche et al., 2009), some of these research streams and networks have more widely Southern Caucasian cities with enquires regarding public spaces’ erosion and reconstruction processes (Neugebauer and Rekhviashvili, 2015) and the evolutions in housing and urban

**_The editorial was not included in the peer-review process.*

1_The network of scholars interested in the cities and urban spaces of Central and Eastern Europe.

2_ira.urban was a collaborative research project with multiple activities targeting processes of urban reconfigurations in post-Soviet space from a comparative perspective.

development systems in the three cities of Baku, Tbilisi and Yerevan (Sichinava, ed., 2016). However, despite these latest publications, research on South Caucasian post-socialist- and more in particular on Georgian – cities is, although promising, still limited both in its quantitative relevance and in the variety of the topics treated.

The aim of the special issue of *Quaderni* is, therefore, to contribute to the filling of this gap by presenting a selection of both empirical and discussion papers³ - that, as we will see, address a variety of issues- and to stimulate further research both on Georgian as well as on other cities and urban areas of South Caucasus. With this short editorial, we aim to introduce the five contributions of the issue by setting an essential framework for the understanding of larger political and societal changes that involved Georgia since 1991 and by identifying a series of cross-cutting topics that, emerging from the issue, we have found to be relevant for further research development.

Post-Socialist transformation and cities in Georgia: from collapse to stabilization

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the three new independent states of the South Caucasus region- Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia – have experienced a set of dramatic political, economic and social changes going through violent armed conflicts, population displacements, authoritarian political regimes and the destabilization of state and economic structures. These changes have had significant impacts on the region's urban areas and more in general on the forms and dimensions of wider urbanization processes.

Georgia, in particular, went through a peculiarly challenging period of post-Soviet social, economic and political transformations since regaining independence in 1991. With the dissolution of the USSR, the planning ideals, regulations and systems that were in place in the Soviet Socialist Republic of Georgia quickly collapsed and society stepped into the long process and routine of post-Soviet urban transition. The social and economic effects of the end of the Soviet Union were further exacerbated by political turmoil that led, throughout the 1990s, to civil and ethnic wars – such as the ones that involved the two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia – whose effects were coupled with the ones of higher scale conflicts that generated in the whole regions large waves of internal displacement and of refugees (Kabachnik et al., 2014, Salukvadze et al., 2014).

The Georgian economy, one of the most prosperous among the ones of the 15 Soviet republics, collapsed with the dissolution of the USSR and, differently from Armenia and Azerbaijan, made also the experience of a longer and more difficult path to the return of economic growth. By 1994 Georgia's real GDP was less than a quarter of its value five years earlier (De Waal, 2010) while per capita income, that reached almost 6000 USD in 1989, had an almost threefold drop by the early 1990s. Political turmoil and instability were therefore accompanied by increasing unemployment rates that largely resulted from the restructuring of the state economy and the decommissioning of heavy industries in major cities as Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Rustavi, Zestaponi and Chiatura. These dramatic

³ The call "Cities of the South Caucasus" was published in March 2017 and received nine proposals showing a clear focus on Georgian Cities that pushed the editors to consider the possibility of an issue entirely dedicated to Georgian Cities. Out of the eight paper sent to the peer reviewing process, six were accepted for publication with requests of revision and five were finally published.

socio-economic changes led to visible impacts in both rural and urban areas. Particularly, the displacement of hundreds of thousands of people from Abkhazia and South Ossetia impacted cities leading to the formation of new forms of collective housing known as the “collective centres”, i.e. former non-residential buildings such as hotels, administrative buildings, factories and schools in various urban areas occupied by IDP⁴ families.

In general, as in many other post-soviet urban societies, the transition from centrally planned to market economies and the privatization of a large part of state-owned assets was produced in a context of weak institutional and planning frameworks, widespread corruption and spreading informality leading to both radical changes in existing urban environment and to the emergence of new structures and urban actors. This process of change has been hegemonized, since 1991, by actors and forces emerging in the realm of the now deregulated land and real estate markets (Ziegler, 2010), a private interests’ hegemony that was coupled with the almost full withdrawal of the public authorities’ from the regulation of urban development and planning. This new reality characterized by the absence of local structural plans, planning laws and regulations was referred locally as a “wild market” (Van Assche et al., 2010, p. 384), a definition that clearly outlined and stigmatized the power and violence-based nature of the new situation as it was perceived by large swathes of the Georgian society. In this context, newly formed real-estate development actors moved to realize in particular the economic extraction potential of formerly protected, yet attractive urban public spaces and holdings by promoting their, partial or complete, privatization and redevelopment into residential, office and commercial complexes and facilities (Salukvadze, 2009).

In this context, coping strategies and tactics to overcome or reduce the negative effects and the social costs of the political and economic crisis of the 1990s were designed by the people themselves. The increasing scarcity of affordable housing and the deregulation of the urban planning system compelled disadvantaged households to find an alternative, often informal, strategies to satisfy their housing needs (Sichinava et al., 2016). One of the most visible, and relevant of these strategies in terms of its effect on the housing system has been the emergence of so-called “vertical building extensions”. Initiated in the late years of the socialist rule and aimed at improving the residential qualities and available living space, these practices ended-up in challenging the overall quality of residential buildings and of the urban built environment (Bouzarovski et al., 2011). At the same time, small-scale often informal trade and household subsistence agriculture on urban fringes spread in urban areas becoming, during the 1990s, of crucial importance (Rekhviashvili, 2015). Most urban trades happened in “Kiosks” used by small-scale vendors that were either concentrated in specially organised open markets or more chaotically in any available attractive location such as metro stops’ surroundings or other busy areas (Salukvadze, 2009, p. 176).

In the early years of the new millennium, together with the crumbling economy and high levels of unemployment, the Republic of Georgia was also known for the devastating incidence of corruption at all level of government, dysfunctional

⁴ Internally displaced person.

public services, high rates of violence (Kukhianidze, 2009, De Waal, 2010). Growing popular unease with such a situation and the re-orientation of political and economic elites led to the so-called Rose Revolution, the “pro-Western” peaceful regime-change that occurred in November 2003. Ignited by protests over disputed parliamentary elections’ results, the “revolution” culminated in the ousting of President Eduard Shevardnadze, which arguably marked the real end of the Soviet-era of leadership in the country. A group of mostly Western-educated young and ambitious politicians replaced the incumbent government that largely relied on the former Soviet political elite. This process culminated in the election of Mikheil Saakashvili as President in January 2004 and the formation of a United National Movement (UNM)-led coalition majority which ushered the establishment of a new neoliberal development policy regime in Georgia.

The long series of reforms that followed the “revolution” led to an overall stabilization of the country and to improvements in certain indicators of social, economic and political life. The radical free-market approach of the new government led to the slashing and simplification of taxes, the downsizing of the public sectors and the deregulation of a wealth of policy areas. This was also followed by the liberalization of trade and the launch of a program of further, so-called, “aggressive privatization” (Rekhviashvili and Polese, 2017, p. 9) of almost 4000 state assets that generated around 1.4 billion USD of additional revenues for the state (Gugushvili, 2014). These reforms produced a marked shift from the conditions of the first decade of the post-Soviet transition generating, despite growing inequality and social disequilibria, an accrued sense of confidence reflected in an increasing popular trust in the police and public services, a fall in crime rates and an expansion of the state’s fiscal capacity (De Waal, 2010, Light, 2014, Rekhviashvili and Polese, 2017).

In this context of relative political stabilization, the state significantly expanded its involvement in urban affairs and development also by taking the lead of some wide spatial restructuring initiatives generally produced in close partnership with emerging economic elites and interests. In particular, the national government promoted the set-up of an urban development agenda for Tbilisi, as well as for several other major Georgian cities such as Batumi and Kutaisi, that, while circumscribing the autonomy of local institutions, also implied the full implementation of its strong free-market orientation. Such ambitious and often large-scale state-led urban development and regeneration projects aimed at rebranding a number of Georgian cities through the revitalization, and beautification of central urban cores, the taming and repression of informal urban practices, the expansion of real estate markets and the restructuring – mainly through privatization and outsourcing- of certain municipal services.

These projects were an important feature of the UNM’s period of political hegemony, a period in which in quite a few cases the president himself, along with other key political figures, were seen as the primary decision-makers on urban affairs, with decisions as important as the inclusion of cities in state initiatives (Manning, 2007), or their same main goals and rationales, being taken without any form of public consultation. These projects mostly included historic

quarters' regeneration and upgrading initiatives that had a potential to attract tourists and new capital investments, as increasing tourism was considered one of the main ways to insure the country's economic growth (see Salukvadze and Gugushvili in this issue). However, these initiatives led to new forms of socio-spatial polarization by often resulting in the displacement of the local population through the rise of rents and the further shrinkage of the affordable housing stock, the overall steady gentrification of certain neighborhoods with the deterioration of traditional public spaces and of urban heritage and the change of the involved areas' functional features. Such an urban revanchist approach (Smith, 1996), that seemed to sustain the whole urban regeneration strategy, also led to the displacement of illicit and informal activities from prominent urban public spaces (Costanza, 2015). Despite the contestations and mobilizations activated by emerging urban social movements, such projects have rarely been stopped and often succeeded in reshaping the reality and imaginary of some of Georgia's major cities.

The first important wave of this kind of top-down urban transformations promoted by the UNM-led government occurred in 2005 as Tbilisi was involved in the preparations for the visit of the then US president George W. Bush. This process mostly implied the renovation of the buildings of the areas that were included in Bush's visit itinerary. However, as the US President was not going to enter in most of the buildings involved, renovations were mostly superficial and normally did not affect anything besides the façades igniting critiques on the purely scenic nature of these interventions in some parts of the society (Frederiksen and Gotfredsen, 2017, p. 58). Façades' improvements were later followed by larger scale urban regeneration projects in Tbilisi and several other cities and towns such as Batumi, Kutaisi, Telavi, Akhaltsikhe, Mestia or Signaghi with the aim of increasing land prices and attract further investments as well as to expand urban infrastructure to accommodate the expected, suited surge in the numbers of tourists. The top-down, fast and "window-dressing" character of such renovation projects, whose first occurrence took place in Signaghi- a small but picturesque hilly town located in the eastern part of the country- even led to the coining of a new Georgian term- "Signaghization" (Frederiksen and Gotfredsen, 2017, p. 59)- aimed at designating (and stigmatizing) such projects.

As in 2012 the post-UNM era slowly took roots⁵ and the "Georgian Dream" political coalition started to take power on all administrative levels, urban regeneration projects were affected too, by being paused at first to be soon taking-off again. While it could be argued that the overall quality of the regeneration process had somewhat improved and that also its pace slightly slowed down, its final outcomes and impacts on the local residents looked almost always the same – displacement, commercialization and gentrification – in a wider context in which tourism and its impact on cities were rapidly expanding. Furthermore, beyond and within the large state-led urban development projects, the role of private actors also further emerged as an important driver of urban transformations as made visible, especially in the 2010s (Salukvadze and Golubchikov, 2016), by projects as the *Hualing Special Economic Zone* and *Panorama Tbilisi* in the capital (Gogishvili, 2017).

⁵The word "slow" refers to the fact that from 2012 to 2014 the United National Movement party lost first the parliamentary, then presidential and later local elections. This led to the beginning of the Georgian Dream political coalition reign.

Overall, the post-Rose Revolution context characterized by the deregulation of urban planning, the lack of government control on real estate development or its extreme liberalization, the growing availability of credit for both large projects and individual mortgages fuelled a true construction boom. While contributing to economic growth, such a boom often resulted in chaotic, low quality and sometimes exclusionary forms of urban development that multiplied large residential, office and commercial complexes at the expense of public and green space and damaging the quality of the built environment. However, it must be noted that the consequences of 25 years of (variably) chaotic and deregulated urban environment have slowly brought both public and social actors to a new consensus on the need for strategic, plan-based thinking and regulation. In this new climate, Tbilisi, Batumi and Gori have been among the first cities that started to work on the design of new structural, master and strategic plans or on the revision of their previous highly deregulative versions. However, up to now, none of the plans under discussion has been finally approved by the respective city governments, as discussions negotiations and, at times, conflicts on various aspects has been protracted.

The five contributions of the issue

The five contributions that make this special issue take in full account the context of transition and consolidation that we have just outlined. More in particular, while some authors discuss and detail part of the large societal and territorial trends that we mentioned, others present the results of sensitive empirical studies that describe and explain how the mediation and negotiation between such trends and individual and community agency is actually produced on the ground of cities and neighborhoods.

The first two articles by Salukvadze and Salukvadze and Gugushvili offer a comprehensive overview of a number of processes that developed in Georgian cities since 1991. The introductory article by **Salukvadze** "*Urbanization trends and development of cities in Georgia*" presents a broad summary of the changes occurred in cities' role and hierarchies in Georgia since the collapse of the Soviet Union and discusses the contribution of the national government in urban restructuring and development. The article outlines the core demographic changes occurring as a result of mass out-migration of population and decrease of natural growth rates. Salukvadze emphasizes that the shrinkage of cities all across Georgia further increased the role and un-proportioned dominance of Tbilisi over the urban system, in a context in which all other major cities are striving but struggling to find a viable and sustainable economic basis able to enhance their local competitiveness.

Focusing on one of the main drivers of such changes, the article by **Salukvadze and Gugushvili** "*Geographic Patterns of Tourism in Urban Settlements of Georgia*" touches upon the spatial outcome of the recent prioritization of tourism in urban development initiatives and more at large of the wider branding strategies of Georgia. Based on the analysis of quantitative data for the period 2006-2016, the authors focus on the spatial patterning trends of tourism in three cities – Batumi, Kutaisi and Tbilisi – by examining the role of public infrastructure projects and transportation networks in the distribution of its socio-economic

gains. The role played by the development of particular infrastructure projects - such as the reactivation and upgrading of airports in Kutaisi and Batumi- in the productions of such gains makes itself evident when the performance of these cities is compared to other cities, underlining the emergence and consolidation of new uneven development trends that are co-produced by such state initiatives.

Differently, the articles of Harris-Brandts, Pilz and Sparsbord approach the issue of large state-led urban redevelopment and regeneration projects, their impact on local populations and economies from various perspectives and – especially in the case of the last two contributions- the variegated tactical responses tailored by communities in order to adjust to this new environment.

The contribution by **Harris-Brandts** “*Building Vacancies: Tourism and Empty Real Estate in Batumi*” studies the increasing growth of tourism-related construction in the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Adjara with buildings that often remain unoccupied or in a protracted state of construction due to a variety of factors. Enquiring the primary causes, driving forces and geographies of a vacancy in Batumi, the author puts light on the heavy influence of the political and economic elites’ nexus on the reshaping of urban environments and of local identities through its urban branding strategies. In this context, vacancy is not just the outcome of “rampant speculation” – as shown by the international literature on global super-riches and absentee ownership- but also of a sustained search for visible and rapid construction “as a means of displaying government legitimacy and state building progress”.

The article by **Sparsbrod** “*There was communality.*” *Narrating Transformations in Old Tbilisi*”, while concentrating also on the post-Rose revolution years, moves the locus of the attention to Georgia’s capital city where the author explores, through the deployment of ethnographic technics, the collective memory of the residents of the rapidly changing historical centre of “Old Tbilisi”. Presenting local dwellers’ spatial representations, images and narratives, Sparsbrod discusses the cultural construction of a romanticized past of Old Tbilisi’s social life revolving around the themes of the traditional “Tbilisi courtyard” and the spirit of “communality” that was supposedly associated to it. Such construct, that somehow implies the removal of the difficult living conditions that the residents had to put up with, in reality, seems to play a key role in the residents’ coping strategies in face of the massive changes occurred in the post-Socialist era. Changes that have been accelerating and intensified in the context of the intense process of urban regeneration and subsequent touristification of the old city that was unleashed after the Rose Revolution.

Finally, the article by **Pilz** “*Speaking, building, shopping: A social-anthropological approach to the post-socialist condition of Tbilisi*” discusses, by equally presenting materials collected through ethnographic fieldwork conducted in three distinct areas in Tbilisi, how emerging symbolical landscapes and patterns of social differentiation are experienced in residents’ daily lives. The empirical material presented in the article is discussed in the perspective of a particular post-Socialist pattern of urban reconstruction that the author puts in tension with widely

addressed modernisation discourses in postcolonial contexts. Drawing in particular from the critical examining of the evolving materiality of domestic life, it is argued that official discourse's construction of the "socialist" past as the "un-modern" is far from effectively succeeding in "colonizing" people daily lives. And that the cultural reality of post-socialist Georgian cities is better understood instead in the terms of a "nested pattern encompassing the coexistence of socialist, Georgian, and new forms and styles".

Conclusions: cross-cutting issues and potential research paths

The aim of this special issue was the critical analysis of Georgia's urban transformations from the 1991 independence with a particular focus on the urban impacts of the nation-wide neoliberal state policies promoted after the 2003 "Rose Revolution". The five articles offer a valuable contribution in this regard, also by better articulating and situating in actual local contexts, processes and issues that have already been discussed by wider, international debates on the post-socialist city. Despite some variety of topics and approaches, they also clearly point to the identification of some cross-cutting themes that are, in the perspective of the editors, of particular relevance.

First, the role of large urban regeneration projects orchestrated by national and local governments clearly emerges as a paramount, largely recognized, object of research for contemporary Georgian cities. While conditions of implementation and final results can vary, it is clear how authors share some critical points about their overall effects on urban environments that are the ones – gentrification and housing unaffordability, increased socio-spatial polarization, urban refunctionalization- that were also raised in the first paragraph of this introduction. More in general, the consolidating nexus between political stabilization, state-led urban regeneration projects, tourism, and real estate investments is clearly leading towards a wider commodification and formalization of the built environment.

Second, the inflation of the built environment and of physical capital has been scrutinized in some contributions, not only as a key indicator of the just mentioned deeper and structural changes affecting the political economy of the country, but also of the strong political incentives that have pushed to the increasingly greater centrality of real-estate investments in the overall economic growth and state-building strategy (and narrative) promoted by the ruling elites. In the case of Batumi, we have seen how the strong twist of its local development towards the attraction of international tourism through real estate investments has been key in the production of a high rate of vacancy that also seems justified by "political reasons". In other areas, high levels of investment have been produced in the form of "urban regeneration" – as in the cases of the many projects involving urban cores and historical centers – but in many other cases – especially in Tbilisi – in the form of outright expansion for new residential and commercial uses that have boosted confidence and optimism in a prospective of growth and expansion.

Third, the impact of the branding practices of the Georgian government and the manipulation of the built environment of a number of Georgian cities in the

pursue of international tourism, has also been an object of particular attention in this issue. In this perspective, it is relevant to critically trace the trajectory of Georgian cities' cosmopolitanism and, more specifically, the evolution from its previous highly localized variety – with cities being the locus of historically rooted, culturally diverse assemblages that stratified across centuries- characteristic of both the pre-socialist and Socialist eras to its contemporary touristified forms. In a sense, the process of local and urban ethnic homogenization that has been produced in the context of post-Soviet era processes of South-Caucasus national states and identities' restructuring appears to be at least partially challenged by the increasing flows of tourists to Georgian cities – and the related production of a “cosmopolitan legacy” ready for consumption – and by the very liberal immigration and capital circulation and investment regimes implemented in the post-Rose Revolution period.

Fourth, a very wide space of tensions and adjustments between changing lifestyles and material cultures, forms of use and understandings of public and private spaces, constructions and reconstructions of memories and experiences of the past and, finally, strategic discourses promoted by political powers and economic elites is one more very important field of attention that emerges from several of the contributions. Tbilisi case studies illustrate the role that *bricolage* tactics – from vertical building extensions to eclectic, economizing combinations of the old and the new in apartment renovations – still, play in the making of important components of the urban middle classes. This proves to be an area of great critical relevance also in the analysis of actual processes of class structuration and differentiation in a new urban context that, all though characterized by economic growth, still comprises relevant informal economies and networks of exchange involving the large bulks of Georgians who have left the countries after independence.

Of course, and expectedly so, these four topics – as long as others that were discussed in the five contributions- are just some of the issues that are currently at stake in Georgian cities. Crucial areas of interest that have been seldom addressed and that a more sustained stream of researches on Georgian – and, more at large, on South Caucasian- cities are yet to be addressed.

First, further research *on* and discussion *of* the various forms, strategies and outcomes of processes of neoliberal erosion and/or restructuring of urban public spaces in Georgian cities would be of great value. It would be relevant both for the significance of such trends in cities around the world- and in post-Socialist cities in particular – and for the contribution that studies in this area could actually make to a better understanding of the highly localized, path dependency factors that co-preside at the production (and erosion) of public spaces.

Following this last issue, a focus on the impact of religious practices and the role of strong religious actors such as the Georgian Orthodox Church – that has been important in post-independence state-building strategies and narratives – have on urban built environments would be of great interest as well. Signature projects as the construction of the Holy Trinity Cathedral of Tbilisi are just the most visible occurrences of a more generalized process that, although in a context

of increasing cultural secularism, has seen religion regaining some space in the making of Georgian cities.

