

TOURISM SUSTAINABILITY ANALYSIS AND THE PROSPECTS FOR CREATING AN ETHNOVISUAL TOURISM ATLAS IN ADJARA

Manuchar Loria¹, Gulad Tkhilaishvili², Natalia Jijavadze³

Abstract. Ethnovisual tourism explores a destination's cultural heritage through visual means, generating economic benefits and encouraging investment in cultural infrastructure and heritage conservation projects. Assessing the social, economic and environmental impacts of tourism activities is essential to ensure sustainability and preserve local communities. In Adjara, Georgia, an ethnovisual tourism atlas can provide an immersive experience of local culture and heritage. Community engagement and participation are essential for the preservation of cultural heritage and for the benefit of the local community. Environmental sustainability should be prioritised through responsible tourism practices, such as reducing waste and energy consumption. The National Tourism Administration of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development has published booklets and collections on pilgrimage tourism, such as "Orthodox Pilgrimage to Georgia" and "Georgia for the Jewish Travelers". These publications serve as reference materials for tourists, but are of limited use to guides and the general public. The Batumi Synagogue, for example, was built in 1904 by the Jewish community of Batumi and ceased operations in 1929. These publications can serve as reference materials and should be supplemented with additional materials to better understand the sustainable development of tourism in Adjara. In 1993, the Batumi Synagogue was returned to the Jewish community after being illegally installed by European Jews. The government postponed the project three times, and the Jews turned to the rabbi of Kutaisi for help. The article presents and analyses the sustainability of tourism in the context of post-COVID-19 conditions in Adjara, examines the ethnocultural characteristics of some ethnic groups living in Georgia, and proposes a model route for pilgrimage tourism for tour operators. The characteristics of the creation of an atlas of ethnovisual tourism based on field research, video monitoring of ethno-cultural values and the main sources for structuring cartographic material are also described. The article examines the dynamics of tourism development trends in Adjara, their probable estimates and prospects, which will be of interest not only to tourists and guides, but also to stakeholders interested in inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations, as well as to the scientific community. The research task was to analyse the sustainability of tourism in Adjara, focusing on the ethno-cultural characteristics of Georgian ethnic groups, and to offer a model pilgrimage tourism route for tour operators. The main objective was to predict future development and define trends. The research methodology includes interviews, stories, video monitoring, statistical forecasting technical tools and moving average tools. In conclusion, the interests of the ethno-spiritual culture of a multiethnic society in terms of sustainable tourism development and economic prospects are substantiated with the help of a video atlas, and an original tourist product in the form of an ethno-tourist video atlas is created. Video monitoring of ethno-cultural values allows capturing traditional elements of everyday life, material culture, social and family life, and spiritual culture.

Key words: tourism development, ethnotourism, video atlas, polyethnic, pilgrimage.

JEL Classification: Z30, Z32, Z39

1. Introduction

Ethnovisual tourism is a type of cultural tourism that involves exploring and experiencing the cultural heritage of a destination through visual means

such as photography, film and art. For Georgia, a country with a rich and diverse cultural heritage, ethnovisual tourism can be an important tool for promoting tourism and economic development.

¹ Batumi State Maritime Academy, Georgia (*corresponding author*)
E-mail: m.loria@bsma.edu.ge

² Batumi State Maritime Academy, Georgia
E-mail: g.tkhilaishvili@bsma.edu.ge

³ Batumi State Maritime Academy, Georgia
E-mail: n.jijavadze@bsma.edu.ge



Georgia is renowned for its unique traditions, architecture, cuisine and landscapes. The country has a rich history and cultural heritage, including the ancient cave city of Uplistsikhe, the medieval monasteries of Davit Gareja and Gelati, traditional Georgian polyphonic singing and the art of wine making using clay vessels known as qvevri. These cultural treasures can be showcased and promoted through ethnovisual tourism, giving visitors an immersive experience of Georgia's cultural heritage.

Ethnovisual tourism can also bring economic benefits to Georgia. By promoting cultural heritage and traditions, the tourism industry can create new jobs and generate income for local communities. It can also help preserve cultural heritage by encouraging investment in cultural infrastructure and heritage conservation projects.