While the contributions have addressed issues related to urban housing and overall real estate construction process a further research on housing problems appears to be essential, as Georgian cities are going through the processes of gentrification, car-driven steady suburbanization and new phenomena of residential segregation in post-Soviet housing environments. A focus on state policies and on the link between housing carriers and pathways and the already mentioned processes of class differentiation and structuration would be also of great support in the understanding of the user and demand side of the sustained real estate investments made after the “Rose Revolution”.

As it has been outlined in the earlier parts of this editorial, great importance in the processes of spatial restructuring that have involved Georgia has been played by the series of violent armed conflicts that developed by the early 1990s with impacts that are still being produced today. The scholarly attention of the impacts of war, displacement and memory politics of war-affected regions in urban areas has been lacking despite this evident relevance. The unfortunate global relevance of such issues, and even more in recent years of their urban impact, would largely justify a more consistent attention.

Finally, if it is true that a new consensus on the need of a new planning and policy framework for the governing of spatial development of Georgian cities is coming more and more to center of the national policy agenda a research focus on the actual, hopefully consistent, outcomes of this re-centering would be of great importance as well. If proper empirical evidence seem to be still limited as of now, researchers can be ready to critically examine final results – and governance and organizational characters – of the planning process of varied nature. In conclusion, we do hope that this special issue will have contributed to the further strengthening of what seems to be a growing international interest for a region – the South Caucasus – and a country – Georgia – that as will be clearer by the end of the reading of this issue are objects of great interest for anyone who is involved in urban affairs.

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Tbilisi

In the Caucasus,
Corinna Del Bianco
detail
look at the complete project
p.88

Cities of the South Caucasus: a view from Georgia



Tbilisi

In the Caucasus,
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Urbanization Trends and Development of Cities in Georgia

by Joseph Salukvadze

Urbanization
City development
Georgia

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, urbanization rates dropped in Georgia. It was a result of mass out-migration of population and decrease of natural growth. The capital city of Tbilisi succeeded to retain most of its population, while the most of second-tier cities and smaller towns have experienced and still are undergoing population decline or significant shrinkage. Over a couple of decades, many settlements without obvious success are scrambling to find new economic bases to build the development on, and make their urban structures more competitive and attractive for investments, as well as for population. Meantime, the urban system of the country experiences unproportioned dominance of capital metropolis over the rest urban areas in terms of population, economic development and welfare continue to grow.

The internal structures and urban forms of cities, especially capital metropolises have also undergone significant changes. Privatization of real estate and land parcels along with the extreme commercialization of construction and development businesses dramatically changed many urban neighbourhoods, cityscapes, and strongly influenced the social composition and cultural traits of large cities. Over last two decades, housing development became by far the leading driver of spatial growth and, in some cases, territorial sprawl. Meantime, production of the huge amount of new housing spaces didn't solve a problem of housing affordability, homelessness, and urban poverty. Furthermore, new urban environmental challenges have occurred with private appropriation and reduction of public open spaces and green areas, while growing individualization of mobility patterns (use of private cars) and transportation modes added to ecological problems which always existed in big cities. Urban spatial planning has lost its former importance and often fell under influence of commercial and political interests.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify main trends and features of urban development in the cities of Georgia and provide an analytical overview on ongoing and upcoming urban processes across different types of cities.

Introduction

Georgia is a small country in the South Caucasus region with a territory of 69.700 km². After ethnopolitical conflicts of the early 1990s and the Russo-Georgian war of 2008 two areas of Georgia – the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic and part of Shida Kartli Region (known also as South Ossetia) – have been occupied and put under the control of the Russian Federation. Georgia has a population of 3.718,2 thousand persons (as of 1 January 2017), out of which 57,2% lives in urban areas and 42,8% in rural places (GeoStat 2017).¹ Georgia is classified by the World Bank² as a lower-middle-income economy.

¹ Further, in the text all data is presented for the territories under effective Georgian jurisdiction, if not stated otherwise.

² See <http://data.worldbank.org/country/georgia>

After a dramatic depression in the 1990s, when GDP per capita dropped below 1.500 USD³, the economy started to grow again and rose up to 3.852 USD⁴ in 2016.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, as in the case of other post-communist countries, Georgia engaged in a long political, economic and cultural transition to capitalism. The transition imposed a strong imprint on the processes of urbanization and on the national urban system, on the one hand, and on the internal structures and urban forms of cities, on the other. Under the influence of a long series of neoliberal reforms, the economic basis of urbanization changed dramatically, the institutional set-up of city governance was deeply transformed, urban spatial planning lost its former importance, and the functional and social differentiation of the urban society accelerated.

In other words, Georgian cities underwent a process of *multiple transformations* which includes (i) *Institutional transformations* with democratic government elections, privatization of state assets, prices and foreign trade liberalization; (ii) *Social transformations* with economic restructuring, social polarisation and the rise of a postmodern culture and neoliberal politics; (iii) *Urban transformations* with city centre commercialization, inner-city regeneration, suburbanization, etc. (Sýkora & Bouzarovski 2011, p. 46).

Moving from this context, the purpose of this article is to provide a comprehensive overview on the process of urbanization in Georgia, identify main trends and features of spatial development in its cities, and analytically review ongoing and upcoming urban processes of change across different types of cities. In doing so, I mostly apply a desk research method which is based on the consultation of official statistical sources – mainly produced and published by the National Statistics Office of Georgia-Geostat – as well as on the review and analysis of scientific literature (see references), reports of international (e.g. the World Bank, UN-Habitat) and local agencies/ministries and other relevant publications.

Demographic features and urbanization trends

After a relatively fast urbanization driven by the Soviet industrialization policy in 1930-1950s encompassing all member republics, Georgia's urban population experienced moderate growth rates and after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 even started to experience a decrease. It was only in the second half of the 2000s that the share of the urban population started to grow again, reaching its all-time pick in 2015 (see Fig.1).

However, this rebounding of urbanization was coupled with an overall shrinkage of the national population. In fact, over the last 25 years, Georgia experienced a dramatic population decline with a drop from 5,4 mln to just 3,7 mln, i.e. almost by 1/3. While securing a very low but still positive natural increase rate (from 0 to 4 ‰) during the post-soviet years, Georgia became a country of mass emigration, especially during the 1990s, with a net

³ See <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD>

⁴ GDP in current prices in 2014 (see http://www.Geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=119&lang=eng).

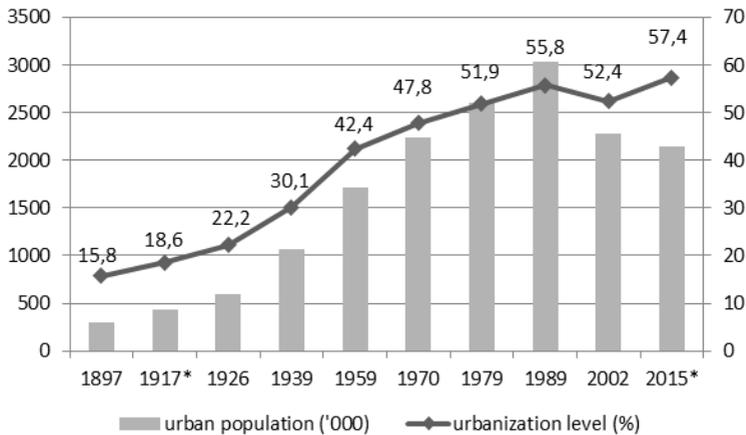


Fig.1 Urban population change and urbanization rates in Georgia over last century (based on the population censuses).

Source: Compiled by the author based on Jaoshvili 1978, p. 63;

Various Authors 2003, p. 27, and National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat).

Note: * data is based on estimation

migration balance that in the years 1990-1997 was negative for ranging from a total 620.000 to 1 million people (Salukvadze & Meladze 2014, pp. 152-153).

Mass emigration led to a stagnant demographic situation in the entire country, as well as in its urban areas. By 2016 the crude birth rate in urban areas decreased to 15,2‰ and the crude death rate had significantly increased to 13,7‰ with the rate of natural increase consequently dropping from 7,8‰ in 1989 to 1,6‰ in 2016.

Very significant were also the changes affecting the age and sex composition of the population: in 2017, the share of population under 15 decreased from 24,3% in 1989 to 19,5% while the share of people of 65+ almost doubled from 7,8% in 1989 to 14,5%. In the period between the last two population censuses (2002 and 2014) the median age of the population grew by 2 years to 38,1 (35,9 for men and 40,1 for women) while the average size of urban households contracted from 4 in 1989 to slightly more than 3 persons in 2016.

Additionally, and most importantly, mass outmigration has constituted a brain drain that had a particularly negative influence on the availability of human capital in urban areas. In fact, “Whereas rural-urban migration made up merely partially for urban population losses, it compensated even less for the deficit in qualified urban labour” (UN-HABITAT 2013, p. 207).

The urban system and hierarchy

There are 91 urban settlements⁵ – 54 towns/cities and 37 dabas⁶ – in Georgia.⁷ Almost all of them – besides very few as in the case of Batumi, Mtskheta and a couple of smaller towns – have lost population since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The population decrease was the most dramatic in so-called monotowns – cities depending on a single industrial sector like Chiatura, Tkibuli, Zestaponi – that lost up to one-third of its inhabitants, a decline determined by the collapse of industrial production and the subsequent relevant worsening of socio-economic conditions (UN-HABITAT 2013, p. 214).

An underdeveloped urban hierarchy with an unproportional hegemony of the capital city over other urban settlements is characteristic of Georgia. Traditionally, Tbilisi has always been by far the largest city and its dominance has gradually strengthened during the Soviet period when the capital cities of smaller Soviet Republics became the object of large investments aimed at increasing their industrial and military potential, infrastructural strength and human capacity, while other cities were almost ignored. This trend continued in the post-Soviet free-market period with Tbilisi, almost the only internationally competitive city in Georgia, gaining even larger importance and strength compared to other cities of the country. Today, it concentrates more than half of the urban population and almost 30% of the overall population nationwide (Salukvadze & Golubchikov 2016). Moreover, the capital possesses a very high share of the economic, social and cultural capital – as well of their actual development potential- as compared to other urban settlements.

The population gap between Tbilisi – that stands at 1,14 million inhabitants – and the other cities is therefore very large (GeoStat 2017). The three largest cities following Tbilisi count a population ranging from 100.000 to 200.000, and they altogether concentrate less than 0,5 million citizens (18% of all urban population). Meantime, the difference between Tbilisi and the second largest city, Batumi – that counts 155.000 inhabitants – is more than 7-fold (GeoStat 2017).

Another significant gap in the Georgian urban hierarchy is that between the big and smaller cities/towns since there is no middle-size settlement with a population ranging from 50.000 to 100.000. Most towns (31) with a population under 50.000 have in fact less than 10.000 residents. Equally interesting is that fact that almost 96% of all urban settlements is represented by smaller cities, towns, and dabas that concentrate less than 1/3 of the total population.

Furthermore, urbanization in Georgia is characterized by huge territorial disparities since the country is very unevenly covered by urban settlements. Almost 70% of the urban population is concentrated on 1% of the territory⁸ that comprises the areas located within the administrative limits of the four largest cities: Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi and Rustavi. This situation creates very large differences in urbanization levels between different municipalities and regions of the country, as well as it determines significant difference in population densities. The majority of cities in Georgia, especially the largest ones, are located in the narrow valley between the mountainous ranges, branches,

⁵ Georgian organic law 'Local Self-Government Code' (adopted in 2014) distinguishes two types of urban settlements in Georgian context: Town (City) and Daba; the latter is a smaller non-rural place (translated as township or borough in English).

⁶ Daba is a type of settlement in Georgia, a "small city". In present-day Georgia, daba is typically defined as a settlement with the population of no less than 3.000 and established social and technical infrastructure, which enables it to function as a local economic and cultural centre; it, furthermore, should not possess large agricultural lands. The status of daba can also be granted to a settlement with the population of less than 3.000, provided it functions as an administrative centre of the district (municipality).

⁷ In this report we refer only to those settlements that are under effective control of the Georgian government; settlements on the occupied territories of Abkhazeti and Tskhinvali region (s.c. South Ossetia) are not considered.

⁸ Territory of the entire Georgia, including occupied territories, is considered.

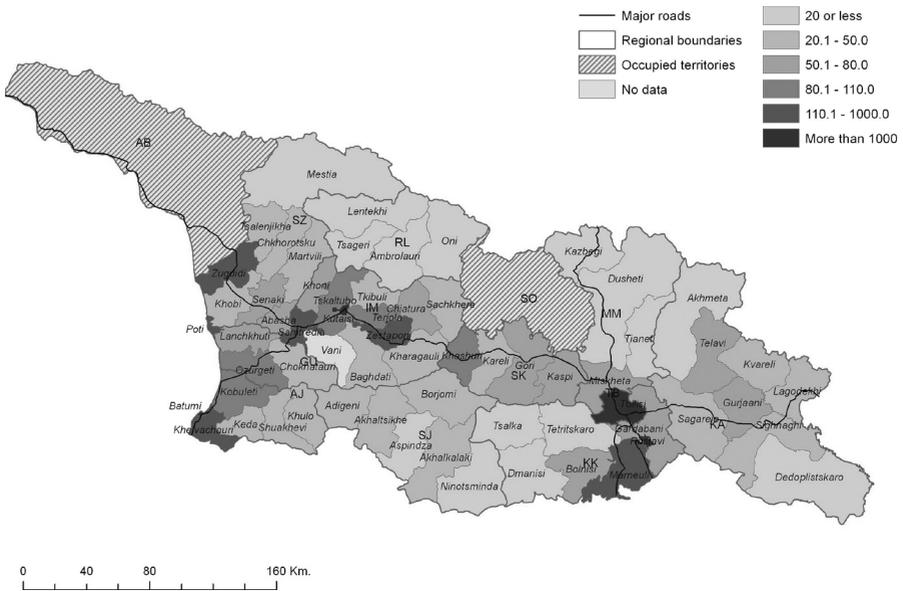


Fig.2 Population density by municipalities (persons/km²).

Source: World Bank 2015, p. 17, based on Geostat.

and plateaus of the Greater Caucasus and Minor Caucasus, along with the only highway running from the east to the west towards the coastline of the Black Sea (see Fig. 2).

While Georgia's national average population density amounts to 53,5 persons/km² the territories of few municipalities represented by the largest self-governing cities have densities exceeding 2.000 persons per km², coming to represent the truly focal places in terms of population concentration in the country.

A World Bank study called "Georgia Urbanization Review" (Salukvadze 2013) showed that the location and economic performance of cities in Georgia are closely linked to market access indicators such as (i) proximity to major highways, (ii) distance to the capital city of Tbilisi, (iii) distance to Big Four cities (Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi and Rustavi), and (iv) vicinity to the Black Sea ports (Batumi and Poti). Presumably, a better location is positively correlated with the population size and market size/capacity on the one hand, and further correlated with infrastructure and utility provision on the other.

Economic background of urban development

More than 70% of GDP is produced in urban areas, while the share of the primary sector – agriculture, forestry, and fishery- is less than 10% (7,9% in 2016, see Geostat). Trade, transport and communication and other tertiary and quaternary sectors that mostly cluster in urban areas show positive trends of growth. Their share in the national GDP during the last two decades rose from just over 45% to nearly 70%, while manufacturing also increased to more than 20% in recent years (24,5% in 2016) (Geostat 2018). All data that indicate a "sectoral shift away from agriculture and towards services" that "places the

spotlight on cities as engines of national growth” (World Bank 2015, p. 13).

Meantime, in spite of a strong correlation between urbanization and economic growth, urban areas could be performing much better as “Georgia is punching below its weight for its level of urbanization” (ibid., p. 9), lagging behind some of comparable regional neighbours like Azerbaijan, Romania and Slovakia, all of them with significantly higher GDP per capita rates.

An abrupt economic collapse followed the disappearance of the all-Soviet market in a couple of years after the demise of the USSR put Georgia’s economy under tremendous pressure, impacting with particular violence the economies of mono-industrial mining and manufacturing cities. Most of them failed to recover up to now and still seek a new economic basis to leverage on to achieve future development. Along with population loss, many cities and towns are experiencing high rates of unemployment and therefore of poverty and social vulnerability. The existence of displaced people (IDPs) from occupied regions further aggravates this problem.

There is a clear correlation between urbanization share in GDP and regional production specialization. Tbilisi, the most urbanized place of the country generates almost half of the national Gross Value Added (GVA) that is entirely produced by the tertiary or quaternary (around 80%) and industrial sectors (around 20%). Imereti, Adjara and Shida Kartli, preceded by the three big cities of Kutaisi, Rustavi and Batumi contribute by about 10% each to the national GVA.

Although the official statistics report a quite moderate nation-wide unemployment rate – 11,8% in 2016⁹ – urban unemployment is quite high – more than 20%- a level that is about 4-times higher than in rural areas. However, it needs to be noted that “[t]his appraisal does not take into account the huge underemployment in the countryside, which does not reflect in the unemployment rate (ADB 2016, p. 57)”. Underemployment and self-employment are often positively related with poverty, that is about 50% higher in rural places than in urban areas. Consequently, average monthly income per household is almost 25% higher in urban areas as compared to rural areas with the capital metropolis of Tbilisi (GEL 1.199) and the predominantly urban Adjara (GEL 1.022) on top of the list (Geostat 2015).

There is also a large gap – almost 10% – between urban and rural areas regarding relative poverty with the 2/3 of Georgia’s relatively poor living in rural areas (MRDI 2015, p. 24). Persisting high poverty levels can be explained by jobless economic growth and low agricultural productivity, twinned with inappropriate human capital and narrow labour markets (Gugushvili 2011). Among the city poor, besides traditional groups such as pensioners, disabled and multi-children families, internally displaced persons (IDPs) should be mentioned: they were more than in 2014 with a large majority of them residing in cities (MRDI 2015, p. 7).

⁹ See http://www.Geostat.ge/?action=page&p_id=145&lang=geo

Socio-economic patterns of Georgian cities

The huge differences between the cities and towns of Georgia in terms of population, economic profile, human capital and other factors determine their different roles in the urban system. According to their importance in the national economy and level of socio-cultural development, they could be grouped into three main types (World Bank 2015):

- (i) 'Big 4' growth poles – Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Rustavi;
- (ii) Regional centres with a more localized economic gravitational pull;
- (iii) Secondary urban economies with market access and opportunities depending on the growth potential of the 'Big 4'.

The 'Big 4' are the distinguished growth centres of Georgia. Besides Tbilisi's undisputed dominance in terms of population size, economic potential, share in GDP/GVA, etc., the aggregate strength of all big cities is even more impressive. Tbilisi's genuine diversified economic basis and most favourable investment environment, which allowed attracting nearly three-quarters of incoming FDI (Geostat 2016), in combination with the potential of the remaining three big cities make these group unchallenged: it almost fully represents Georgia's human, economic and intellectual capital. The cities of 'Big 4' are leaders of trade and business nation-wide and they have, especially Tbilisi, a broad obligation to lead Georgia's economy to a path of sustained growth. Additionally, Tbilisi is a centre of the largest and only agglomeration (TA) in Georgia concentrating around 1,5 million inhabitants although it hasn't any legal and institutional status so far.

Besides Tbilisi, all big cities take advantage of their location on the trade corridor, though each has a slightly different economic base and comparative advantage. Batumi draws its advantage from its strategic location as a tourism hub and Georgia's secondary port on the Black Sea, Kutaisi is a provincial capital with a faltering industrial base that needs to be reconverted, a traditional high education centre and a newly emerged tourism hub (after opening the international airport in 2012; see also Salukvadze and Gugushvili in this issue), and Rustavi is an industrial hub that enjoys the advantages of its proximity to Tbilisi (World Bank 2015).

Each of these cities could be doing better in terms of capitalizing on their market access through developing stronger private-public partnership, developing clear vision and priorities for city's development and combining business environment improvements with targeted sectorial interventions. In addition, they are positioned to facilitate the growth of secondary urban economies by establishing links with them as local input and output markets.

The Regional Centres are further away from the highway corridor and less connected to the growth centres. Nevertheless, these cities serve an important function as administrative capitals and serve a more localized market for smaller towns and rural areas in their vicinity. Gori in Shida Kartli, Telavi in Kakheti and Zugdidi in Samegrelo are good examples of such cities.

The Secondary Urban Economies are represented by relatively small towns

and some of them may be seen as the lower tier of growth centres for Georgia. The majority of them still struggle with fundamental issues such as adequate funding, basic services, and infrastructure.

It is obvious that in Georgia only big cities with population of more than 100,000 have enough potential in terms of population and economic growth, human resources, institutional capacity, economic performance, ability to develop innovative technologies and creative approaches, investments' attractiveness to be considered as distinguished actors and major growth poles for sustainable urban and national development.

Changes in city development

Borén and Gentile (2007) in their discussion on metropolitan processes in post-communist states identify several key significant socialist-era legacies such as central planning, land allocation,¹⁰ the second economy, the centrality of defence considerations that continue to mould the course of events in the urban scene. Meantime, when theorising the multiple transformations produced during the post-communist era and characterizing cities under these transformations, Šykora and Bouzarovski write: "Cities in former communist countries can no longer be seen as socialist cities... Yet, they are not fully developed capitalist cities either" (2011, p. 44). This perspective seems to apply to Georgian cities since, especially large metropolitan cities, perfectly fall under a general pattern of post-communist cities that while becoming modernized, market-driven, socially differentiated they still keep traits and legacies of Soviet cities.

Drawing from a quite limited body of scholarly research dedicated to problematics of Georgian cities such as housing, transportation, planning, public spaces (Assche et al., 2009, Grdzlishvili and Sathre, 2011, Neugebauer and Rekhviashvili, 2015, Polese et al., 2015, Gonçalves et al., 2016, Salukvadze and Golubchikov, 2016, Gogishvili, 2017) we can identify some main issues and trends.

The prime feature of post-communist transition in Georgia has been the mass privatization of land, housing, and other economic assets and sectors. Among all post-Soviet countries, Georgia introduced apparently the highest degrees of free-market liberalism through its reforms, however this shift towards private ownership and entrepreneurship did not always translate into economic growth and prosperity, as well as into a better city environment and urban order (Salukvadze 2009; UN-HABITAT 2013).

The second is the decline of the role of spatial planning that in soviet times was entirely centralized and subsidized by the state during. For almost two decades after independence Georgian cities have undergone changes without a strict and systematic abidance to master plans and other essential planning documents, driven mostly by real property market forces and influential stakeholders' - private business/developers, and governmental groups - interests. The departure from the Soviet spatial planning system produced a vacuum which was not filled up by any new system (Salukvadze 2009; Van

10 Land allocation means delivery/arrangement of land parcels to different land users – public entities and/or private persons/tenants.

Assche and Salukvadze 2012). This trend has had especially strong and mostly negative impact on spatial changes of more vibrant bigger cities like Tbilisi and Batumi, while in smaller, economically stagnant towns, such changes did not occur at significant scale. Only in 2005, the Georgian law '*On Territorial Arrangement and Urban Planning*' was adopted, which introduced new general principles and frameworks of urban planning and development (World Bank 2016, p. 30). However, the implementation of this law took more years and production of master plans of some important cities took place only starting with the 2010s. For instance, Tbilisi got its first post-Soviet master plan (general land-use plan) only in 2009 and in 2018 its updated version will be introduced.

The third is the leading role of housing construction played in the territorial growth in almost all cities. Immediately after independence, the housing stock in Georgian cities has been privatized and sold to sitting tenants (Vardosanidze 2010). After the so-called 'housing hunger' of Soviet times caused by a strictly limited provision of living space per dweller (less than 9 m²), a relatively low housing quality and the very long waiting lists to acquire new dwelling, the newly emerging homeowners rushed to improve their living conditions. During the 1990s when there was almost no new residential construction in the cities caused by political unrest and economic crisis, housing 'improvement' took mainly the form of so-called "apartment building extension" (ABE). This semiformal format of 'Do-It-Yourself' practices was a tool for the deployment of *in situ* housing adjustment and social resilience strategies (Bouzarovski et al. 2011) that have helped thousands of urban households to acquire additional living space, though at a cost of deteriorated building safety and aesthetic appearance.

From the 2000s, along with the relative improvement of the economic situation, the construction of new residential high-rises took place in the big cities and by the time being it reached a truly massive character. This production offered to better-off households new, spacious and better-quality housing that was non-existent in the Soviet times. The financial sector played an important role in the construction boom with banks showing "increasing willingness to finance these housing developments" (UN Habitat 2013, p. 220). Construction of new housing was also fuelled by remittances of those Georgians working/living abroad who considered buying real-estate properties to be a secure investment both in the perspective of re-selling an of renting the new apartments (Gentile et al. 2015). This triggered both heavy competition for the best urban sites for multi-apartment housing and significantly higher housing prices, which grew exponentially during last 15 years, reaching 1,5-2 thousand USD/m² in the central parts of Tbilisi. Mass provision of expensive commercial housing – often exceeding the still low average incomes – rendered housing unaffordable for the great majority of citizens (UN-HABITAT 2013; World Bank 2015). As large segments of the population remain unserved, housing inequality and segregation grew (Salukvadze 2016). The liberalization of urban governance, the deployment of deregulatory tools in property and construction activities, the simplification of bureaucratic procedures put Georgia on top of many international rankings (e.g. Doing Business surveys rank Georgia

among top positioned countries overall – 9th in 2017 and 2018- with high positions in property registration and issuing of construction permits).¹¹

However, at the same time, the housing boom together with some other out-of-control urban processes like congested traffic, air and water pollution, etc., has threatened the urban environment and ecological situation in many cities, especially in urban metropolises. First, urban public open spaces dramatically shrunk as they became targets for investment from housing and other building developments as high-rises have mushroomed in city gardens, parks, boulevards and other vacant land plots- e.g. residential, industrial or school courtyards- especially in the centrally located areas of towns. Second, after the disappearance of more sustainable and clean public transport systems such as trams and trolleys already in the first years of the 1990s, private cars and micro-vans (so-called marshrutka) became the dominant mode of passenger conveyance in all cities (only Tbilisi has metro/underground transport). The dramatic growth of motorization in the last few years- according to experts¹² in Tbilisi car ownership exceeded 600 vehicles per 1.000 inhabitants ratio- of traffic congestion, unrestricted usage of obsolete second-hand cars and of low-quality gasoline became by far the primary reason of air pollution and of other ecological problems in urban areas. Third, unregulated, often informal, constructions in river valleys, poor utility provision- drinking water, heating, waste management- in several small towns and some peripheral urban districts, led to an increase in risks for the population and the environment, especially in case of natural hazards. The deadly flood of river Vera in Tbilisi in June 2015 demonstrated unpreparedness and low resilience of urban settlements to natural threats.

Finally, one more important trend over last decade is the launching of state-backed new urban development projects in some selected cities and towns. Acting as a sort of state-led gentrification, these projects aim on one hand at improving the urban environment and city life, and, on the other at promoting cities' international attractiveness and competitiveness through the building of their new images and branding, especially in the perspective of tourism development (Oriol 2016). Such projects have mostly been launched on ad hoc bases. They primarily took place in Tbilisi and included (i) renovation-rehabilitation of its historical core (e.g. the project 'New Life for Old Tbilisi', renovation of Agmashenebeli avenue), (ii) erection of new signature buildings in the city centre and close vicinity (e.g. Public Service Hall, "Bridge of Love", etc.); (iii) renovation of urban infrastructure and public services. It is remarkable that, besides Tbilisi, the state has conducted or supported projects in other bigger cities as well as smaller towns. In order to reduce the overwhelmingly commanding role of Tbilisi, in the context of under a decentralization strategy, the government of former president Mikheil Saakashvili relocated the Constitutional Court to Batumi and the Parliament to Kutaisi. These experiments, especially one with the Parliament, are still a source of many contradictions as it did not prove an efficient solution. On the other hand, the economic projects of opening international airports for low-cos airlines in Kutaisi and Batumi worked well and helped the conversion of Kutaisi into tourist and travel hub. Batumi along with Tbilisi became

¹¹ See World Bank Doing Business website - <http://www.doingbusiness.org/rankings>.

¹² Interview (12/08/2017) with Gela Kvashilava, a chairman of transport NGO.

a vibrant urban place attracting well-known hotel chains, housing, and office-space developers. The renovation of city centres of Kutaisi, Zugdidi, Telavi, Akhaltsikhe, Mtskheta, as well as smaller Signagi and Mestia, also were aimed at the attraction of tourists, a goal that was effectively reached. Nevertheless, some of these projects cause conflicts between the specialists and the local population in terms of their necessity and urgency, while socioeconomic conditions of a significant part of the population in those cities and towns still remain far from optimal.

Conclusions: Main challenges of transition

Contemporary Georgian cities while still undergoing a process of post-communist transformation are facing several challenges caused by new state policies such as deindustrialization, privatization, marketization, governance neoliberalization and deregulation. In this context, observers can easily notice the contradictions posed by both transition and globalization (Salukvadze and Golubchikov 2016) well represented by the internal struggle to find, on one hand, a new economic basis for development and, on the other, to obtain a decent positioning in a highly competitive urban hierarchy at the local, regional (within South Caucasus and beyond) and, in the case of Tbilisi, global levels.

Georgian urban landscapes that mostly have been shaped during the Soviet period are undergoing dramatic changes in terms of functions, structural set-up, and morphology, sometimes forming strange and eclectic cityscapes containing old legacies and new developments in an often-contested manner. The entire post-Soviet period has witnessed a deeply imbalanced process of urban growth based on the avoidance of planning as a tool for urban regulation and consensus building. Meantime, ad-hoc fancy post-modernist signature projects launched in the name of modernization not always brought adequate good results, especially from a standpoint of the overall economic and social improvement of the quality of life in targeted settlements and urban areas.

The processes and trends that we have briefly presented in this contribution all stress the need of more balanced approaches to urban growth with the implementation of inclusive urban development tools, the strengthening of planning and assessment institutions and the design of effective urban strategies and agendas. Only in such case, we could expect a gradual resolution of systematic problems such as population stagnation, urban shrinkage, distorted urban hierarchization and of other dozens of intra-urban problems some of which that have been both inherited as a Soviet legacy and newly acquired during the recent transition.

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Tbilisi

In the Caucasus,
Corinna Del Bianco
detail
look at the complete project
p.88

Geographic Patterns of Tourism in Urban Settlements of Georgia

by Gvantsa Salukvadze
& Temur Gugushvili

Urban tourism
Spatial allocation
Georgian cities

This study discusses the spatial patterns of tourism allocation in urban Georgia through phenomenal changes in tourism performance. Different perspectives are examined towards the role of public infrastructure projects and well-connected internal transportation networks development in the equal distribution of the social and economic gains from the tourism industry. An analysis of statistical indicators of tourism industry performance in the three urban settlements of Batumi, Kutaisi and Tbilisi clearly illustrates the changes that occurred in tourism development in each of the three cities over a ten-year period from 2006 to 2016. Comprehensive analysis and interpretation of statistical data shows the extent to which the expansion of tourism industry in particular cities and regions benefited from the development of infrastructure projects while other cities and regions failed to receive such advantages. Ultimately, the study addresses the research question whether the growth of Georgia's tourism industry still benefits only its capital, Tbilisi or it has also been valuable for other urban settlements.

Introduction

Empirical evidence clearly shows that during Soviet rule, Georgia was a tourism hub (Frederiksen & Gottfredsen, 2017). In the early 1990s, after the fall of the Soviet Union, Georgia was plunged into civil war and economic crisis, and the tourism industry stagnated significantly. It should be noted that tourist accommodation facilities, such as hotels and hotel-type establishments, were used as asylums for internally displaced refugees (Adeishvili et al. 2011). Following the unprecedented economic collapse of the Georgian economy, a slow revival of the tourism industry was initiated in the mid-1990s.

It should be taken into account that since the Soviet era, the tourism industry has played a vital role in Georgia's economic and social development. The potential for tourism to become the fastest-growing industry led to a substantial increase in private investment in this sector, which calls into question its influence on changes in the tourism distribution in urban-type settlement patterns.

Since 2004, the footprints of mass tourism development have been visible. Due to the new wave of state investment and support together with the development of a cohesive strategy for the long-term viability of tourism, several successful projects have been implemented to promote the local economy in various regions (OECD Development Centre 2011). Three primary regional development projects have been carried out in major cities, such as Batumi (Adjara Autonomous Republic), Kutaisi (Imereti Region), Tbilisi, Telavi (Kakheti Region), Mtskheta (Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region) and Signagi (Kakheti Region), and their surrounding areas to upgrade infrastructure and facilities at natural and cultural heritage sites. The promotion of these cities has helped to transform the above-mentioned regions into vibrant destination identities (The World Bank 2015).

Taking into consideration the recent past of Georgia, continuous investment from various donor international organisations and local funds unleashed the potential of the tourism industry in Georgia and led to its fast growth in terms of indicators such as the number of domestic/international visitors, tourism value added and international tourism receipts. It is remarkable that, according to the Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA), the average annual growth rate over a recent ten-year period (2005–2014) was 30%, with the highest growth rate seen in 2012 when the number of international arrivals increased by 56.9%. Between 2009 and 2013, Georgia achieved one of the fastest rates of tourism growth globally, with total arrivals increasing by more than 300%. In 2015, the number of international travellers increased over the same time period last year by 7.0%, and, in 2016, the number of international tourists exceeded 6 million (GNTA 2018).

A limited number of studies have been carried out by scholars to observe the remarkable transformation of diverse variables as a result of tourism industry growth, mainly in terms of comparisons between settlements in rural (Hüller et al. 2017; Paresishvili et al. 2017; Gugushvili et al. 2017) and urban Georgia (Cappucci 2013). On an international level, despite the fact that the increasing trend of urban tourism has triggered a rapid upward tendency to research this phenomenon in the academic arena, urban tourism still remains quite an immature field of research (Pasquinelli & Bellini, 2017). From this standpoint, the present study aims to disclose the spatial distribution of tourism in the Georgian cities of Batumi, Kutaisi and Tbilisi and to provide discussion regarding the primary factors involved in these changes. As a result, this article serves as a contribution towards motivating further discussion pertaining to the urban tourism and its spatial allocation in Georgian cities.

Batumi, located in the south-west of Georgia, constitutes one of the most

visited tourist destinations due to the combination of high mountains and the Black Sea. As a Black Sea resort and port city, Batumi welcomes numerous visitors and is therefore known as a tourism capital of Georgia.

Kutaisi, located in the western part of Georgia, was considered as the capital in the past. In 2012, the Parliament of Georgia was transferred from Tbilisi to Kutaisi to promote decentralisation. Construction of Kutaisi International Airport for budget flights opened additional opportunities for the city in terms of tourism development.

Tbilisi, the current capital and most populous city of Georgia, is located at the crossroads of Asia and Europe and represents an international tourist hub. According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia (GEOSTAT), the population of this city exceeds 1 million.

The introduction to this article provides a historical review of tourism formation in Georgia. It is followed by a literature review, which presents the factors involved in tourism, including unequal and equal distribution as well as circumstances pertaining to the concentration of tourist flows in urban settlements. In the part of the manuscript- Magnetism to Urban Core: Limited Distribution of Tourist Flows, several variations of tourism distribution are discussed with the aid of available statistics and survey data. In the concluding section of the article, methodological limitations are discussed, and further research is recommended.

Literature Review

It is remarkable that tourism, as a complex economic activity, has multiple linkages to a wide range of economic sectors; thus, tourism has positive multiplier effects and the potential to act as a catalyst and incubator for economic development (Vellas 2011). Furthermore, tourism is considered to be 'a new urban activity' with the ability to transform the physical, social and economic structure of a place, hence playing a paramount part in place production (Anna & Rocca 2005, p. 9; Pasquinelli & Bellini 2017). In a study of mass tourism and urban systems (Anna & Rocca 2005), it was argued that the balance of a city as a dynamic and complex system can be compromised by an external force, such as the phenomenon of mass tourism. Institutionalised tourism transforms the entire destination in order to process a high number of visitors efficiently and smoothly (Cohen 1972).

It is noteworthy that 'the roots of mass tourism go to the twentieth century when tourism was expanding rapidly due to the advances in transport, which allowed people to travel in masses' (Sezgin & Yolal 2012, p. 73). Several authors (Xiuqiong & Fucai 2010; Yeoman 2012; Ebrahimzadeh & Daraei 2014; Kang, Kim & Nicholls 2014) highlighted the importance of reliable transport infrastructure, which may include the sum of roads, airports and seaports (Seetanah & Khadaroo 2009), in terms of accessibility to a destination and tourism distribution. Yeoman (2012), who considered transportation to be a vital component in the formation process for the future of tourism development (Kang et al. 2014), studied the case of South Korea where the impor-

tance of infrastructure facilities is acknowledged. The development of major highway and railway systems provides accessibility to new destinations for tourist flows, which implies that inclusive transportation linkage plays a crucial role in facilitating tourism activity distribution (Kang et al. 2014). Furthermore, based on evidence of Ebrahimzadeh and Daraei (2014) from Iran, the location of the destination matters in terms of modern transportation routes, which act as bridges between metropolitan cities and small towns. Also, according to Xiuqiong and Fucai (2009), advancement in transportation links and infrastructure lessens the inequity of tourism development.

To explain more precisely, the diffusion of tourism activity has changed into a 'mass phenomenon', which is expanding rapidly due to the fact that cities have become favourite tourist destinations (Coldwell 2017). In fact, tourist flows have become more and more concentrated in cities that are in need of adequate infrastructure and facilities to meet this new demand. If tourist demand exceeds urban supplies of facilities and infrastructure, cities will collapse and become 'unliveable' for both residents and tourists (Anna & Rocca 2005; Novy 2011). In light of recently commenced anti-tourism marches across Europe, considerable concern presently exists regarding the above-mentioned sporadic distribution of tourism in urban settlements (Coldwell 2017; Pasquinelli & Bellini 2017). With regard to this notion, the World Tourism Organization stresses the importance of alleviating the concentration of tourist flows in cities through ameliorated management within destinations and the timely tackling of this issue to prevent the roots of 'tourism-phobia' (Rifai 2017).

The issues addressed in this article acquires particular importance as, in some countries, it has been observed that tourism can be a source of spatial inequality (Yang & Wong 2013). More precisely, several complex spatial factors, such as attractions and transport access, trigger a concentration of visitor flows (O'Hare & Barrett 1999). As Gillmor and Pearce (1996) argued, the additional variable that affects the inequality of tourist flows is unsteady and differentiated regional tourism demand through various spatial patterns. According to their narrative, cities are divided into clusters of popular and unpopular destinations for tourists to visit. The existence of hotspots prevents cities from sound and inclusive tourism allocation (Gillmor 1996). The spatial distribution of tourism should therefore be evaluated to assess the role of growing tourism in regional economic inequality (Goh et al. 2014).

Methodology

Descriptive statistical analysis was used as a research method to explore the expansion of tourism performance in the urban settlements of Georgia over the last decade. The information obtained includes temporal and spatial administrative data. To ensure optimal illustration and depiction of key trends and patterns of tourism formation, tools such as QGIS, R and Excel were applied.

The selected approach, particularly the assessment of geographical peculiarities and aspects of tourism development, is in line with ongoing tourism

studies at an international level. More precisely, recent studies show the importance of integrating and analysing the spatial distribution characteristics of the spread of tourism (Tosun et al. 2003; Jian et al. 2017; Li et al. 2016).

The innovative approach of the present study lies in the integration of geographical patterns in the analysis of urban tourism allocation. More precisely, in the context of Georgia, this article will play a crucial role in filling the existing knowledge gap regarding the spatial diffusion of tourism in the urban settlements of Tbilisi, Batumi and Kutaisi. The sample cities for the study were selected based on their rapid advancement in social and transportation infrastructure; in particular, the chosen urban settlements were the first to build international airports. Moreover, road and railway links in these cities became more accessible over time, and other infrastructural projects were successfully implemented to meet the expectations and needs of visitors.

The information collection stage, which consisted of gathering from websites available data and/or requesting it in the form of public information, demonstrates the novelty of the above-mentioned applied approach (Turmanidze 2017). Existing databases that were expected to contribute to research on the sample cities did not provide separate data regarding indicators such as international tourism receipts, foreign credit card operations of international travellers or tourism value added. Despite the noted limitation, the researchers believe that this work could be a springboard for additional studies addressing tourism as a new activity in urban areas and the formation of the spatial distribution of tourism.

The databases of GEOSTAT were used as a primary source of statistical data. This agency regularly collects tourism statistics from officially registered hotels and hotel-type establishments and additionally conducts household surveys regarding domestic tourist flows. Through information collected from the Civil Aviation Agency of Georgia, the exact quantity of passengers at the airports of Tbilisi, Batumi and Kutaisi was confirmed.