Ethnovisual tourism can be an important tool for promoting Georgia's rich cultural heritage, generating economic benefits and preserving the country's traditions and history. It can help create a positive image of Georgia as a unique and diverse destination, attracting more visitors and strengthening the country's overall tourism industry.

Tourism sustainability analysis is an important aspect of tourism planning and development. It involves assessing the social, economic and environmental impacts of tourism activities to ensure that they are sustainable and do not harm local communities and the environment.

In the case of Adjara, a region in Georgia known for its unique cultural heritage and natural beauty, the prospects for creating an ethnovisual tourism atlas are promising. An ethnovisual tourism atlas is a tool that combines visual and ethnographic data to provide tourists with an immersive experience of local culture and heritage.

In order to create an ethnovisual tourism atlas for Adjara, a sustainability analysis should be carried out to assess the potential impact of tourism on the local community and environment. This analysis should consider factors such as the carrying capacity of the region, the availability of infrastructure and resources, and the potential for economic development.

In addition to sustainability analysis, it is important to involve the local community in the development of the ethnovisual tourism atlas. This can be done through community engagement and participation, where local people are consulted

and involved in the planning and implementation of tourism activities. This will help to ensure that the local community benefits from tourism development and that their cultural heritage is respected and preserved.

Finally, the development of an ethnovisual tourism atlas should also prioritise environmental sustainability. This can be achieved through responsible tourism practices, such as minimising waste and reducing energy consumption, and by promoting ecotourism activities that have a low impact on the environment.

The research task is to analyse the sustainability of tourism in Adjara, to discuss the ethno-cultural characteristics of the ethnic groups living in Georgia and to offer a model route in terms of pilgrimage tourism for travel companies. Also, the distribution of the average monthly number of visits by non-resident visitors to Georgia aged 15 and over according to visited regions and visits by international travellers to Adjara. The main task of the research is to forecast the future development of tourism in Adjara and to define trends.

Research methodology: interviews, stories, video monitoring, MS Excel statistical forecasting technical tools were used. (Linear forecast)-linear regression forecast, (Exponential) exponential growth, and moving average-moving average tools, to use all three tools and reduce the allowable error (3-4%) for information accuracy by 1.5 to -2%.

With regard to pilgrimage tourism, the National Tourism Administration of the Ministry of the Economy and Sustainable Development has published several interesting brochures and collections:

"Orthodox Pilgrimage to Georgia" – Tbilisi 2015, prepared in Georgian, English and Russian. The publication briefly describes church holidays, St. Andrew the First-Called and the Way of St. Nino in Georgia. Different regions of Georgia: geographical location, climate, administrative centre, history, churches and monasteries of the region (Orthodox Pilgrimage to Georgia, 2015).

Georgia for the Jewish Travelers is a brochure prepared in English and Hebrew. The publication is intended for reference and contains information about synagogues in various cities of Georgia and the Museum of Jewish History.

Both publications are interestingly prepared and fully fulfil the function of a guide for tourists.

However, they are extremely limited for guides and the general public interested in these issues. Therefore, publications of this type can only be used as reference and should be supplemented, for example, with additional materials. The following information about the Batumi Synagogue is contained in a brochure published by Georgia for the Jewish Travellers: "In the beginning of XX century Batumi Jewish community addressed Emperor of Russia Nicholas II with the petition and asked for permission to built synagogue in the town. After obtaining consent form the Emperor the construction started and it was finished in 1904. The synagogue was designed by the architect Semyon Vulkovich. In 1929 the synagogue ceased functioning and since then the building had been used for different purposes. It was only in 1993 that she shul returned to the Jewish community. The building was renovated and nowadays the synagogue is active." (Georgia for the Jewish Travelers, 2017)

2. Spiritual Culture – Discussions

Discussion of a specific religious monument: Batumi Synagogue. After settling in Batumi, European Jews illegally established a house of prayer. Their request to open a synagogue for them was postponed three times by the government. It was suggested that they turn to the rabbi of Kutaisi for help. Then, on Shepalevi Street, they took a 10-year lease on an old one-storey wooden house with a large courtyard owned by a Turkish citizen. Not all the worshippers could enter this house. But rich Jews were willing to build a large synagogue. According to Riklin, in 1890 the Jews of Batumi appealed to the governor of the Caucasus, Sheremetev, to officially open the synagogue. Instead of agreeing, in 1890 the governor of Kutaisi ordered the closure of the illegally established house of prayer. Educated Ashkenazi Jews again appealed to the Governor of the Kutaisi Governorate to open the synagogue, who in turn informed the Crown Prince of the Caucasus on July 21, 1895. Then, according to Jewish tradition, they appealed directly to Tsar Nicholas II. According to the storytellers, King Nicholas agreed, and only then, in 1899, did the Minister of the Interior issue an official decree allowing the synagogue to be opened. The European Jews of Batumi bought the building from a Turkish citizen for