Magnetism to Urban Core: Limited Distribution of Tourist Flows

Air transport, which is inextricably linked to tourism, is an unchallenged means of international passenger transfer (Basnet 2015). It should be pointed out that Georgia has faced many sudden changes related to air transportation development, including the construction of new airports over the last ten years. In addition to Tbilisi International Airport, two international airports were opened in the major Georgian cities of Batumi and Kutaisi. The airport in Kutaisi, which was reconstructed and given international status for low-cost airlines coming from different regions of the world, offers cheap and direct flights. This fact has had a positive impact on the arrival of international tourists and should facilitate the distribution of visitor flows to cities near Kutaisi. Since 2012, a consistently upward trend has been seen in the number of passengers served in Georgian airports. In recent years, Kutaisi International Airport has shown the best performance in terms of the number of passengers served, whereas Tbilisi International Airport served roughly 90% of the travellers arriving in Georgia in 2016. In

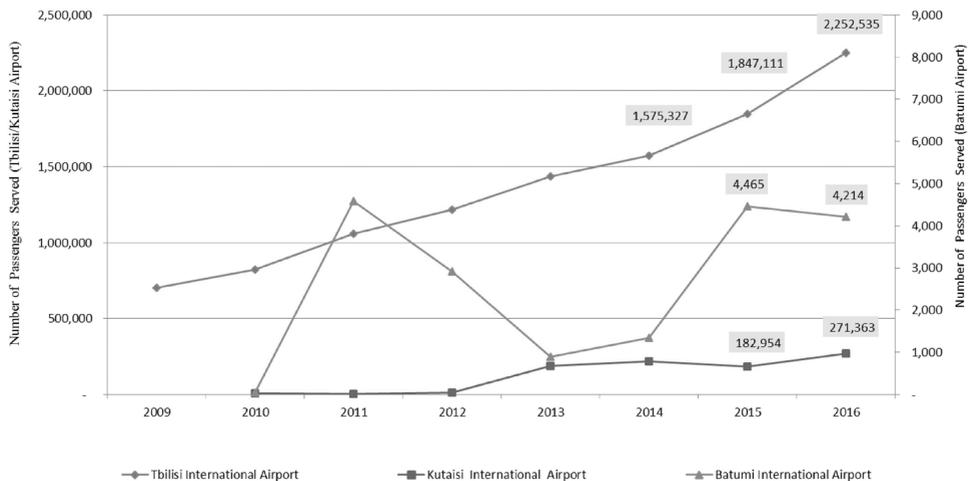


Fig.1 Number of passengers served in the Batumi, Kutaisi and Tbilisi International Airports.

Source: <http://gcaa.ge/eng/regular.php>

sharp contrast to these two airports, the absolute number of passengers arriving in Batumi International Airport has been much less; however, since 2013, an upward trend has been observed (Georgian Civil Aviation Agency 2017)(see Fig.1).

It is remarkable that through investments made to upgrade railway systems, the internal distribution of travellers has developed equitably. Since 2016, passengers of Georgian Railways are able to travel to Black Sea resorts on a double-decker train. Importantly, new trains have been ordered from a leading Swiss train manufacturing company, Stadler Bussnang AG. As it is said, tourism expands more with better tourist-friendly transportation systems (Kimar 2012). Therefore, the ambition of Georgian Railways to integrate the global transport logistic network by increasing its standards and infrastructure can clearly be seen.

The statistical data used for the present study clearly shows the allocation of the below-stated tourism indicators in the three sample cities during the period of positive changes in destination development processes, as described above. The overall annual average growth of employees in hotels and hotel-type establishments in recent years is visible, particularly in big cities such as Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Batumi. Even though the proportion of such employees in Tbilisi gradually decreased from 47% in 2006 to 38% in 2016, Tbilisi still represents the city with the highest percentage of employees in hotels and hotel-type establishments. In sharp contrast to the statistics for Tbilisi, the percentage of employees in this sector during the same time period rose twofold, to 20%, in Batumi, while the percentage in Kutaisi amounted to a mere 2% (see Fig.2).

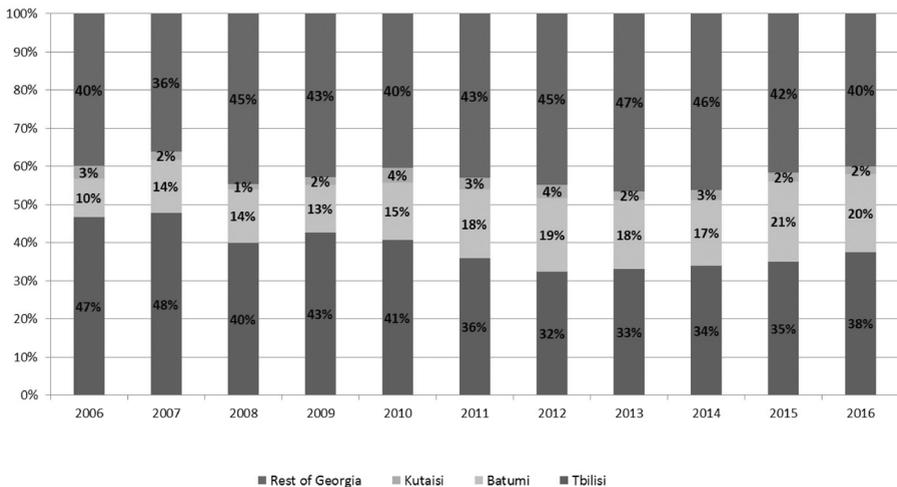


Fig.2_ The annual average percentage of employees in hotels and hotel-type establishments between 2006 and 2016.

Note. Information was officially requested from the National Statistics Office of Georgia.

An analysis of international and domestic visitor distribution in hotels and hotel-type establishments is relevant for gaining an understanding of the spatial diffusion of tourism in urban settlements in Georgia. In 2016, the proportion of tourists reached 44% in Tbilisi, which attained a higher percentage in contrast to Kutaisi and Batumi (3% and 21% respectively) (Anon, 2016). It is notable that in recent years, a slight positive change appeared in Batumi and Tbilisi with regard to number of visitors in accommodation units. In sharp contrast, changes in the proportion of tourists levelled off in Kutaisi.

According to the given data of the GNTA (Georgian National Tourism Administration 2018), key trends towards the construction of hotels are observable in the three urban settlements. In particular, accommodation units newly opened between 2016 and 2017 as well as units planned for 2018 and 2019 clearly show the leading position of Tbilisi (33 units in total) compared to Kutaisi (4 units in total) and Batumi (14 units in total). In the short run, the least change in establishment of the building process is expected in Kutaisi.

Interestingly enough, according to a household survey conducted by GEO-STAT (National Statistics Office of Georgia 2016) between 2014 and 2016, the majority of domestic travellers visited Batumi for holidays, leisure and recreation. On the other hand, motives such as business trips or meetings with friends and relatives accounted for most domestic travel to Tbilisi and Kutaisi. More precisely, during these years, the percentage of domestic visitors travelling to Batumi (12,8% of all visits) for holiday, leisure and recreational purposes was much higher than the percentage of visitors travelling to Kutaisi (2,4% of all visits) or Tbilisi (6,2% of all visits). Conversely, local tourists with other intentions travelled predominantly to Tbilisi (24,4%) and Kutaisi (8,1%) rather than Batumi (7,4%).

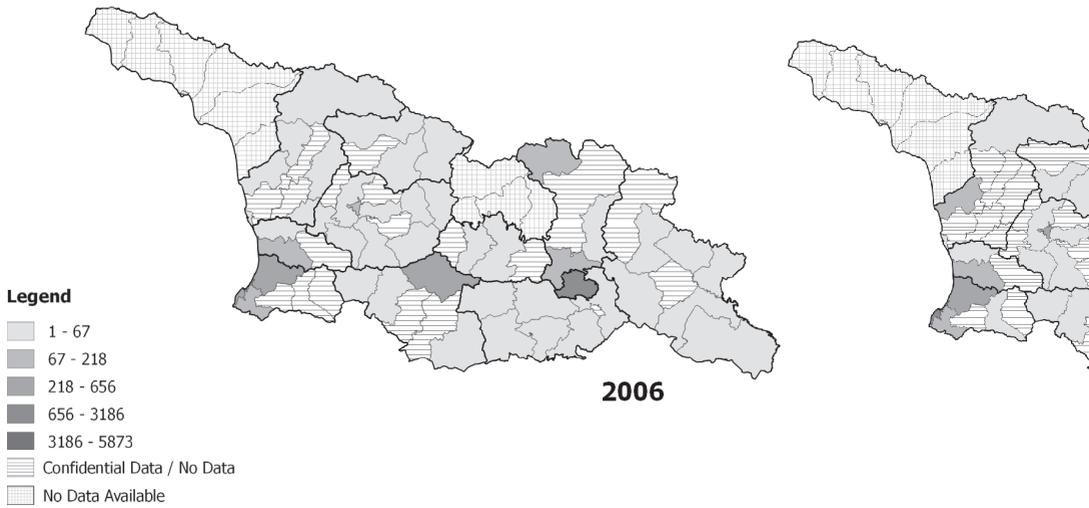


Fig.3_ *The geographic characteristics of the annual average number of employees in hotels and hotel-type establishments in Georgia.*

Note. Information was officially requested from National Statistics Office of Georgia.

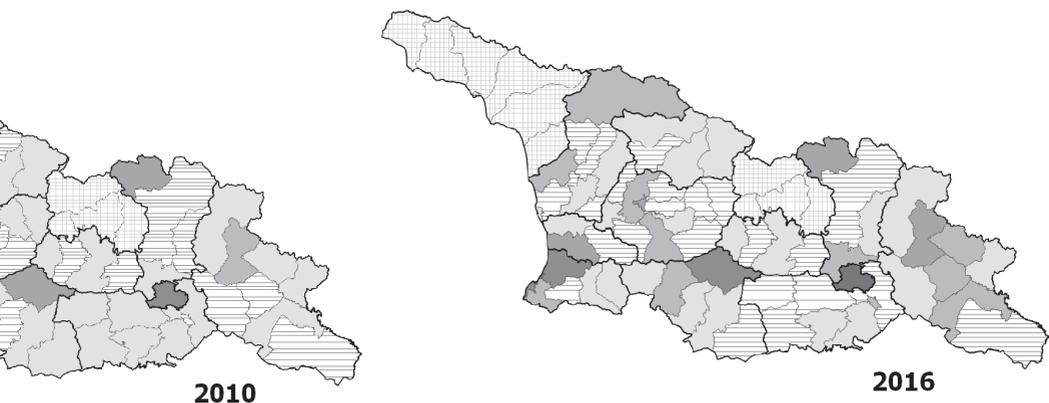
The map in the illustration below becomes progressively more colourful over time, which reflects the increasing number of employees in hotels and hotel-type establishments between 2006 and 2016. Even so, ‘open spaces’ still remain in several parts of the maps of Georgia, which means that tourism is distributing with slow peaks, but its pooling continues to exist in some destinations (see Fig.3).

Last but not least, additional statistical material draws attention to dissimilarities in trip length of domestic visitors staying in accommodation units in various locations at a regional level. The heat map below clearly illustrates that Tbilisi received visitors for trips of a longer duration than other regions. The duration of visits to Tbilisi varied according to seasonal tendencies (see Fig.4). According to the GEOSTAT household survey, trips of the longest duration were made in the third quarter of each year analysed (2014–2016). This means that visitors preferred to stay for longer periods of time in Tbilisi during the summer. The length of tourist trips was more or less equal to the obvious leadership of Tbilisi as a tourism destination together with seasonal patterns.

Conclusion

The present article summarises tourism distribution with its geographic patterns in three major cities of Georgia: Batumi, Kutaisi and Tbilisi. The primary finding is that despite the facts that two recently built airports welcome international tourists and local transportation networks have been developed, the benefits generated from tourism are still unequally distributed among urban settlements of Georgia.

Another main conclusion drawn is that Batumi is much more associated with,



and visited for, recreational, leisure and holiday purposes in contrast to Tbilisi and Kutaisi. Moreover, the present study found that considerable progress has been made in the area of employment in hotels and hotel-type establishments of the depicted three cities but with different degrees of improvement. To explain, the findings of this study indicate that, as opposed to Batumi and Kutaisi, the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, is not only dominant in employment, but also constitutes the most visited city.

The analysed statistics in the article represent Kutaisi as a city with huge tourism development potential; however, the limited available data gives a first impression of a fairly different reality. In Kutaisi, the number of people employed in the tourism industry is low. Tbilisi and Batumi outpace Kutaisi in this respect as well as in terms of the number of international and local tourists and the volume of planned construction of accommodation units.

While the uneven allocation of visitor flows is evident throughout the above discussions of implemented transport infrastructure projects the spatial distribution of tourism in Georgia is becoming progressively more balanced. Nevertheless, an uneven allocation of visitor flows is glaring in several settlements that are absolutely left out of the mentioned process and not able to enjoy similar sequential progress.

Despite the fact that Georgia has all the makings to become a viable tourism hub, the country is still in its early stage of tourism development. Uneven allocation of visitor flow requires attention and proper planning at this early stage to avoid negative outcomes.

The present study clearly has some limitations. It is notable, that the

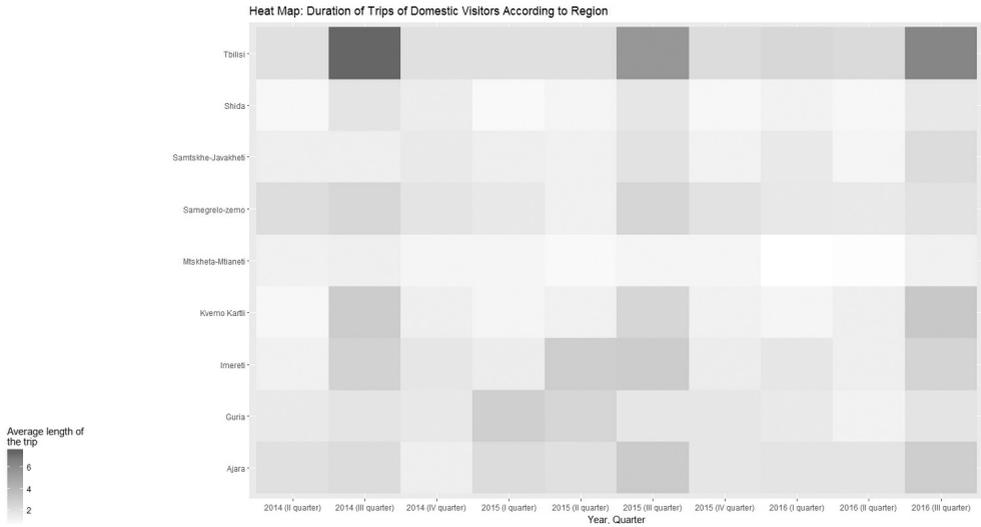


Fig.4_ Heat Map: Duration of Trips of Domestic Visitors According to Region

Note. Information was officially requested from the National Statistics Office of Georgia; Survey of Domestic Tourism

Source. National Statistics Office of Georgia

researchers take into account the particular nature of tourism, namely, its backward linkages with several economic dimensions and propose that further study be undertaken to employ statistics, which would measure the indirect and induced effects of tourism. However, a more important limitation to this study lies in the researchers' inability to analyse the impact of increased tourism performance on transformation within urban settlements. Thus, on a wider level, qualitative sociological/anthropological studies are needed to estimate the changes that appear in urban organisation as a result of tourism for a more thorough investigation.

Acknowledgements

This article is based on desk research in frames of the project "Linkages Between Tourism and Community-Driven Economic Activities: Shaping Sustainability in Mountain Regions" funded by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation (N FR17_485). We gratefully acknowledge the insightful commentary provided by Dr. David Gogishvili, which greatly benefited the paper. Thanks, are also due to the reviewers, who gave us much valuable advices in the early stages of this research. Errors and omissions remain our responsibility.

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Building Vacancies: Tourism and Empty Real Estate in Batumi

by Susanne Harris-Brandts

Batumi
Empty buildings
Tourism development
City branding
State building

Since the 2003 Rose Revolution, Georgia's Black Sea city of Batumi has seen a dramatic rise in tourism-related construction. Yet, many of these buildings remain unoccupied or in a protracted state of construction. Through site analyses and local interviews, this paper discusses the politico-economic forces driving vacant buildings in Batumi and assesses their impact within the context of the country's post-independence state building. Batumi is used as an extreme case study of the urban transformations underway across Georgian cities in the name of post-independence rebranding, neoliberal market reforms, and tourism development.

Introduction

During warm summer months, Georgia's western city of Batumi overflows with tourists. They come to be near to the Black Sea, to relax on the beach, and to soak up an abundance of sunshine. In the twentieth century, such visitors were mostly families from nearby Georgian regions or neighboring countries taking short-term vacations and participating in family activities. Following Soviet independence and a change in government in 2004, the city has additionally become a prime destination for those seeking exciting nightlife, five-star hotels and gambling.

Batumi has in-turn seen a dramatic rise in the amount of new construction and real estate speculation aimed at expanding the city's tourism sector internationally, and at shifting it towards a destination for entertainment. Between 2008 and 2012 specifically, when the United National Movement (UNM) government of President Mikheil Saakashvili was in its second term in power, over fifty new buildings for apartments, hotels and casinos were constructed across this small city, further increasing its density and amplifying available retail and residential space. During this same period, tourism in Georgia grew from 1,500,049 visitors (2009) to 5,392,303 visitors (2013), a 360% increase (Georgian National Tourism Administration 2015) In 2017, this number grew to 7,554,936 tourists (Georgian National Tourism Administration 2017). Throughout Batumi's Old City core, along the waterfront boulevard, as well as in the more recently developed south-western district adjacent to Ardagani Lake, new mixed-use, mid-to-high rise buildings feature prominently on the skyline, yet many stands unoccupied and with unfinished interiors.

The construction boom underway in Batumi mirrors a global trend in real estate speculation that relies upon luxury development and entertainment. It further reflects the growing use of the tourism sector as a catalyst for urban development during periods of state building, something particularly present in the post-socialist countries surrounding the Black Sea (Bethmann 2013; Bulin et. al. 2014; Hall et. al. 2006; Light & Dumbrăveanu 1999).

In line with this trend, Batumi has become a local example of what Aihwa Ong (2011) has termed "hyper-building," and what Saskia Sassen (2001; 2011) describes as the desire for cities to emulate and "catch up" with global cities. Batumi further represents a more amplified case study of the urban changes underway across Georgia after its 2003/04 Revolutions. Similar vacant new construction exists in Tbilisi, Gudauri, Signagi, and Kutaisi. Understanding the specific changes that took place in Batumi can thus draw awareness to comparable issues now appearing across the country during its ongoing development.

A byproduct of this process of rapid and dramatic urban transformation has been the proliferation of brand new buildings being left with either unfinished construction or no occupants upon completion. Such vacancies are the result of a number of forces both local and global: from developers not fulfilling their construction obligations or pulling out of projects prematurely due to market volatility, to absent foreign owners creating so-called "ghost apartments" through protracted unit vacancies. Empty buildings also reflect a lack of government regulation and planning foresight. Even the more straightforward reason of poor project design has contributed to the emergence of a new urban landscape of mass building vacancies in Batumi.

While academic work has foregrounded the economic logics of real-estate cycles that produce high rates of unit vacancies and ghost apartments (Pyhrr et al. 1999; Malpezzi & Wachter 2005; Haramati & Hananel 2016; Sorace & Hurst 2016; Mera & Renaud 2016), less attention has been paid to the

political manipulations of such processes for city branding purposes, or to the daily impacts of high vacancy rates on local communities. In post-socialist cities, the trend toward empty buildings has not only been tied to shifting market forces, but also to volatile shifts in government, local corruption, and the political difficulties associated with transition during the initial phases of state building. The challenges of post-Soviet state building have been discussed at length by authors such as: Diener and Hagan (2013), Isaacs and Polese (2016), and Kolsto (2018) and in the city of Batumi specifically by: Frederiksen and Gotfredsen (2017), Khalvashi (2015), and Pelkmans (2006).

In considering the various impacts of empty buildings on the city of Batumi, this paper first describes the political-economic conditions that have led to mass development for touristic use. It then identifies three main typologies of building vacancy and discusses the most effected neighborhoods in Batumi. Finally, the political-economic uses of many of the spectacular new vacant buildings are described, as are the challenges these projects face in being more effectively absorbed into the everyday life of the city. The study period for this research is between 2003 and 2017, with emphasis placed on the present-day conditions of Batumi. A mixed-methods approach has been used that combines document analysis with field observations, site documentation, and five interviews conducted in Batumi in 2016.

The rapid transformation of Batumi

Prior to the political transformations of the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia, Batumi was a quiet and insular waterfront city of 121,800, home primarily to ethnic Georgians, with Armenians (6%) and Russians (5%) being the largest minorities (Geostat 2002). At the time, the Autonomous Region of Adjara (with Batumi as its capital) was ruled by the pro-Russian autocrat, Aslan Abashidze. The city received tourists primarily from neighboring parts of Georgia and the adjacent countries of Armenia, Russia and Azerbaijan. During Soviet times, Batumi was an integral part of what was then known as the Soviet Riviera, a stretch of resort cities from Novorossiysk, Russia to Sarpi, Georgia, which connected visitors along the eastern coast of the Black Sea.

Following the November 2003 Rose Revolution protests in Tbilisi which brought the UNM Government to power, political unrest grew in Adjara and led to calls for the resignation of Abashidze. In May 2004, heavy public protest and political volatility forced the ousting of Abashidze and led to his exile in Moscow. As the central government re-seized control of Adjara, it began introducing neoliberal market reforms and privatizing state-owned property, making both buildings and land parcels available for private-sector purchase. Some of the city's most iconic buildings were sold to private-sector investors for redevelopment. Between 2008 and 2012, the largest amount of development took place in the city under the UNM government. Then in 2012, development patterns once again changed when the UNM government lost elections and was replaced by the opposition *Georgian Dream* coalition. The new *Georgian Dream* government promptly took to freezing many of the development projects formerly led by UNM, a process further described below.

VACANT BUILDINGS IN BATUMI, GEORGIA

LEGEND

- LARGE INCOMPLETE BUILDING
- VACANT FLAT FOR SALE ON MYHOME.GE (January 2018)

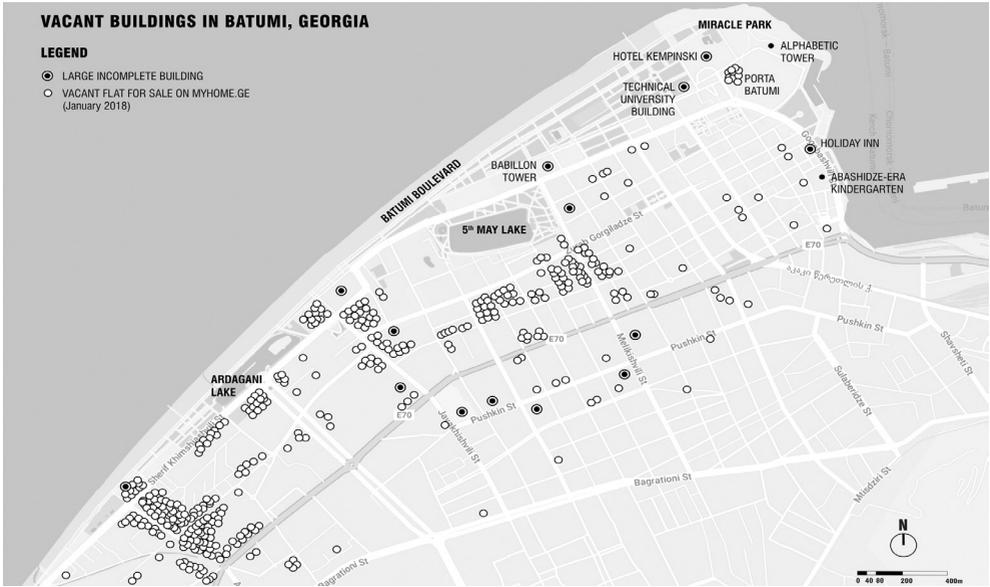


Fig.1 Map of Batumi highlighting large, incomplete buildings and vacant flats for sale on myhome.ge (January 2018)

Vacancy typologies in Batumi

Vacant buildings in Batumi exist in three main forms: buildings frozen with partially-completed construction; buildings whose exteriors have been completed but whose developers are unable to finish or sell their interior spaces (residential and commercial); and residential buildings that have reached full completion and have had many of their units purchased by absentee owners (so-called “ghost apartments”). These three types are frequently clustered in the same districts due to the nature of development speculation, which tends to see certain city districts undergo rapid change all at once. To-date, there is no official data on the amount or distribution of vacancies in Batumi. In order to obtain a more accurate portrait of the situation, I have personally documented street level retail vacancies and the locations of partially-completed buildings. This activity took place in mid-2017 and does not reflect the city’s ongoing conditions; new construction continues to emerge and some existing projects have advanced over time. Specific quantitative data related to the total number of single-unit residential vacancies was not trackable due to their private nature. Instead, broader qualitative reflections on these neighborhoods are provided in this paper.

Such vacant interior units represent a form of “ghost apartments,” a phenomenon discussed in urban studies and real estate literature. Haramati and Hananel (2016), for example, describe the worldwide emergence of this phenomenon and its broader links to both tourism and real estate speculation. Their work focuses primarily on the Israeli cities of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, but their observations mirror much of the trend in Batumi. They conclude that the unregulated inflow of foreign investment capital tied to ghost apartments “changes priorities in the city, shifts funds and attention to the needs of foreigners instead of those of local residents, thus influencing the diversity of the city” (Haramati & Hananel 2016, p. 116).

In line with Haramati and Hannel's (2016) findings, similarly it is the case that the areas of Batumi most effected by a spike in new vacant buildings are those where rapid new unregulated development of vacation properties has taken place (Fig. 1). In this fashion, the phenomenon of Batumi's empty buildings can be understood as linked to the city's tourism sector development. The areas most affected by newly constructed empty buildings are the districts around Ardagani and Fifth-of-May Lakes and the strip of land adjacent to the newly-extended waterfront boulevard running northeast to southwest along the coast for approximately five kilometers (Fig. 1). In these areas, over forty percent of all new buildings have high rates of residential unit vacancy (more than fifty percent vacant) and over fifteen incomplete construction sites currently exist. Among the latter are some very large projects, like *Babillon Tower*, a proposed forty-seven storey building intended to be one of the tallest in Batumi. Since construction started in 2013 its construction has been frozen at the fifteenth floor.

As a result of the desire to transform the city into a regional hub for tourism, these city districts experienced intense change after the revolution, at a pace and scale unprecedented in earlier decades. Along the waterfront edge, a number of the most prominent projects planned for Batumi, such as the aforementioned *Babillon Tower* and others like the *Hotel Kempinski*, *Holiday Inn*, *Porta Batumi Tower*, *Alphabetic Tower*, and the *Technical University* building, have suffered years of frozen construction, with most still remaining incomplete today. The prime reason for these projects not reaching completion is that their developers have not lived up to their contractual agreements. The implementation of projects has been delayed because developers lack sufficient financing, have not sold a sufficient number of units in advance, or because they have more pressing priorities in other countries. Incomplete construction has also at times been the result of political corruption and shifts in government policies, as was the case with the *Technical University* building initially constructed under the UNM government and then frozen prior to occupancy for a number of years before being sold to a new developer in 2015 under the Georgian Dream government. Collectively, the frozen status of these projects embodies the volatility of rapid urban transformation during state building and the vulnerabilities that can derive from the inability of governments to select less-than-reputable investors, or from its proclivity to corrupt business transactions.

The Holiday Inn project is another clear example of this type of delayed construction in Batumi. Situated in a prominent location on Gogebashvili Street between the northern waterfront boulevard and the Old City, the incomplete building was sold to *Arai Georgia* in July 2008 under the condition that construction would finally be completed by summer 2010 (Transparency International 2015). This deadline was not met and the contract was further amended in 2013 and again in 2014 to extend the construction deadline to May 2015, a deadline that was equally unmet. For over seven years the property has sat unfinished, surrounded by sheet metal and growing piles of illegal waste. As of 2016, the property was instead being developed as the *Crowne Plaza Hotel*, a franchise name later switched to the Georgian brand *Rooms*



Fig.2 Multiple towers blocks are under construction—or with frozen construction—in the district around Ardagani Lake.

Hotels, all operated by the same property owner. Other than changes to advertising on the construction hoarding, the site continues to show no signs of transformation. News announcements in August 2017 claim that the project will open in the summer of 2018 (Charkviani 2017). In the face of its rapidly developing urban context, this unfinished hotel is an unwelcome reminder of the turbulence associated with poorly-regulated development.

Likewise, a number of projects across the street from the *Holiday Inn* in the new tourist area of *Miracle Park* have suffered from years of frozen construction. The government-owned, *Alphabetic Tower*, an elevated restaurant pavilion decorated on the exterior with the letters of the Georgian alphabet and designed as a prime tourist attraction, is a leading example. Built in 2010, the project remained unoccupied for six years, when it was finally leased to a Spanish company and opened under new management. Constructed as part of the building fervor led by the UNM government, this incomplete project initially had its funding allocated elsewhere once the *Georgian Dream* coalition won power in 2012. The city endured substantial financial losses from both the cost of construction and ongoing maintenance of the building.

Adjacent to *Alphabetic Tower* and the vacant *Hotel Kempinski* is the large Porta Batumi residential tower, itself experiencing protracted delays in its construction schedule while further impacting the livelihood of this area. Complemented by a nearby abandoned clock tower, the overall result has been the creation of an entire district of newly-built yet vacant properties. Prior to all this construction, the area had served as an important site for sports and recreation. A large football stadium previously existed in the area of the *Hotel Kempinski*. Adjacent to it sat a public swimming pool, which was also widely used. The stadium was partially demolished in

2002 under Abashidze in order to make room for new development, an initiative then carried forward by the UNM government. Further down the waterfront, UNM also took to demolishing existing Soviet era buildings in order to clear room for new residential, hotel and casino complexes. In this fashion, the complete overhauling of the development adjacent to Batumi's boulevard can be seen as driven by both tourism development and a nation-building ideology attempting to erase the Soviet past.

Also further southwest, adjacent to the 2009 extension of the waterfront boulevard, significant vacancy levels affect a newly-developed district bordering the man-made Ardagani Lake (Fig. 2). In this area there are multiple new high-rise residential towers that are incomplete or that visibly lack occupants. Located on former marsh lands, the area was dredged in 2009 to form the lake and to make room for the expanded development of the city, a process primarily driven by the UNM government's desires to generate additional residential real estate investment property. The majority of these residential units have been sold by developers, yet many are now for resale and most of the year they remain uninhabited due to non-resident foreign owners, rendering them "ghost apartments". Many units rely solely on seasonal tourists and are posted on online rental websites, such as *AirBnB* and *MyHome.ge*. Overall, there is still far more supply than demand for residential space in this district. Particularly since the area is perpetually under construction, it has an alienating atmosphere and lacks street-level activity. Vast amounts of the retail space provided at street level remain unoccupied and at times have been vandalized or used for illegal dumping, attracting stray animals and further dissuading long-term residents and tourists.

Beyond these vacant and frozen projects along Batumi's waterfront, other newly-constructed vacant properties can be found in the older parts of the city by the Fifth-of-May Lake. These typically take the form of four-to-ten-storey infill projects built by demolishing existing single-family residential properties. These new projects are overwhelmingly residential, yet many also possess unoccupied retail spaces at street level. Collectively, they have shifted the character of the old parts of Batumi which used to be comprised of small neighborhoods of one or two-storey buildings (Fig. 3). Beyond dwarfing adjacent houses, the construction hoarding around partially-completed buildings has detracted from the street life of the city. Coupled with the large rates of retail vacancy, these trends are slowly eroding Batumi's older neighborhoods.



Fig.3 An incomplete twelve-storey building dwarfs its neighboring traditional Adjara-style single family home in Batumi's Old City.



Fig.4 The cover image for a guide book produced by the Ministry of Culture, featuring the then-vacant Alphabetic Tower and Technical University Building.

Branding vacancy

Despite the growing presence of newly-built vacant buildings in Batumi a decade after the revolution, in online media and international tourism marketing material the city has increasingly been depicted as a booming success story (The Australian 2012; Azhgebetseva 2017; Euronews 2017; Spritzer 2010). Government officials too have contributed to the reproduction of this image of the city as one of the hottest new destinations for tourists and real estate investors around the Black Sea (Real Estate Publishers 2011; OSCE-PA 2012). Interestingly enough, some of the empty buildings discussed in this paper have been used in the deployment of such an image. Two of the most widely circulated empty buildings in support of such imagery are the above-mentioned Alphabetic Tower and Technological University buildings, which feature on everything from fridge magnets to official Ministry of Tourism material (Fig. 4 & 5).

Similarly, the vacant high-rise residential buildings around Ardagani Lake have been showcased in aerial photographs used for city promotion online and in social media¹. They are represented in a manner that amplifies their spectacular building height and shiny exteriors, while down-playing the very limited street-life and empty retail spaces. Distant aerial camera shots of the illuminated buildings at night are particularly used in this regard, given their ability to obfuscate the true levels of a building's occupancy and neighborhood under-activity. Tellingly, in many photos featuring the Technological University building, the building is not actually illuminated like those in its adjacency².

As I have argued elsewhere, circulating images of the city's impressive new vertical skyline have been used by politicians as a way to assert the position of Batumi—and of Georgia's more generally—on the international stage (Harris-Brandts 2017). Coming to power after a revolution that was largely rooted in popular opposition to corruption and government inactivity, it was also important for the UNM government to make their reforms highly visible locally. As opposed to longer-term immaterial reforms, new architecture was one of the most explicit ways of accomplishing this goal. Rapidly-produced new architecture thus provided the government with a quick portfolio of trophies to show to the public and to prove that they were hard at work bringing about change. Ironically, many of these buildings themselves were created in less than democratic ways that perpetuated the practices of partisanship and continued the lack of due democratic processes rampant prior to the revolution (Inaishvili, Interview 2016; Ramishvili, Interview 2016; Zvania, Interview 2016). Public discussions about the privatization of state property or the heritage status of buildings were mostly non-existent and many decisions regarding the fate of entire areas of the city were made unilaterally by President Saakashvili, despite protest from local activist groups (Inaishvili,

¹ For example, see: <http://enjoyingeorgia.com/discover/batumi/>; <http://cbw.ge/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/maxresdefault-1050x525.jpg>; http://www.kancelariaeup.pl/images/Batumi/noc%C4%85_od_jeziora.jpg; <http://travel.wex.ge/images/rsgallery/original/batumi-2-1.jpg>

² <https://q-ec.bstatic.com/images/hotel/max1024x768/103/103923560.jpg>



Interview 2016; Chichileishvili, Interview 2016; Zvhania, Interview 2016).

Images of Batumi's new vacant architecture were also used politically to contrast the success of the city with the shortcomings of neighboring Sukhumi, Abkhazia, the unrecognized de-facto state 230 km to the north which unilaterally seceded from Georgia in 1992. For decades Sukhumi had been the preferred holiday destination, but it lost this position while struggling with independence. The rapidly growing skyline of Batumi has frequently been juxtaposed with images of faltering Sukhumi—particularly in online memes and advertisements.³ Ironically, many of the buildings used to showcase Batumi as superior are themselves in a precarious state of partial completion or under-utilization, largely masked by exterior illumination and promises of imminent public openings. In this sense, empty buildings have played a crucial role in state political propaganda and have even contributed to rhetoric surrounding regional geopolitics.

With regards to circulating images of the city's new buildings for tourism purposes, the advertising of Batumi as an already-successful and booming destination through re-framed pictures of its empty buildings became a necessary step in efforts to attract *actual* tourists. Without a large enough local demand to activate all the new entertainment and hotel spaces, the transformed face of the city was being displayed in branding campaigns and tourist media as *the* place to be while in reality sitting overwhelmingly vacant. In some cases, the vacant buildings were literally used as stage-sets for tourism promotional videos, using hired actors. The selective framing of new empty buildings contributed greatly to the false image of the city, eventually in-part effectively working to lure greater numbers of seasonal tourists, but also introducing new problems of vacancies through the rise of ghost apartments.

Fig.5_ Fridge magnet souvenirs for sale, featuring the then-vacant Alphabetic Tower and Technical University Building.

³ For example: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/CBU83T-nUBAAP8vb.jpg>

Living with vacancy

In understanding the impacts that empty buildings have had on Batumi's residents, it is important to consider the ways in which empty buildings can play an ideological role in the absence of any functional use. Just as politicians relied upon the circulation of empty buildings as marketing tools for tourism, they also effectively deployed them as local-level propaganda. The arrival of new architecture was frequently linked to the promise of an alternative collective future for Batumi's residents, one that would offer greater job opportunities and a chance for improved livelihoods. Anthropologist Mathijs Pelkmans (2006) points to "the social life of empty buildings" in his description of this phenomenon in Batumi during the post-independence period of the 1990s. He explains how vacant buildings enabled local residents to collectively participate in the hopes for future change, something that was accomplished through projections of their own imagined futures onto the yet-to-be occupied new projects. Overall, this helped to create a degree of public complicity and social cohesion during a crucial period of state-building. An example that Pelkmans discusses at length is the new kindergarten constructed under Abashidze's rule and sitting vacant for many years after completion. Nested in the heart of the Old City and fenced-off with iron gates, the building continues to be unused to this day, never truly finding its place in the city.

Sadly, this is the case for most of Batumi's vacant buildings. While some, like Alphabetic Tower, the Technical University building, and the Holiday Inn, have eventually been altered or are planned for re-activation, numerous others remain permanently frozen or abandoned. On top of this, the problem of ghost apartments in the city is especially chronic since there is little that can be done by the government to better activate units that are privately owned. On a more promising note, in other areas of the city with incomplete buildings, ad-hoc and informal uses are appearing in the form of un-regulated retail spaces. Second-hand goods or fresh produce are sometimes sold out of unfinished ground floors and even a number of the more prominent retail shopfronts in the Old City are occasionally being used as short-term showrooms for events like Fashion Week, or as front-window art and photography exhibitions (Fig. 6).

In comparing the empty buildings of Batumi from after the revolution to those of the earlier Abashidze era, it can be seen that there is much similarity across the periods, even though development during Abashidze's reign took place on a smaller scale. In both eras, development took place in an environment of low-regulation and was driven primarily by patronage networks, with key decisions being made solely by the ruling elite. Still, the Batumi that existed after the first decade of independence possessed different characteristics from the city that exists today. Its emphasis was less on mass spectacle and there was little-to-no celebration of Batumi as an integral part of greater Georgia since Abashidze had his own separatist aspirations. The previous use of empty buildings as propaganda and branding was therefore framed quite differently. Still, there are areas of ideological continuity from the 1990s and 2000s, including using new architecture to buttress an image of Georgia as Western, and to support the current ruling party more broadly.

Conclusions

Over the course of less than a decade, Georgia's resort city of Batumi has experienced dramatic urban transformations. Driven by the post-revolutionary UNM government's desires to amplify tourism development, the city has also suffered from the proliferation of incomplete and vacant buildings. Partially-constructed projects in Batumi signify much of the hastiness of development after the revolution and show how fully-functioning urban areas have been demolished and replaced with uninhabitable, fenced-in, and frozen construction sites. Prior to new construction, many of these areas had been home to flourishing communities that contributed greatly to the life of the city. In considering Batumi's post-revolution transitions then, it is important to note that it has not just been the physical buildings that have transformed, but also more ephemeral place meanings and community interactions. Shifts in building programming have further left a mark on the character of city streets and have changed the relationship between public and private space. Areas originally catering to local residents now mostly support the needs of short-term tourists.

Although in some respects Batumi can be seen as in-line with the broader market changes that produce vacancies in global cities like New York, Vancouver, and London—namely, due to international absentee owners—it is also a unique case study. The empty buildings of Batumi speak to the particular conditions of political instability that were present in Georgia following Soviet independence and after the country's political revolution. Over the past three decades, Georgia has struggled to undergo democratic reforms and transitions in government and this has also been reflected in the volatility of the construction sector. Equally, the transition from socialism to neoliberal capitalism has dramatically restructured the way the urban landscape is produced in Georgian cities.

Somewhat ironically, the pressure on government officials to rapidly make explicit their efforts towards reform and state change through new architecture after the revolution in-part led directly to the by-passing of lengthy democratic processes associated with urban development, such as screening investors and considering the heritage significance of existing buildings. As such, the vacant spaces of Batumi represent not only the challenges of rampant real estate speculation. They are further associated with the problems of using the visibility of rapid construction as a means of displaying government legitimacy and state building progress.



Fig.6_ A make-shift men's hair salon is set up in front of a vacant building in Batumi.

On a social level, Batumi's empty buildings symbolize broader collective dreams and fears about reform, and about the nation's newly emerging identity. Such ambitions are also reflected in the images that circulate in promotion of the city to outside audiences. In tourism campaigns the empty buildings of Batumi continue to circulate widely as images for attracting foreigners. Presenting a fictitious narrative of life in Batumi, these images conjure a parallel reality—one that ultimately has concrete ramifications for residents, and for the economic prosperity of the city.

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Tbilisi

In the Caucasus,
Corinna Del Bianco
detail
look at the complete project
p.88

Speaking, Building, Shopping: A Social-Anthropological Approach to the Post-Socialist Condition of Tbilisi

by Madlen Pilz

Modernisation discourse
Urban reconstruction
Citizen participation

The concept of modernisation understood as a discursive instrument for re-ordering society offers insights into the changed representation of society's past, present, and future. In my article, I review which symbolical landscapes and patterns of social differentiation get staged within the process of urban reconstruction in Tbilisi and how it is experienced by Tbilisians in everyday life. My empirical material shows a specific post-socialist pattern of urban reconstruction that differs from that generated by modernisation discourses in postcolonial contexts. In official discourses here, the socialist is constructed as the un-modern part instead of the traditional; however, everyday life contradicts the official representation because of pragmatics or the recalcitrance of people's needs. My analysis is based on ethnographic research carried out in three urban areas, starting at the periphery and ending in the city centre of Tbilisi, Georgia.