2,000 manats. The first service was held in the unfinished synagogue in 1904, on the occasion of the birth of the Emperor's successor. According to the archives, the synagogue was still unfinished in 1912. Lev Volkovich was the architect of the synagogue. In the 42nd minutes of the meeting of the Central Executive Committee of Acharistan on March 28, 1923, it is stated: The Jewish Synagogue (meaning the Ashkenazi Synagogue), located on Shepalevi Street, should be confiscated. The proposal should be given to the Internal Security Committee to take appropriate measures. The building should be included in the list of communal buildings and transferred to the Young Communist League of Adjara. For many years, sports organisations were located in this building: "Shevardeni" and "Spartak". In November 1998, the building regained its religious status (Loria, pp. 60–63, 2009).

General overview of pilgrimage tourism. The Pontic Greeks are also particularly interesting from the point of view of pilgrimage tourism. Other churches built by the Greeks in Adjara or on their initiative are similar in terms of planning. It is a rectangular building with an oval, three-part sanctuary. All three parts of the sanctuary have windows. According to the volume of the church, there are two rows of columns supporting the dome and the roof, dividing the interior of the church into three parts. In the settlement area of the Pontoel Greeks, at least one church can be found in every village of Adjara. The exception is the Church of St. Nicholas in Batumi, which for a while was also called the Russian Church. It is interesting to note that almost everywhere in the villages where the Greeks lived, they built churches in the name of one or another saint. In Kvirike there is the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen and the Church of St. George; in Dagva there is the Church of the Dormition of the Holy Mother of God; in Achkva there are the Churches of St. Peter and Paul and St. Theodore; in Ortabatun the Church of St. Panteleimon and in Akhalsheni the Church of the Transfiguration.

Each saint was consecrated in the same church with a feast day in his name, according to the appropriate ecclesiastical procedure. The holiday was a time not only for the villagers to gather, but also for relatives to meet, including those who had moved away from the village. Religious holidays were generally called Panair (Panairis) (Mgeladze, pp. 67–78, 2021).

Material culture. With regard to tourism in the rural polyethnic environment, the example of one of the Greeks living in Adjara in the village of Zeda Kvirike, namely Hristo Xandopoulos, can be taken. Here the tourist can learn about the Greek way of life, accommodation, have a good rest and taste Greek dishes. One of the most striking features of the courtyard of Pontoel Greeks were the augaros, or spectacles.

In the Ponto Greek residence, the "icon corner", also known as the "prayer corner", is prominent and eye-catching. Places in the residence that are less conspicuous are chosen for it. In Christo Xandopoulos' house, one of the corners of the kitchen was chosen for this purpose.

Rules of behaviour in churches. It is necessary to observe silence in the church, especially when there is a service. It is not possible to enter the sanctuary. Turn off mobile phones and don't talk on them in church. When visiting churches and monasteries, do not wear shorts, dresses or shirts off the shoulder. Women are advised to wear dresses rather than trousers, although light skirts specially designed for tourists can be found in the church. Women should wear a headscarf when entering the church and men should remove their headwear.

3. Statistical Analysis of Tourism Sustainability and Dynamics of its Development (Forecasting on the Example of Georgian Regions, Tbilisi – Batumi)

The information is mainly processed on the basis of data from the National Statistical Office of Georgia for 2019–2021 and the Department of Tourism of Adjara.

The statistics that have been reviewed cannot reflect the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The analysis of the results is mostly carried out under the "status quo" conditions, according to the scenario of what the results in the tourism sector would have been if there had been no pandemic.

The information processed to refine the calculation of the share of tourism in GDP in Figure 1 is 8.3%, which compares with the official information of Forbes, which states that "the share of tourism in Georgia's GDP is expected to grow to 10.5% in 2018 by 2028" (Forbs. ge). The data developed in accordance with the margin of error of 1.5% reflects a positive trend, which is encouraging for the development trend and future progress of the tourism sector in Georgia.

Figure 2 shows the visits made by non-resident visitors to the regions by quarter in 2014–2022. It was important for us to study not all regions, but to determine the overall indicator of tourist flow, including the dynamics of the development of the tourism potential of two regions (Tbilisi and Batumi).

As can be seen from the Figure, tourism in Georgia remains one of the fastest growing sectors, and its development in the next three to four years reflects a positive trend. According to the moving average, the main activity of tourist flows certainly falls on the 3rd quarter, and all three indicators are growing steadily. As for the tourism index of Adjara, it does not show a sharp increase, as the rest of the regions also maintain their positions with the development of tourism infrastructure.

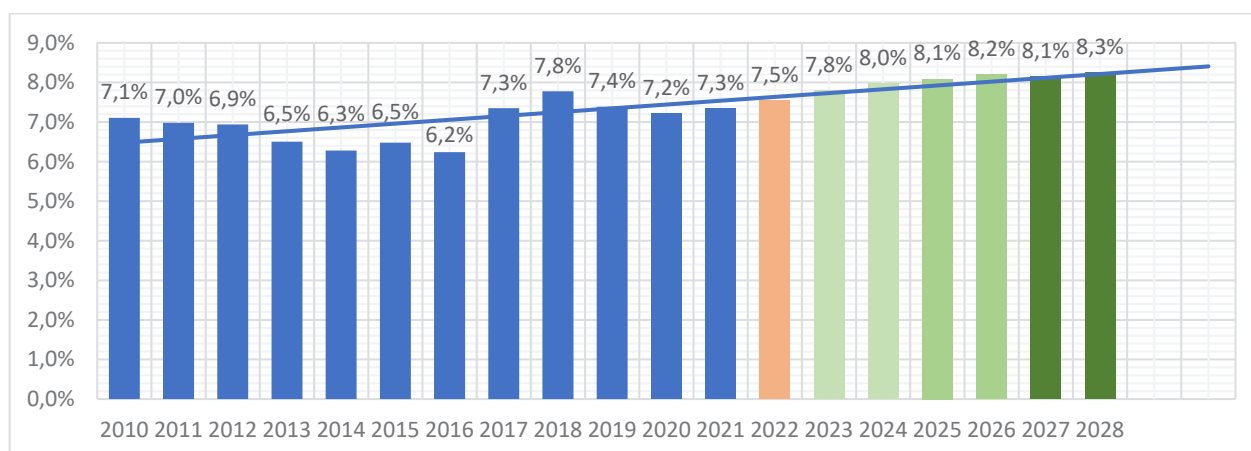


Figure 1. Tourism share in GDP (million GEL)

Source: National Statistic Office of Georgia (2022)