Introduction

The point of departure in this analysis of the post-socialist/post-Soviet urban transformation in Georgia's capital Tbilisi is the concept of modernisation. In politics, as in everyday life, 'modernisation' is usually understood as describing the transformation of a society from a traditional or less modern to a (more) modern state, based on specific measures of modernisation. In contradiction to this normative notion, in critique of persisting global power relations, postcolonial scholars developed a conception of the term as a discursive instrument to differentiate and hierarchize societies on the grounds

of the construction of something as modern and something else as un-modern (Mitchell 2000). In this article, I will apply this perspective to explain the post-socialist urban change in Tbilisi and to demonstrate that the traditional¹ is not necessarily the counterpart of the modern, but that rather, in a post-socialist context, the socialist is often thought of as the un-modern, backward, and corrupt. The exclusion of the Soviet past took place on nearly all levels (Manning 2009, p. 924), from official representations and discourses to the urban imaginary and in the urban space. Nonetheless, the insight into urban everyday life that I reconstruct on the ground of my exchanges with city dwellers and observations reveals a somewhat different reality: the socialist constitutes an intrinsic part of the urban fabric and of people's lives.

In order to illustrate my idea, in the next section I will outline my conceptualisation of the terms 'post-socialist/-Soviet transformation' and 'modernisation'. In the main section, I will discuss different ways that the post-socialist/-Soviet material re-production and symbolic re-construction² changed public and private spaces, exemplifying these process in three Tbilisian quarters. The socialist high-rise district Gldani was chosen for this analysis because of its absolute ordinariness, the quarter Saburtalo was chosen because of its outstanding socialist character that in many ways contradicts the official rhetoric of the 'backward socialist', and, finally, the old city quarter because it is the elective ground for the shaping of a post-socialist Tbilisian collective identity. Using the example of three Tbilisian families in these quarters—in my experience, they represent three different but typical local households—I will give insights into individual Tbilisian environments, social perceptions of the changes, as well as the possibilities of participation in the transformation; that is to say, to be actively involved in and/or to benefit materially and symbolically from it.

Against the backdrop of my empirical material, I will discuss the role of the socialist urban materiality within this process and shed some light on the kind of transformation or modernisation of the urban fabric and of people's everyday lives that took place. Therefore, my leading questions are: through which objects and reconstruction measures has transformation or modernisation entered urban public and private spaces? Which new symbolic and social urban landscapes are emerging in Tbilisi?

Post-socialist/-Soviet modernisation

The notion of the 'post-socialist/-Soviet' has different qualitative dimensions: a) addressing specificities of everyday change; b) functioning as a category to describe the global political order; and c) acting as a scientific-political legitimation of research projects (Vonderau 2008, p. 23). A milestone was the debate about the long-term persistence of the post-socialist as a conceptual framework that demanded a shift towards the post-socialist as a local context of a global transformation process (Verdery 2002, p. 17). Based on this, newer approaches argue to conceptualise the post-socialist as an epistemic category that, similarly to the post-colonial, is focusing on the continuous effects of different pasts, positionalities, and dependencies on recent power relations, practices, and values (Stenning & Hörschelmann

¹ I use the terms *traditional, Soviet, socialist, modern or Western and Georgian* to refer to the specific construction of a set of imagined and essentialised values and imagined norms which are connected with these labels.

² According with readings of Lefebvre, Bourdieu and de Certeau, Setha Low differentiates between the processes of spatial production and construction that are both social techniques to spatialise culture and human experience. Production means here "the historical emergence and political/economic formation of urban space", meanwhile construction entails the perception and interpretation through practices of 'social exchanges, memories, images, and daily use of the material setting' (Low 2000, p. 128).

2008, p. 317). Further developing this approach, Tuvikene reclaims the necessity to counterbalance specific global hierarchies and to de-territorialise the narrative 'post-socialism' as a regional container, addressing whole societies or cities, and rather to understand it as a focus on certain aspects of cities (Tuvikene 2016).

Departing from these discussions, I conceptualise 'post-socialism' heuristically as a specific dynamic of an accelerated process of change that means an assemblage of practices of modernisation and of distinction from the socialist/Soviet past.³ In the past, post-socialist (urban) literature worked intensively on the aspect of reinventing and glorifying a pre-socialist past in Georgia and elsewhere (Borén 2009, Fuchslocher 2010). Meanwhile—and in contrast to anthropological literature—studies about 'how the "less welcomed" Soviet past resists forgetting and return to unsettle, disrupt the dominant contemporary narrations of post-socialist identity formation' (Young & Kaczmarek 2008, p. 55) were described as lacking in urban studies. The topic of modernisation was touched upon in several studies (Brandstädter 2007; Svašek 2007; Fehlings 2014) discussing people's feelings of the loss of modernity grounded on a socialist perception of modernity and on a specific imagination of the West associated with expectations of material well-being and freedom. These accounts are grounded on a normative understanding of modernity. In order to understand the social effects of such understanding, I propose to analyse the changes through the lens of Mitchell's (2000) critical elaborations of the concept.

Mitchell describes modernity as a specific way to think about the past, the present, and the future and to generate a coherent narrative which is centrally grounded on the modern-traditional dichotomy. Based on the considerations of the colonial interaction between the 'West' and the 'non-West' elaborated by others, Mitchell describes the categories of 'modern' and 'traditional/colonial' as discursively constructed, unfolding a 'reality effect' and therewith forming powerful comparative tool of self-description: 'The production of Modernity involves the staging of differences [...] The modern occurs only by performing the distinction between the modern and the non-modern, the West and the non-West, each performance opening the possibility of what is figured as non-modern contaminating the modern, displacing it, or disrupting its authority' (Mitchell 2000, p. 26). For transferring this notion of the modern to explain the Georgian situation, some specific characteristics of the local transformation process need to be reconsidered. In order to study the local conceptualisation of the un-modern, I will focus on different practices of spatialisation and materialisation, as well as places and objects in the urban landscape and in everyday life. As I will show in my analysis, in Georgia it is not the traditional that is exposed as the backward and un-modern, but rather, the socialist/Soviet. Therefore, the Georgian tradition as represented in urban places, such as churches or the old city, was connoted with resurrection and prospects and was tightly entangled with new flagship developments. That means that both the new architecture and the national heritage formed intrinsic parts of the new/modern Georgian collective identity. Furthermore, what has been observed in

³ I consider it important to differentiate conceptually between the terms post-socialist and post-Soviet. Referring to the ideological and systemic change, I use the term post-socialist; for focusing on its local and everyday specificities, I use the term post-Soviet (Milerius 2008, pp. 38-48).



Fig.1 M. Pilz, Street scene in Gldani.

Georgia seems consistent with the view that within elaborations in colonial and post-colonial contexts, the modern—un-modern opposition is centrally aimed at legitimising new established social hierarchies (Houben & Schrempf 2008, p. 11).

Methodical approach: Transect through the city

The empirical data that form the ground in the following sections was collected on the ground of a mix of different methods:⁴ in participant observations, talks, and interviews and the study of different materials like real estate sales announcements, city maps, and tourist guides. For interrelating the collected individual stories and different places, I consistently applied a kind of anthropological urban transect.⁵ Grounded on that, I developed a heuristic kind of catalogue of global and local markers for changes in public and private spaces: (a) of building or furnishing practices; and (b) of practices of speaking about and representing different objects to decipher urban up- and downgrading, new or old trends, and lifestyles (Krebs & Pilz 2012). This forms the analytical guideline for my descriptions in the next sections.

Gldani: From ‘natural reserve’ to urban periphery

Gldani was constructed between 1968 and 1981 on green land at Tbilisi’s periphery. Tamuna and her family⁶ have lived in Gldani since its early days and in several ways, they represent a quite common Tbilisian household: first, for their multigenerational structure—six persons of four generations lived in four rooms— and second, for their mix of income profiles. Two of the women were the main breadwinners in the family.⁷ Parts of the extended family lived in Moscow and Israel and supported the family occasionally.

Gldani had a good reputation in the Soviet press: it was depicted in tour-

4 I carried out my research between 2008 and 2012, the last years of the government of Mikheil Saakashvili. This was an incisive period in the process of post-socialist change for Georgia, as well as for Tbilisi. Under his government, a lot of trendsetting decisions were taken regarding the post-socialist/Soviet and neoliberal reconstruction of the country, as well as the urban redevelopment of Tbilisi.

5 The idea of the anthropological transect is based on the works of Andres Duany and other members of the New Urban Planner group (Duany & Talen 2002). I carried out the walks through the city partly with the help of students from the Department of Anthropology of the TSU, therefore I am very much indebted to Prof. K. Khutsishvili, I. Pipia, and G. Meurmeshvili.

ist maps and mentioned as a project of Soviet friendship in tourist guides (Tbilisi 1981, p. 89). The high-rise district offered to new residents comfortable and healthy living conditions in a green zone. As Tamuna told me, her mother expended a great deal of effort in obtaining their flat in Gldani and to leave their two-room, underground flat in the old city. The change was perceived as a relief by the family, as it provided a more comfortable living space.

In contrast to the Soviet past, Gldani does not appear in tourist booklets and maps in the years of my research; in the official public representation, it ranged between a blind spot and critical zone. Tbilisians from other city areas emphasised Gldani's bad image in several discussions, whether for its peripheral location, its homogenous building fabric, or its high number of ethnic minority members. Tamuna also complained about the distance from the centre and the lack of cultural life. In any case, she admitted that she would not move back to the old city unless living conditions changed for the better.



Fig.2 M. Pilz, Street fountain in Gldani.

Official and common ways to speak about Gldani changed incisively from representing socialist modernity to a negative image. In the public opinion, (socialist) modern living conditions seemed to lose their attractiveness, but, as Tamuna's statement confirms, this is not in fact true for the people living there. The upside of Gldani's decline was that flats here were affordable, which, in return, enabled multigenerational households from the central quarters to leave their overcrowded living conditions and gain more private space and comfort.⁸

The urban fabric of Gldani was almost of Soviet origin. Yet there were several private interventions from the late 1980s and 1990s, such as building extensions to different houses, privately fenced gardens in public areas, and benches and drinking fountains in the yards. This individual engagement was regarded as partly improving the quality of public space and partly as post-Soviet disorder. The activities of the government in the public space of Gldani were evaluated as scarce but positive, as in the case of the reconstruction of the roads, the construction of football and play grounds decorated in the colours of the Georgian flag, and the Rose Revolution Amusement Park.⁹ Tamuna's mother loved the park's lights, describing them as heart-warming, especially when compared to the darkness of the 1990s, when electricity would be often cut-off. Tamuna commented: 'Bread and games for the poor, the Rose is a symbol of Georgia's integration into the West. It means there is hope for us. I will not condemn him [Saakashwili, *authors note*] for the park, something needs to be offered to the poor, and it helps.'

6 All names of non-public persons are changed. The talks with Tamuna and her family were carried out between January and March 2009, in March 2010, in July and August 2012.

7 The family lived on around 1,500 Lari (≈590 Euro) plus irregular remittances and gifts.

8 Flats with 3-5 rooms were offered for 30-50,000 USD, meanwhile comparable flats in the inner city were offered for 100-150,000 USD, documentation G. Meurmeshwili, January-April 2009.

9 The Rose Revolution—led by M. Saakashwili—took place in November 2003, and as a consequence of this event the former president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze, resigned. During the years of his government, Georgia turned increasingly into a failed state.

In their apartment, the kind of post-socialist reconstruction they experienced is better understood through the concept of 'low-cost consumption'. Due to their financial situation, the family could not afford a general modernisation of their flat, but they managed to repaint it and to buy a new sofa while the rest of the Soviet furniture remained in use. In the same limited way, the digital age entered their home: their mobile phones were old and counterfeit products purchased for little money. Tamuna's niece owned the first computer in the family—thanks to her father's remittances—while sometimes they received parcels with second-hand clothes from relatives in Israel. Their situation was comfortable in terms of space and stability, but it did not allow for luxury.

To sum up, in the public realm the symbolical impetus of the construction activities in Gldani seemed much higher than their functional impetus, marking the territory with the signs of the new political regime and thereby identifying Gldani symbolically as a part of the new Georgia.

In the private realm, while Tamuna's family fully benefited from socialist modernity in terms of comfort and healthy living conditions, their level of participation in the post-socialist modernisation was negligible, largely realised through second-hand or no brand-name products often financed with money earned elsewhere. The objects required a permanent struggle with the natural signs of abrasion, malfunctioning, and outdated, and therefore represented a kind of failed modernisation. Their participation through modernisation of the public realm is also limited to the necessary (roads), the symbolic (games), or to the negative (lost image of Gldani).

Saburtalo: From socialist 'general urban' to post-socialist 'urban centre'

Saburtalo's construction started in the 1930s and was continued after the Second World War. Therefore, the quarter is a very heterogeneous apartment block area with numerous buildings in the 'Empire style', as well as with different blocks from the Khrushchev period. Nowadays, it is one of the quarters with a very high and visible concentration of post-Soviet developments and with real estate prices that were among the highest in Tbilisi.¹⁰ I will present the micro-cosmos of the quarter, drawing from the case of a young couple who had recently moved into the vacant apartment of some relatives who had relocated to Russia for work. Nato and her husband represent a younger generation with few memories of the Soviet past and manifold connections to the West, thanks to their jobs.¹¹

In the Soviet period, Saburtalo was a quarter with a high representational status and, accordingly, it was included in tourist guides as representing a showcase of Soviet modernity in Tbilisi (Tbilisi 1985, pp.177-194). During the post-socialist transformation, the quarter lost its status – it no longer appears in tourist guides or maps; however, it became one of the hotspots of the urban (re-)construction. The symbolical message of the post-socialist flagship projects—in contrast to Gldani—was transcending to the urban and national scale. In everyday life, Saburtalo gained popularity, as I heard frequently from my interlocutors, because its flats of Soviet origin were

10 *100-150,000 USD for a flat with three rooms, documentation G. Meurmeshwili, January-April 2009.*

11 *Talks with Nato and her husband took place in August 2010, July 2011, and 2012.*

considered to be better designed than in other quarters (Gldani) and because of its many newly emerged shopping facilities.

Highly symbolic flagship projects were built at Saburtalo's entrance, like the Heroes Monument and the Hotel Adjara. The Monument is a tower of 51 meters, representing a bookshelf, that was designed by the Spanish architects CMD Ingenieros. The marble panels put in this 'shelf' bear the names of 4,000 heroes who died for Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union from 1921 onwards. Some of the marble panels were reserved for the names of future heroes. The Hotel Adjara—a former socialist premium hotel—was completely rehabilitated and hosts one of the many casinos in the city visited by tourists from Azerbaijan and Middle Eastern countries, where gambling is illegal. Among Tbilisian residents I was talking to, the new sites were not very popular. A lot of my interlocutors were stressing how nice the old Hotel Adjara had been. Moreover, it was perceived as a sign of exclusion, as most people did not feel that they belonged to the target group. The Heroes Monument seemed completely to miss its purpose as a collective unifier. The developments turned out to be sites of dispute between the government and groups of residents about the right way to redevelop the city. Ultimately, this has to be understood as a debate about the right interpretation of Georgia's past and present.

Additionally, many changes occurred at the street level: the roads were reconstructed and equipped with a new traffic management system. At the sidewalks, a large variety of shops, restaurants, and bars was opened. Saburtalo became the shopping area for everybody in the city, as it offered products of all price segments and options for all tastes. Above street level, three different façade styles were dominant: old socialist ones, the patchwork façades of (un)authorised building extensions consisting of brick-, wood-, cardboard-filled or empty steel skeletons,¹² and new Western-style glass and concrete façades.

Nato and her husband decided not to continue to live with his parents and moved into the unoccupied flat of her relatives, consisting of one and a half rooms, a kitchen, a toilet, and a bathroom, and due to a building extension, a balcony of the size of a room. They fully renovated the flat, removed the greying Soviet wallpapers and afterwards, in order to save money, they just painted the walls. They took out the old carpet and kept the old parquet flooring, although some parts of it were loose. As they did not have their own furniture, they selected some of the Soviet-made furniture that had remained in the flat. For Nato, the economic reconstruction of the flat was a tactic to save money. Although both had a regular and respectable income, they were both supporting their parents, and Nato additionally paid her sisters' educational fees.



Fig.3_ M. Pilz, Heroes monument in Saburtalo.

¹² Like a flat in Gldani, building extensions symbolised a strategy to compensate overcrowded living conditions and the immobility of flat-owners due to financial hardship (Bouzarovski, Salukvadze & Gentile 2011, pp. 2700-2711).



Fig.4 M. Pilz, Shop window in Saburtalo.

The flat, as well as the reuse of Soviet furniture, was also a way out in terms of individual rights. Young couples living in the husband's parents' house¹³ is a phenomenon of growing frequency due to increased living costs. Nato perceived it as a step backward, as a re-traditionalisation of the young women's position and of gender relations in general. During the time they had lived together with her mother-in-law, Nato had a hard time accepting to be under her control and to live according to her conceptions.

That is to say, the post-Soviet renewal in Saburtalo was introducing new materials, designs and odours, and clothes and food, which in everyday life existed side by side, thereby generating a space that, in contrast with the official rhetoric about the Soviet legacy, was not grounded on the exclusion of the Soviet as something alien or un-modern. For Tbilisians, Saburtalo is still a Soviet quarter, and the meaning of the post-Soviet flagships is not more than highly symbolic. The backdrop into 'really' traditional cultural practices in private lives and the socially exclusive character of many key symbols of the 'new modern' crisscrossed the dichotomy that was established in official discourses of the Soviet as the 'backward' and the Georgian and Western as the 'modern'.

The old city: From 'urban centre' to 'urban core'

Tbilisians call 'old Tbilisi' an ensemble of several quarters erected in different historical periods by different ethnical and social groups, like Armenians, Azerbaijanis, Jews, and the Russians during the imperial period. During the Soviet period, the territory was marked from the very beginning by different reconstruction activities. Therefore, the historical urban fabric of Tbilisi was a nested ensemble of local historical, Russian imperial, and Soviet-modern construction forms. Tamara and her husband were, for the longest period in

13 Traditionally, in Georgia the wife, after the wedding, would move into the husband's house. During my research in Georgia between 2008 and 2012, I met just one couple living with the parents of the wife and I was explicitly informed about the unusual circumstance and the inconvenience the situation meant for the man.

their lives citizens, of Soviet Georgia and spent all their lives as residents of the old city and felt strongly attached to it.¹⁴

The post-Soviet urban renewal consisted of building practices like the construction of developments in a global postmodern style, the recovering of the historic building fabric and the closing-down, abandonment, and demolition of Soviet representative elements such as the statue of Lenin, shopping centres, and the IMELI (Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute). The closed and vacant buildings became so-called 'left overs of socialism' (Czepczynski 2008, p. 131). As elsewhere, this process did not remain uncontested by Tbilisians, as the case of the statue of Mother Georgia shows. In the 1990s, several public calls to remove the statue referring to her 'Soviet-ness' were made, which affected her transformation into a site of critical examination of the Soviet past as well as of the post-Soviet reconstruction.¹⁵ Some of my interlocutors, due to the change of gender relations, interpreted the statue as a symbol for hardworking Georgian women, because of the conception that those who make wine are working hard, in contrast to Georgian men.¹⁶ Thus, the socialist statue offered the ground for debates over post-Soviet intra-family labour relations and the growing polarisation between genders. In return, in these debates the meaning of the statue was reinterpreted and, as a consequence, the urban landscape was reconstructed in a dissenting way.

The (re)-construction of the old city involved different actors, like local private business, the state, global investors, and architects such as CMD Ingenieros or Michele De Lucchi, and International organisations like ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites). Their activities consisted of different practices: repairing, recovering, and replacing, and were aimed at preserving and/or modernising the old city, at re-nationalising it, or making it more attractive for tourists. As in Saburtalo, the construction and meaning of the new signature architecture were highly debated. Although—unlike in Saburtalo—many of the projects were for public service and to foster the new national identity, like the House of Justice or the Rike Park, some of the Tbilisians I talked to perceived them as signs of social segregation. Here, the rejection was often explained by the high costs they had for the national budget, often at the expense of social programs, and by their failure to generate an economic impact for the majority of people. Moreover, for some of these projects, old residents had to abandon their homes, a circumstance that did not help to increase their acceptance.

Tamar's house—due to the earth quake in 2002—was assigned the second level of emergency status by the city administration. In exchange for their damaged house, the owners were offered one at the outskirts: an offer that divided the house community. Some of the owners wanted to move out quickly, while others, like Tamara, advocated for waiting for a more acceptable offer in the familiar surroundings of the old city. She interpreted the offer of homes at the outskirts as a smart strategy to relocate 'normal people' from the centre and to make money at their expense. For sure, the apartment owners would lose the sense of familiarity, the proximity to important services, and the financial security that a flat in the centre represents.

¹⁴ Talks with Tamara and her husband took place in August 2010, July 2011, and 2012.

¹⁵ The statue of Mother Georgia of the Sculptor E. Amashukeli combines Georgian cultural elements (wine for friends, sword for the enemies, and the figure of the mother replacing men if necessary to protect the homeland) with elements of the socialist modernity: its materiality and size.

¹⁶ A point of debate was that more women in contrast to men accepted work below their qualifications on the tertiary labour sector and still fulfil their household responsibilities (Talks with Nato, I. Pipia, and Ija in August 2011).



Fig.5_ M. Pilz, Rike Park in the old city

In Tamara's flat, little had changed in the past 25 years, although their income was stable: her husband was still working while she got one pension from Georgia and one from Israel, and sometimes a little income in relation to a collaboration with a newspaper. Additionally, her children were always willing to help—they bought a new washing machine in a name-brand shop, which ran smoothly in sharp contrast to the so-called Chinese electric water kettles, which she used to buy on the market (*bazroba*) and which needed to be replaced frequently. Tamara and her husband always tried to save as much money as possible so as not to bother their children and to be able to replace their old computer models when they 'died'.

In sum, the old city is the territory with the highest number of urban renewal projects in Tbilisi. Many of the developments were perceived as exclusive, because on one side, the national budget was plundered, and on the other, because the residents were reduced to the role of spectators. In particular, private projects, like shops and restaurants, were focused on well-off consumers and tourists. In this way, tourists started to play a growing role in the re-imagining of the old city, perhaps a greater role than the common resident. This was also the case for Tamara and her husband, who felt reduced to spectators in front of the new locations even though they could rely on a stable income. Nonetheless, their household appliances and digital devices—washing machines, electric water kettles, mobile phones—might be signs of successful modernisation had they been genuine branded products. But this requires an investment that can be managed only with a good Georgian income or income generated elsewhere.

Conclusions: the emerging symbolical and social landscape of contemporary Tbilisi

In this paper, I focused on the relation between practices, like speaking about or representing, building and furnishing or shopping, and the quality and quantity of the modernisation process in three Tbilisian quarters and in three Tbilisian households. My descriptions showed that in contrast to official political discourse about 'the Soviet', actual urban reconstruction reveals a nested pattern encompassing the co-existence of socialist, Georgian, and new forms and styles, such as functional constructions or postmodern signature architectures. In Tbilisi's public realm, the transformation advanced with different qualities and quantities, variably contributing to a new symbolic landscape throughout the city. Several state-driven developments in the urban space were catching up with global urban development trends (old city), meanwhile the significance of other projects was merely national (Saburtalo) or even local (Gldani).



Fig.6 M. Pilz, Street scene in the old city

Gldani—because of its dominant socialist building structure—can be read as a space that is still Soviet. Meanwhile, the shift of its representation—from being a modern high-rise area in a natural reserve to a downgraded area at the periphery—turned Gldani discursively into a post-Soviet space. The scarcity of new constructions and recovering works developed a symbolical impact on individual lives within the area, but no symbolical impact on Gldani's image within the city. Gldani's new characteristics (image, low real estate prices) are very typical for Western, urban, peripheral quarters under the neoliberal condition. Ultimately, this means that modernisation took place in Gldani in an exclusively discursive way, excluding it from the new 'urban national scene'.

Saburtalo—previously a showcase of socialist modernity—experienced a development in the post-Soviet period, which on the local scale meant a transformation of the quarter into an urban centre with a high concentration of functions of the urban scale (shopping area, city administration).¹⁷ Meanwhile, on the international scale, it started to figure as an important development area (Tbilisi Guide 2008). Saburtalo's socialist urban fabric, as well as its building extensions and bazroba, did not provoke an image of post-Soviet disorder, and the new developments differentiated Saburtalo's 'Soviet-ness' from that of Gldani and produced a post-Soviet landscape where the Soviet and the capitalist are nested in each other and the symbols of 'the national' appear as mounted symbolically on top. Hence, modernisation entered Saburtalo in manifold ways: as neoliberal capitalisation, infrastructural improvement, and westernised consumer culture, which altogether provoked the discursive effect of a modern, dynamic quarter, with people participating in the transformation as happy consumers of Western goods.

17 The classification system of the urban zones established by the New Urban Planners is a Western model and is therefore not always fitting to describe socialist cities, as in the case of Saburtalo. Due to its living and local administrative function, it would have been classified as 'general urban', thereby neglecting its national and urban importance as educational centre.

The redevelopment of the old city can be categorised as a shift in meaning from an 'urban centre' to an 'urban core'. In the Soviet past, the quarter was defined by its high mix of functions: housing and shopping on the local scale and political representation and tourism at the national and Soviet scales. In recent days, the residential function was in decline, and incipient gentrification could be observed. The old city turned into a key symbol of the Georgian national identity and into an urban brand of growing global significance. Therefore, it became a place of heated debates about the meaning of the new architecture and the emerging restriction of citizen access to many places in the old city, regulated by financial capabilities. Here, modernisation entered in a nested configuration that combined global forms and Georgian forms, excluding the Soviet as well as the common resident.

In the three households the situation, regardless of their different living places, was comparable. Modernisation did not enter here in the form of an encompassing reconstruction or refurbishing of flats. The measures were limited to scarce renewals on the ground of the manual skills of the people, shopping practices, or of objects received as gifts or remittances. The products decided the degree of factual modernisation in the flats, which could exclusively be performed by Western products from branded shops and not by no brand-name products from the markets or second-hand products. The situation, in the case of the three households I have presented, demonstrated that the degree of the flat's modernisation was independent from the income of the direct members of the household, as the income was shared between the members of the extended family. In accordance with official rhetoric, the Soviet landscapes of private spaces should be interpreted as a lack of modernity, but this view would ignore people's creativity to organise their lives on the ground of scarce possibilities. Nevertheless, building and shopping/furnishing practices in the households can hardly be called 'modernisation practices' in the normative sense of the phrase. Symbolically, they represented a kind of westernisation (branded goods) that very often was supplemented by an 'as-if' modernisation through counterfeit goods. For the modernisation/westernisation, a certain investment was needed that for many Tbilisians required a creative assembling of different income sources from in and outside of Georgia.

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Tbilisi

In the Caucasus,
Corinna Del Bianco
detail
look at the complete project
p.88

“There Was Communality.” Narrating Transformations in Old Tbilisi

by Joseph Sparsbrod

Tbilisi
Memory
Narrative
Commercialization
Post-Socialism

Relying on intense ethnographic fieldwork, the article deals with the memories and narratives of the residents of the historic center of Tbilisi (Old Tbilisi). Assuming that memory is constituted within the current conditions of a society, I show that people refer to currently available narrative templates when presenting the past. The Georgian intelligentsia established Old Tbilisi as a concept and romanticized its social life and built environment, it became a spatial image. Even though this image did not, and still does not, correspond with the residents' difficult living conditions, they rather refer to romantic narrative templates when they describe the neighborhood and its transformation in the past decades. They perceive the construction of new buildings and the alteration of the demographic structure of the neighborhood, as an assault to the spatial image of Old Tbilisi and thereby on their memories.

Introduction

“Old Tbilisi was nicer, it was very different on Elene Akhvlediani's pictures. Now more is destroyed and built, much superfluity has been added [...]”, stated Ana, a Georgian woman in her 70s, who lives in the old center of Tbilisi. With the aim of illustrating the changes in the cityscape of the Georgian capital, she referred to the paintings of the “Georgian folk painter” Elene Akhvlediani (1898–1975), who is, among others, famous for her paintings of the historic center of Tbilisi (Old Tbilisi).

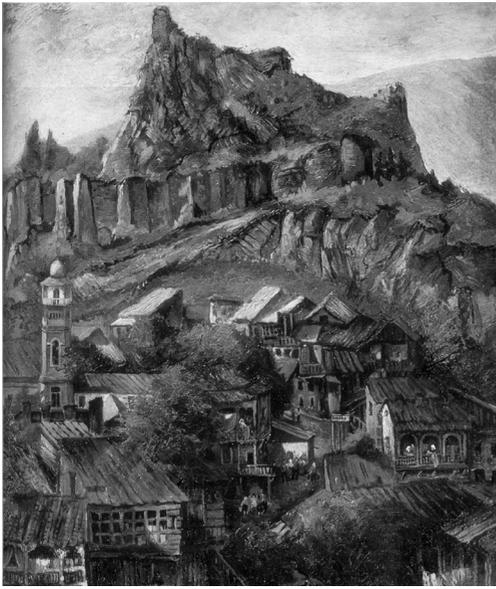


Fig.1 Elene Akhvediani, "Old Tbilisi", 1969, Oil on Canvas, Source: soviet art 2017.

neighborhood. Maidan as a neighborhood is multi-ethnic: Georgians, Azeris, Iranians, Armenians, Jews, Yezidis, Germans, Ukrainians among other diverse ethnic groups have lived, and are still living here. The Muslim cemetery was located here until the middle of the 20th century. Nowadays this graveyard is part of in National Botanical Garden of Georgia (formerly known as the Tbilisi Botanical Garden). Grishashvili Street had hosted the Armenian Saint Sarkis Church which was destroyed in the 1930s by the Bolshevik Government (Elisashvili 2013, p. 15). Mirzoev Bath – a Turkish Bath of the 17th century (Kvantidze 2012, p. 142) is also located on this street and is still open to the public. The Georgian cemetery, located on the same street, was replaced by a school during the Soviet era. Maidan was not regarded as an attractive neighborhood until recently which is why the area has undergone very few regeneration or restructuring initiatives during Soviet times while its territory today is experiencing redevelopment and is extensively utilized for tourism-related businesses (e.g. lodging, sightseeing, recreation).

My study is inspired by the examination of the neighbor's narratives structured by their memories living in Maidan area in Tbilisi. Many authors have described the acquisition as well as the presentation of memory as a process embedded in society. Remembering is rather seen as a collective than an individual act (e.g. Halbwachs 1980, 1992; J. Assmann 1988; Wertsch 2002). James Wertsch especially stressed the point that people refer to the commonly accepted "knowledge" of the respective society and present it within "narrative templates" (2002, pp. 10, 11). National elites often have a stake in the production of communities. They create cultural benchmarks (Assmann 1988, p. 12), for example through the production of imagery (e.g. painting, literature, film) or through the establishment of places for commemoration, like monuments and heritage sites. Halbwachs claims that collective memory

¹ Maidan neighborhood is located in the administrative district K'rts'anisi. Locals mostly call the area "Maidan" (square or market) which is related to today's Gorgasali Square (the central market until the 1950s). Other names for the neighborhood are Abanotubani, Kharpukhi or, more seldom, Seydabad (Georgian Academy of Science 2002, pp. 261, 826, 987). From now on I will use the name Maidan when speaking about this area.

"We lived together in our neighborhood – like one family. It is not like this anymore since none of these people are [here] anymore," stated Alex, an Armenian man of approximately 55. By saying so he was referring to the residents which left Tbilisi at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Both neighbors described how they remember the physical and social character of the Maidan neighborhood¹ and how it has been changing. In this article, I will explore why they often refer to narrative templates established by the Soviet Intelligentsia, when they speak about their neighborhood and the transformation it has undergone in the past two decades.

Therefore, I focus on narratives, everyday life and imagery of Maidan neighborhoods, presented by the neighbors living in Ioseb Grishashvili Street, one of the main streets of the

is related to “spatial images” since people adapt their habits to the space in which they settle and show discomfort if this space is altered (1980, p. 133). I consider Old Tbilisi to be such a “spatial image”. It is charged with a variety of meanings, ranging from a specific epoch to a physical space and its corresponding social relations.

Narratives, social practices and social systems have changed over the course of time. Wertsch therefore, postulates that “collective memory tends to be loyal to a narrative at the expense of evidence” (2002, p. 13). Meaning that the presented values do not correspond to the current social system or practices. In the case of Old Tbilisi, several now-vanished social realities (e.g. state socialism, close neighborhood relations and ruined houses) often diverge from social circumstances and its (material) representations (e.g. capitalism, newly built infrastructure). It is therefore likely that individuals’ narratives refer to a different set of power structures and bear different values and socio-cultural realities belonging to a declined era. They can be full of inconsistency and uneven facts which are neither logical nor plausible. Based on these premises, neighbors’ narratives are precisely the focus of my research: they provide a deep insight into the ideas, desires and values of the residents which often oppose the background of actual change that has taken place in their environment.

The history and city planning of Tbilisi has been documented through a rich literature that was mainly produced during the Soviet Union, for example, the folklorist characterization of Old Tbilisi by Grishashvili (1927), Shota Meskhia’s “History of Tbilisi” (1958) and the examination of Old Tbilisi’s architecture by Vakhtang Beridze (1960; 1963). Over the past two decades, new anthropological and urbanist research has been carried out and currently supersedes the studies from Soviet times. Namely, the works in the volumes edited by Wolfgang Kaschuba, Joseph Salukvadze, Tsypylma Darieva, Madlen Pilz e.a. (Van Assche. e.a. 2009; Darieva & Kaschuba 2011; Kaschuba & Pilz 2012), show a wide range of approaches, methods and topics. The researchers address urban planning (or better its absence), commodification and heritage protection. The transformation of the cityscape and its perception has been examined on a large scale by Paul Manning and Zaza Shatirishvili (2009; 2011). According to these scholars, locals react towards privatization and the restructuring of the “city of balconies” (dominated by balconied houses which are considered to be the “traditional” Tbilisian housing setting) by turning towards nostalgia. Small case studies of neighborhoods and urban communities are the exception. Locals’ ideas are sometimes recognized in academic research, but almost never in urban planning.

The study was realized through extensive fieldwork conducted from March - June 2014 and from March 2016 until March 2017. Three key informants proved to be critical in the access to the field: Ana who introduced me to the Maidan neighborhood and Alex who was my landlord. They grew up and spent most of their life in Maidan neighborhood. This is where they experienced the transformation of the city and the country. Maya, a neighbor in her 30s, was another important informant. She grew up in Vera, another district

of Old Tbilisi, and moved to Maidan neighborhood only ten years ago. My informants have to struggle to satisfy their daily needs; they rely on networks of friends and relatives within the neighborhood as well as beyond. Besides the extensive attendance of these two main witnesses, my research has been further informed by 20 additional interviewees and by participant observation techniques that I used to analyze residents' behavior within the neighborhood. I analyzed the perspective of the elites and different discourses of the last 60 years by the study of written (literature, websites, public campaigns, development plans, heritage legislation and realized projects) as well as visual (photographs, paintings and cartographic material) sources.

The paper is organized as follows. The first part specifies how Old Tbilisi is actually presented. I then proceed by presenting my informant's narratives of their built environment and their housing situation. I then examine the ways in which my interviewees narrate social life in the Maidan neighborhood. In conclusion, I show why Maidan residents refer to specific narrative templates when they present their neighborhood.

Conceptualizing Old Tbilisi

In a chapter of the book published in 2010 called the "Identity and Spirit of Old Tbilisi", architect Giorgi Batiashvili stated that

"the historic areas of Tbilisi possess their own particular characteristics. Here, the features referred to as 'Tbilisuri' (of Tbilisi origin) and 'Tbiliseli' (resident of Tbilisi) are formed and displayed. This is the 'spirit' that gives life to the historic environment. The landscape of the local area and the urban component formed therein constitute the 'Mother of the place' that gives birth to the spirit which is revealed in the architecture and the psychological make-up of the area and its inhabitants. [...] The nest of Old Tbilisi's 'spirit' - [is] the 'Tbilisuri' [sic] dwelling and the 'Tbilisuri' [sic] courtyard" (2010, p. 34).

Old Tbilisi is presented not only as a space in Tbilisi but as "the Mother of space" representing the city as such. It is said to be constituted by the spirit "revealed by the [...] psychological make-up of [...] its inhabitants" and the architecture, especially its "nest [...] the 'Tbilisuri' courtyard". Batiashvili claims that Old Tbilisi is inextricably linked with two important, specific Tbilisian elements: The courtyard and its inhabitants.

Ana and Alex live in the Maidan neighborhood, which forms part of so-called "Old Tbilisi". They depict it, similarly to Batiashvili, with architectural and social components like the "Tbilisian Courtyard" (often called "Italian Yard" – probably to create a more romantic tone)² and its Tbilisian residents ("Tbiliselebi"). Both can observe the panorama of Tbilisi from their windows: the Botanical Garden, the mosque, the historic public bathhouses, Narikala Fortress, new hotels, the newly built Peace Bridge and Metekhi Church. Both have experienced the Soviet Union and its collapse – the following unrest, the establishment of a market economy and the Rose Revolution³. According to their observations and experience, the "identity and spirit of Old Tbilisi" has been vanishing over the past decades, meaning that the neighborhood has lost its specific character.

2 The terms "Tbilisian" or "Italian" courtyard refer to the characteristic houses of the old center with inner courtyards. It is unclear when the concept exactly came up, but the term is an inherent part of the discursive reality about Old Tbilisi and widespread in today's Georgian media (e.g. Batiashvili 2010, p. 34; GDS morning 2013; Taktiridze 2016; Samadashvili-Kordzaia 2014, p. 209ff.). Therefore I use both terms equally from now on.

3 The Rose Revolution took place in 2003 and ended with the election of Mikheil Saakashvili as President of Georgia (2004 - 2012) and far reaching anti corruption measures and economic and political reforms, leading to a gradual recovery of the countries economy and state institutions (Jones 2013, p. 107).



Fig.2 Old Tbilisi as seen from Ana's window: newly built houses, the mosque, Narikala Fortress with the new built church, photo by the author.

Many features have changed due to the collapse of the Soviet Union: numerous residents left the city in the 1990s when the economy of Georgia collapsed and left residents facing extreme social insecurity. Additionally, minority rights were abolished by Zviad Gamsakhurdia, the first president of independent Georgia (Jones 2013, p. 43). Therefore, members of minority groups migrated more frequently than ethnic Georgians. Due to conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the former were sometimes substituted by IDPs (Internal Displaced Persons) from these regions (Golubchikov & Salukvadze 2016, p. 44). Since the Maidan neighborhood was dominated by minorities, it was hit particularly hard by this development. Additionally, as already mentioned, the neighborhood is becoming more and more dominated by tourists and tourism-related businesses since it is located in the very heart of the historic center of Tbilisi. These changes can be visually perceived since the old center is restructured according to the needs of consumption, recreation and commodification. Starting from the 1990s many old houses were demolished and rebuilt – especially during the time of the Saakashvili government. In 2008, an entire street (Mirza Shafi Street) was destroyed in the Maidan neighborhood to make a place for new housing, hotels and commercial buildings. Widely circulated examples of eye-catching constructions that have taken place are the Peace Bridge and the Hotel Tbilisi Veranda.

However, some characteristics of the neighborhood have stayed untouched: some long-time residents still inhabit the neighborhood, mostly those who could not or did not want to leave their old homes. They still live “like one family” with close relations and mutual support, since some of them are socially vulnerable neighbors (e.g. minorities – often facing difficulties to find work, due to language barriers and structural discrimination (George 2010, p. 51) and elderly people, receiving only limited support from the state). In addition,

the built environment has also stayed partially untouched: old, neglected houses surrounding “Tbilisuri’ courtyards” with shared facilities and a weak infrastructure make life very uncomfortable for the neighbors.

“Not characteristic for us”: narrating spatial images

Tourism is the most important economic activity in the Maidan neighborhood. A lot of residents profit from the tourism exploitation since many of them conduct tourism-related businesses. In almost every yard at least one family rents out flats to tourists. As Maya explained: “The whole neighborhood is a hotel. This is a tourist’s neighborhood.”

As the neighbors prefer to buy products from cheaper bazaars or supermarkets and make use of their newly built private bathrooms it is logical that some shops and the historic, public bathhouses cannot survive without foreign clients.

However, neighbors often react negatively towards tourism exploitation that is the main factor in the reorganization of their neighborhood. But their reactions seem to arise from the ways in which this type of exploitation affects their habits and spatial image rather than being a refusal of tourism and business per se. Loud music is played and fireworks are burned every night. It is especially during summertime that neighbors complain about their disturbed sleep. The restaurants, as well as the bathhouses (formerly residents’ favorite places to socialize), are now too expensive for most neighbors. The exodus of many residents broke up the neighbors’ networks and friendships. The newly built structures even endanger their material existence. One resident for example, accidentally discovered that a building company was destroying the foundations of his home: he was not even informed about the constructions along the hillside where his house is located.

It is especially the constructions of the last two decades in the neighborhood and its periphery which evoke the neighbors’ discomfort. In Ana’s eyes the modernist buildings like the Peace Bridge are alien elements in Tbilisi:

“I personally don’t like this bridge, not only myself, also Aleko⁴ does not like it. [...] Our president⁵ and Ugulava⁶ went and saw [...] and they learned something, they came, spread golden things,⁷ made watches⁸ [...], which are not characteristic for us.”