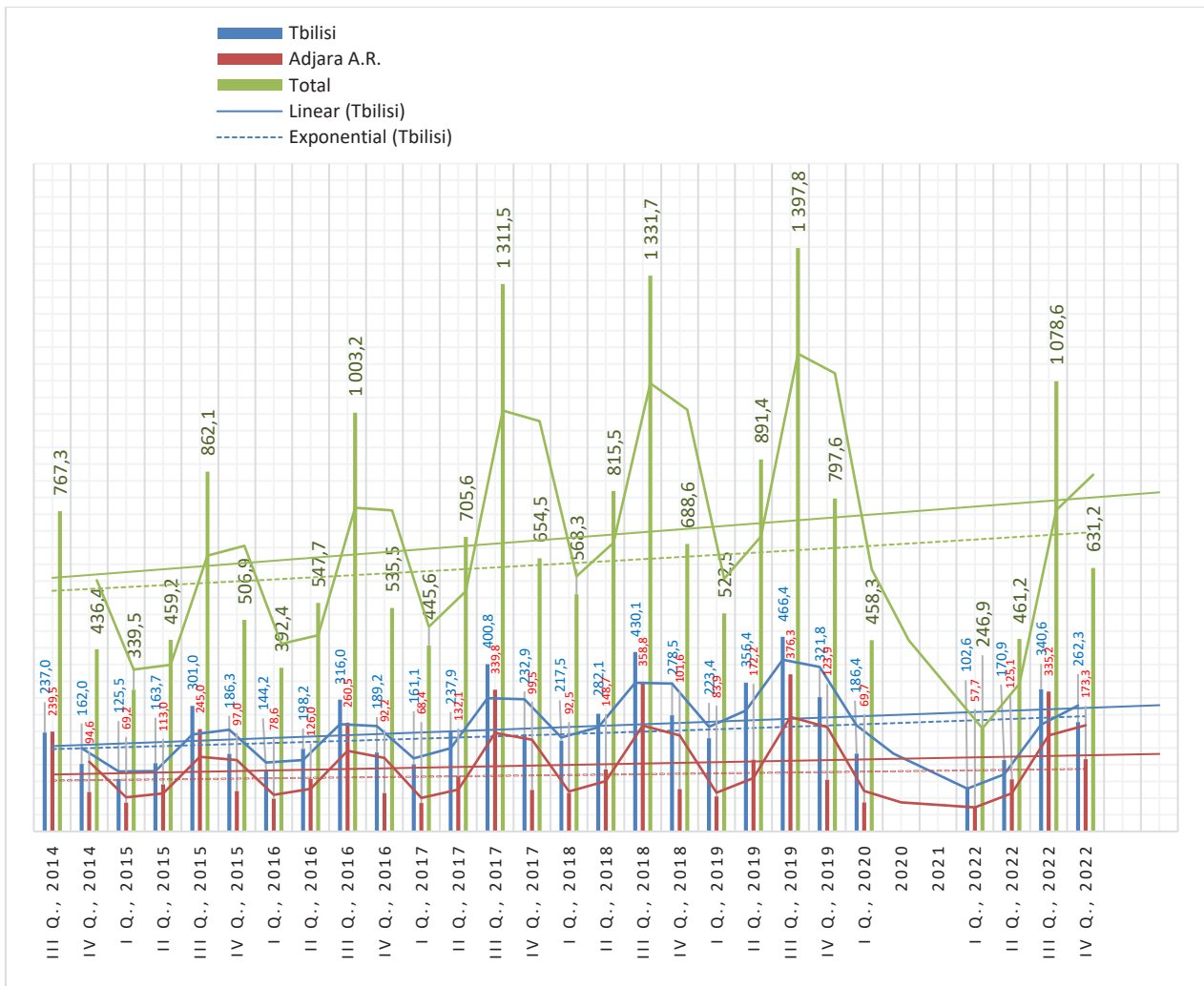


Figure 2. Breakdown of the average quarterly number of visits to Georgia by non-residents aged 15 and older by region of visit