Ana claimed a nation has to take care of its own culture and should not taint it with alien elements. Besides the Peace Bridge and the golden statue of Saint George, the demolition of Mirza Shafi Street and the building of new restaurants and hotels are further examples of the intrusion of new buildings in the old center. In their narratives, the neighbors condemn these constructions as “not characteristic” to the national culture. And they refer to activists such as Aleksandre Elisashvili who “also [...] does not like” the Peace Bridge.

What is “characteristic” for Tbilisi, was defined at the latest in the mid-20th century, when Old Tbilisi received an increase in attention from the Soviet authorities. Stephen Jones claims that the latter aimed to prevent further

4 Aleksandre Elisashvili – member of the City Council, one of the founding members of the NGO Tiflis Hamkari engaged in the protection of historic buildings in Tbilisi.

5 In this time Mikheil Saakashvili president from 2004-2013.

6 Givi Ugulava former Major of Tbilisi from 2005-2013.

7 The golden statue of St. George at Freedom Square.

8 A public clock placed at Gorgasali Square.



Fig.3_ Gravestone of Elene Akhvlediani at the Didube Pantheon, photo by the author.

political claims of the Georgian national movement by supporting its cultural demands. (2013, p. 31) Finally, in 1975, the old center of Georgia’s capital was declared a “national protected zone” and its reconstruction and preservation envisaged (Tbilisi 9th Sept. 1989; Vardosanidze 2010).

On the occasion of the 1500th anniversary of Tbilisi, the historian Shota Meskhia published “History of Tbilisi” (1958) and claimed that in the mid-19th century “the 2 or 3- floor houses of the citizens, wore features of national folk architecture. They were characterized by arched balconies with carved balustrades and brackets.” (1958, p. 423) In the course of time the balconies, the inner “courtyard, terraced roofing, and loggias with stained glass” were declared an integral part of “the so-called ‘Tbilisi house’.” (Bulia; Janjalia 2002, p. 92) As Paul Manning showed, these “arched balconies” became the visual signature of Old Tbilisi (2009, p. 98).

It is exactly this image that Ana is referring to when she claims that the historic center should look like “Elene Akhvlediani’s pictures”. On Akhvlediani’s paintings of the historic center, one can above all see these balconied houses – even her gravestone at the Didube Pantheon⁹ in Tbilisi consists of a sculpture presenting balconied houses.

But Ana also appears to have a personal relation to the painter. She spoke of how the artist came into her house and painted the panorama of Old Tbilisi which is visible from Ana’s balcony. This is, in her eyes, proof that Akhvlediani’s paintings are an exact reproduction of Old Tbilisi. The panoramic view which can be witnessed from Ana’s balcony has changed over the past decades, and by now looks different from the one presented on Akhvlediani’s paintings. Therefore, according to her, the view from the balcony “has to be

⁹ The Didube Pantheon is a cemetery in Tbilisi, Georgia, where some of the most prominent writers, artists, scholars, scientists and political activists of Georgia are buried. It was opened in 1939. The pantheon is located in the Didube District in the northern part of Tbilisi.

given back – maybe taken down and rebuilt, but in the old style and not in another way.” The building of entirely new structures, which are not “characteristic” Tbilisian, makes her familiar environment unrecognisable. In her eyes, it might have been necessary to renovate or to rebuild the houses in her neighborhood since they have been in a bad state, but the spatial image should not have been changed. She perceives the alteration as the erasure of her own memory.

“Tbilisuri dwelling”: narrating housing

Similarly to Ana, Maya claims that she likes “what is old, what is historic: the view, the churches. [...] The neighborhood itself is old and is the most beautiful and nice, there is no doubt.” This statement suggests that the residents positively evaluate their historic homes. But instead what they mostly lament about is their housing conditions. So did Maya, when she continued:

“Besides this, I like nothing [...], the neighborhood is not good. [...] Of course, I want a better apartment, so that I would have better conditions – a kitchen and a toilet in the apartment. [...] I don’t like this neighborhood not only because the people are naughty [...], it is not practical for living, because of the shops, because of everything – the transport, this and that.”

The housing conditions in the shared yards were the result of the Soviet housing policy, due to which communal apartments were established. Svetlana Boym argues that the communal apartment was not only the result of the post-revolutionary housing crisis but also of a revolutionary experiment of shared housing (1994, p. 124). The striven norm of 9m² of living space per person was a mere statistical device and was not related to the existing pre-revolutionary housing stock (Goldman 1988, p. 193). Therefore, the separation of existing flats became necessary and strangers had to share these newly created apartments. Housing committees were created to manage the communal apartments. This newly created institution served to control and educate “Soviet men and women”. The use of shared facilities (kitchen, bath, toilet) was, according to Boym, not only the result of the lack of space but also a political statement against the bourgeois way of life (1994, pp. 128, 129).

However, the specific Tbilisian version of the *Kommunalka* was the so-called “Italian Yard”. A multitude of neighbors used to live, and still live, in the apartments grouped around the “Tbilisian Courtyard”. Some of them still share facilities like the kitchen and the bathroom. The housemates formed the “yard community”, a context that forced them to get along with each other in a confined space.

In the film “April” (directed by the Georgian-film maker Otar Ioseliani, 1962) these difficult living conditions in the so-called “Italian Yards” are contrasted with newly built comfortable housing. In the film, a young couple leaves its shanty-like house and moves into a newly built, comfortable apartment. While the achievements of the Soviet housing policy are shown here, the final message is different. The couple becomes tired of material things as they fill their flat with furniture. Their property starts to disturb them and they



remember the modest, but yet romantic living conditions in Old Tbilisi.

Fig.4 Tbilisian Courtyard in Grishashvili Street, photo by the author.

A similar plot is presented in the film “Sun of Autumn” (released in 1976). The wife of an artist exchanges their comfortable flat with a shanty like a house in the historic center. The artist gets inspired by the character of the old center and becomes very productive and his subsequent satisfaction results in a re-kindling of the couple’s love. In one of the last sequences of the film, the artist invites his colleagues to his exhibition in his “Tbilisuri dwelling”. The guests there, are among others, played by the most famous Georgian artists of the 1970s: Elene Akhvediani and Lado Gudiashvili (1896- 1980). In the film, the Georgian intelligentsia re-enacts their enthusiasm for Old Tbilisi. They explicitly legitimize their fascination for the historic center through the romantic atmosphere which is presented in the love of the artist-couple.

In a key scene, the couple is driving through the city in a carriage while a song, called “Be greeted my city Tbilisi [gamarjoba ch’emo t’bilis k’alak’o]”, is played. Many other Tbilisi-related compositions have similar titles and deal with the beauty of the city (Giorgi Tsabadze: Tbilisi, my city! [ch’emo t’bilis k’alak’o]), the friendship between neighbors (Vakhtang Kikabidze “Buba”: Toast [sadghegrdzelo]) and the love to the city (Vakhtang Kikabidze “Buba”: Tbilisian Love [t’bilisuri satrp’ialo]).

These songs as well as the two mentioned films were produced during the Soviet era and are broadcast on the radio and TV to this day. This media is therefore widespread and becomes common knowledge among the neighbors who can identify themselves with the romantic image of the city that is propagated. Residents may lament about the poor living conditions, but in their narrative, they compensate them with warm neighborliness. Also in the

movie “Sun of Autumn” a neighbor explains: “All the people you need are here: for example, if you need a living fish, the fisherman is your neighbor, if you want to come together in the bath, the Mekise [bath worker J.S.] is your neighbor [...]” This idealized image emphasizes also the specific Georgian form of Soviet communality, enacted in the “Tbilisian courtyard”.

“We lived together in joy and grief”: narrating communality

According to the neighbor in the film as well as the neighbors in reality “communality (urtiertoba)” existed in Old Tbilisi – especially in the “Italian Yard”. “Before it was better than now. At least [the neighbors] were good to each other, if you were in distress if you needed something, everything was provided for the indigent person. [...] Today as well, but back then it was more intense”, Maya’s mother-in-law explained. Alex narrated that, during war-time, his mother had worked in a food oil factory and brought oil and seeds back to the yard in order to share it with those who had nothing. As he stressed, in Tbilisi, there had been a time when all lived together, there was “communality” between all “Tbilisians” and they had lived according to “Tbilisiness” – a certain way of behavior characterized by mutual respect and help, as he specified. An Armenian woman in her 50s explained that “it is a beautiful neighborhood. [...] Different nations are living together [...] like a family. They used to live together both in joy and grief [literally: “in feasting and down on the ground – lkhinshi da dzirshi”].

Neighbors refer to a narrative template linked with the communality of the genuine urban population, the *Tbilisians*. As Alex claims Tbilisians are a “nation on its own”. This idea was elaborated by the “Georgian folk poet” Ioseb Grishashvili (1889-1965) in his book “Old Tbilisi’s Literary Bohemia” (1927) first published in 1927 and republished in 1986. From the beginning of the 20th century on, he conducted research about the life in the area which he called “Old Tbilisi”. In his view, Old Tbilisi had its own culture, different from that of other regions of Georgia. Tbilisians would see themselves as a folk consisting of different ethnic backgrounds (1927, p. 13). By publishing an “urban dictionary” (1997) he assigned a unique language to the capital of Georgia. He put stress on the peaceful mixture of different people who understood themselves as part of one big community, Tbilisi. (1927, p. 13) According to Manning and Shatirishvili, “during the twentieth century there began a process of idealization of Old Tbilisi on the ground of high culture, [...] as a result of which Grishashvili’s book became a ‘cult’ classic” (2011, p. 266). The concept of Old Tbilisi became widespread in the late Soviet era and the neighbors refer to its specific qualities (the Tbilisian housing, a unique language, one big community and a mix of different ethnic groups) in their narratives. The idea of “communality” is linked with the physical structure of Old Tbilisi. Batiashvili, as mentioned above, claimed: “The nest of Old Tbilisi’s ‘spirit’ - [is] the ‘Tbilisuri’ dwelling and the ‘Tbilisuri’ courtyard.” According to Maya’s mother-in-law, mutual help, community and understanding were integral parts of life in the Italian Yard, because “in this Italian... if you want to move or not, you have to go out, and then more communality emerges.” Alex draws a picture of a warm and polite community of friends

“we knew each other. [...] There was little evil, but we knew who is evil and what kind of evil. [...] In your house in your family you’re living, you know all of your family. Who is what, yes you know, brother, sister or who else they are, mother, father you know each other good, here it was the same at the Maidan, in general in Tbilisi”.

What is distinctively shared by all neighbors’ accounts is that they all deal with a lost past. Communality does not exist anymore or is not as intense as it used to be. Responsible for these alterations is the outflow of the long-established residents, the so-called “Tbilisians”, who knew the Tbilisian rules of cohabitation. Instead, new residents would come from the villages and would not know the rules of Tbilisi. Alex mainly refers to the above-mentioned migration processes, due to which former residents (“Tbilisians”, as Alex says) were substituted by IDPs (“villagers”, as he calls them). However, since Tbilisi was steadily growing in the Soviet era, due to intense industrialization, a huge number of the rural population migrated into the capital. This process is ongoing (with an interruption in the 1990s, due to economic and political upheavals), since Tbilisi is the economic center of Georgia (Golubchikov; Salkvadze 2016, p. 44).

Old Tbilisi, according to the neighbors, is not only altering its built environment, but also the attitude that neighbors show towards each other. “There has been communality” is a catchphrase which I heard from all the neighbors I had spoken with.

The yard community was established due to the creation of the Tbilisian communal apartment: the Italian Yard. This would therefore make the narrative template of Old Tbilisi appear as an effect of the Soviet housing policy. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the outflow of the urban population, the establishment of capitalism and a free housing market, the tourism exploitation of the Maidan neighborhood has made the communal apartment and the everyday life that was related to it, slowly disappear.

Conclusions: relying on “outdated narratives”

The Georgian, Soviet intelligentsia romanticized the built environment and social life of the historic center of Tbilisi, which emerged as a result of the shortcomings of the Soviet housing policy and the establishment of communal apartments in Tbilisi. As clearly demonstrated, it is present until this day and is presented as “the spirit of Old Tbilisi.” This concept was accepted as common knowledge in the neighborhood and thereby constitutes its memory. In the residents’ narratives they recall many aspects of the spatial imagery produced by the Soviet Georgian intelligentsia e.g. the representation of Old Tbilisi by historic buildings. In particular, the “Tbilisian Courtyard”; a ruined housing stock which formed the romantic atmosphere of love and communality between the long-time urban population – the Tbilisians. Neighbors automatically recall this romantic narrative template and contrast it with the negative connotations of current developments. “Old Tbilisi was nicer” than it is today – tourism altered the cityscape negatively; the houses were, and still are ruined, but it was romantic. Before, neighbors knew each other, whereas

today many of them have left. “There had been communality” among the neighbors, while today it is lost.

The neighbors’ idealized, collective memory serves as a self-assertion that they remain members of an “authentic” community while pointing towards an alternative society (located in a lost past – in the Soviet Union or even before) characterized by social security and close relations between the neighbors. Since collective memory is related to “spatial images” and people adapt their habits to the space in which they settle, residents show discomfort with alterations of their environment. Its transformation is perceived as the annihilation of memory and the past.

Further research should examine how the idealized image of Old Tbilisi is used as a form of city branding by the city hall and big tourist agencies. But also by neighbors who are involved in tourism-related businesses to cope with everyday challenges.

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In the Caucasus,
Corinna Del Bianco
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Appendice

Others

In the Caucasus

Progetto fotografico di / Photographic project by

Corrina Del Bianco

A strip of land wedged between the Caspian Sea and the Black Sea, two enclosed inland seas, hosts the Caucasus. The Caucasus are two parallel mountain ranges, soft and green, rich in water; with valleys, plains and deserts. A mountainous range that marks the passage from Europe to Asia. Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as Russia, make up the countries of the South Caucasus. They are similar in colours and in the perfumes of the land, but profoundly different in their populations, their languages and alphabet, their religions and traditions, and their natural resources.

The report here is composed of images collected over the course of two trips, the first to Georgia and Azerbaijan in 2010, and the second to Armenia in 2011. I could observe and document the changes in the city of Baku (Azerbaijan) through repeated trips and with projects published in numerous international architecture journals. However, for this issue of QU3, I preferred to report the most homogenous view possible on the three countries, showing that, despite their differences and contrasts they represent a single, dense, and compact geographical area.

A homogenous view on the countries because it was the first time that I went to all three of them and had a new perspective, devoid of any influences. It was homogenous given the trip's program; in all three cases I was warmly hosted and accompanied to visit the peri-urban and rural zones. It was homogenous given the duration of the trip, in that I spent about one week in each country. Lastly, it was homogenous given the lenses and the photographic instrument used.

This photographic project intends to contribute to this issue of QU3, dedicated to the South Caucasus, a transversal glance at the three independent Caucasian countries. This includes the relationship between the countryside and the city, and the rural and the urban landscapes; the local cultural heritage in its tangible and intangible forms; the societal aspects tied to

traditions and their own cultural expressions; the economy, which is so different in the three countries due to the resources they possess and exploit, and that is manifested in the urban organism. Finally, the infrastructures, often renovated and modern, but that are still punctured by elements from both the history of the Ottoman Empire and from the years under the Soviet rule of the 20th century. These elements give a special flavour to the images and highlight the historical detachments of these three societies that, in parallel, are rebuilding and reclaiming their own identities.

Corinna Del Bianco (Florence, 1986) majored in architecture at the Politecnico di Milano, where she is now completing her doctorate in Architectural, Urban and Interior Planning, with research on forms of living in Pemba (Mozambique). Since 2015 at the Politecnico, she has tutored the *Urban Design for Development* course and is assistant professor at the Josai International University in Tokyo. She is board member of the Fondazione Romualdo Del Bianco, and since 2015, has managed the activities of the International Institute Life Beyond Tourism® for the development of territories through travel for intercultural dialogue. Since 2009, she has collaborated with Italian and international architectural studios.



Corinna Del Bianco, *In the Caucasus*



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Corinna Del Bianco, *In the Caucasus*

Profilo autori / Authors bio

Alessandro Coppola (1978) is a research fellow and a member of the teaching committee of the international Phd school in Urban Studies and Regional Science at the Gran Sasso Science Institute in L'Aquila. He holds a M.A in literature and history at Università di Roma Tre and a Phd in urban studies at the same university. He has had research and teaching appointments in the broad field of urban studies at Università di Roma Tre, Politecnico di Milano, Università Cà Foscari di Venezia, Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio, Kent State University in Florence. His research has focused on urban policy and politics, neighborhood change, informality, urban shrinkage and community organizing mostly based on qualitative and ethnographic approaches. On these topics He has published monographs,

book chapters and articles on journals such as *Urban Studies*, *Urban geography*, *Etnografia e Ricerca Qualitativa*, *Rivista Geografica Italiana*, *Archivio di Studi Urbani e Regionali*, *Territorio*, *Urbanistica*. He has extensively consulted for national and international institutions and organizations and for grass-roots groups on urban affairs and policy. He has coordinated the Roma Resilient initiative and has been and still is part of several EU urban policy on issues resilience, temporary uses and community development. An extensive traveller, he has a passion for urban reportages.

David Gogishvili received his doctoral degree in Urban Studies and Regional Science at Italy's Gran Sasso Science Institute in 2017. In his PhD project, he analysed the exceptional legal and spatial powers of mega-events and their role in influencing urban

policy and practice in three different cities- Glasgow, Tbilisi and Baku. His current research interests include mega-events and megaprojects role in urban development in Global East, mobility and transport policies as well as the increasing impact of tourism on urban areas and destination images. Outside of academia, he has been involved in various NGOs and urban social movements working on open data initiatives, open source geographic information, and issues related to urban development in Georgia and the South Caucasus. He is a founder of the Soviet Past Research Laboratory and the pedestrian rights association *Iare Pekhit (Walk)*, both based in Tbilisi, Georgia where he is originally from.

Temur Gugushvili is a first-year PhD student at Tbilisi State University. He has long-term continuous working experience in both international

and local research projects. Temur's topical areas of interest include sustainable livelihood practices in the rural settlements with various contexts such as urbanization, tourism development, protected areas and climate change. His academic performance was recognized with great success, for which he received several fellowships from leading scientific institutions and societies.

Susanne Harris-Brandts is a doctoral candidate in Urban Studies and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the United States. Her work examines the politics of architecture and urbanism during periods of state building and political unrest, particularly across the South Caucasus. Prior to her doctoral studies, Susanne studied architecture and is a licensed architect in Canada. She has worked at numerous design and research practices across the globe, including in To-

ronto, Vancouver, London, the West Bank and Abu Dhabi.

Madlen Pilz

is currently working as Researcher at the Leibniz-Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig, Germany, in a project about the 'post-migrant city' with a regional focus on Leipzig and Munich. She was trained in Social and Urban Anthropology with a focus on the global areas Europe and Latin America. For her PhD she was studying the post socialist reconstruction in Tbilisi, Georgia, and the emerging symbolical and social landscape of the city. Other researches she was carrying out dealt e.g. with the political struggle for recognition of women from poorer urban classes in Quito, Ecuador, or with the representation of the (un)desired socialist citizen in the GDR.

Gvantsa Salukvadze (1992) is a PhD candidate

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Joseph Salukvadze (PhD since 1985) is a professor at the department of Human Geography, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Tbilisi State University (TSU) and a visiting Professor at Tech-

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Joseph Sparsbrod
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Cities of the South Caucasus: a view from Georgia

After the collapse of the USSR and the regaining of independence, Georgia has experienced a dramatic set of political, economic and social changes which have had marked impacts on Georgian cities that further intensified with the early 2000s, political and economic stabilization and the greater role assumed by the state in leading urban restructuring initiatives. While similar developments in some other parts of the former Socialist Bloc have attracted much interest among urban scholars, the attention towards Georgian cities has been limited. With this special issue we make a step towards bridging this knowledge gap by providing contributions on topics such as spatial hierarchies and restructuring, urban regeneration, tourism, urban memories and lifestyles. But first, the editorial text by the editors of this special issue first introduces the reader to the broader transformations in Georgia and its cities since 1991, an overview of the topics treated by the authors and some conclusive points on further research on Georgian and South Caucasian cities.

QU3 - iQuaderni di U3

QU3 is a peer-reviewed scientific journal promoted by scholars working in the urban studies area of the Department of Architecture of Roma Tre University (Italy). The journal is edited by Giorgio Piccinato and has a Scientific Board of Italian and international scholars and an Editorial committee of lecturers, researchers, PhD students and department staff. QU3 provides space where current research on urban and territorial transformations could be shared. QU3 is part of UrbanisticaTre an online platform that gives researchers, PhD students and professionals an opportunity to present emerging research in a variety of media such as scientific articles, photoreportages, videos and other.