Source: National Statistic Office of Georgia 2022

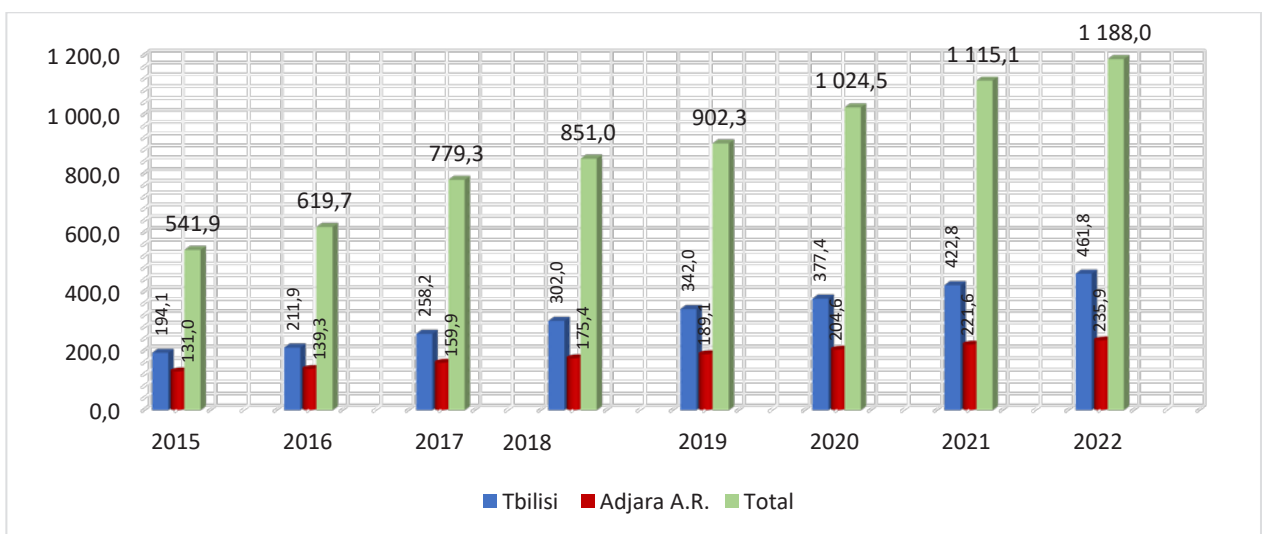


Figure 3. Breakdown of the annual number of visits to Georgia by non-residents aged 15 and older by region visited (thousand of people)

Source: National Statistic Office of Georgia 2022

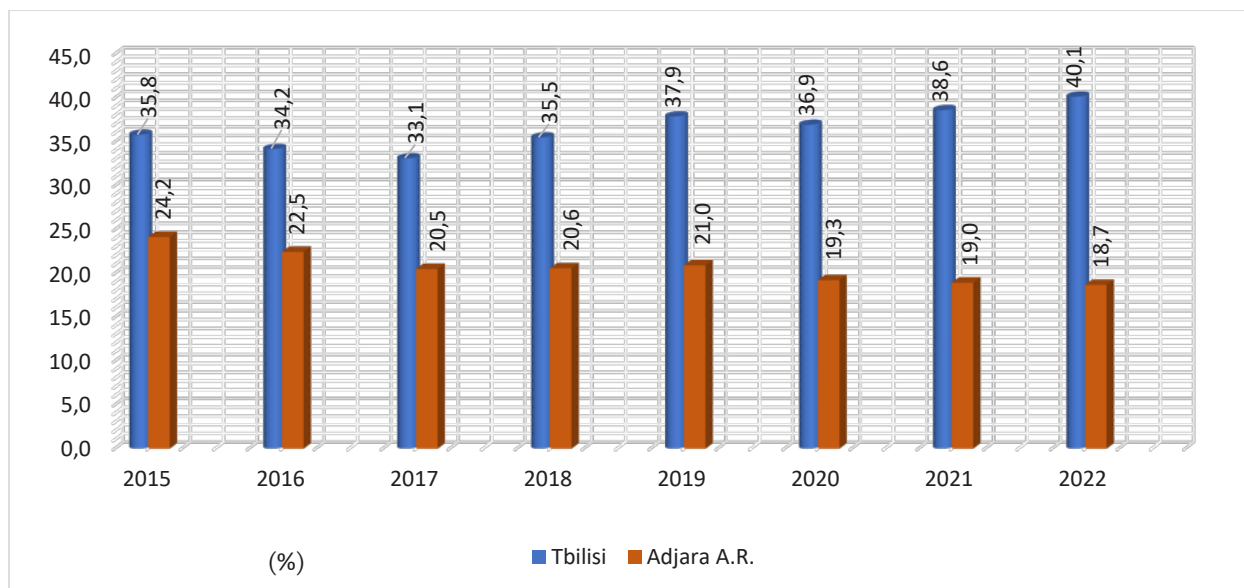


Figure 4. The distribution of the annual percentage number of visits made by non-resident visitors aged 15 and older in Georgia by visited regions (Adjara, Tbilisi)

Source: National Statistic Office of Georgia 2022

In this case, Figure 3 considers two regions – Tbilisi and Batumi. The dynamics show that the number of tourists has been growing since 2015, and this is not a fall, but an upward trend compared to any year.

As for Adjara, since 2015, the flow of tourists has been growing every day, although the data in the overall figure is decreasing and is represented by 19%.

This data does not mean that tourist flows to Adjara are declining, but given the growth of tourist infrastructure and facilities in other regions, these regions play a rather important role and occupy a corresponding share in the overall figure.

Figure 5 presents international traveller visits to Adjara in 2011–2022, looking at visits by international travellers and international visitors,

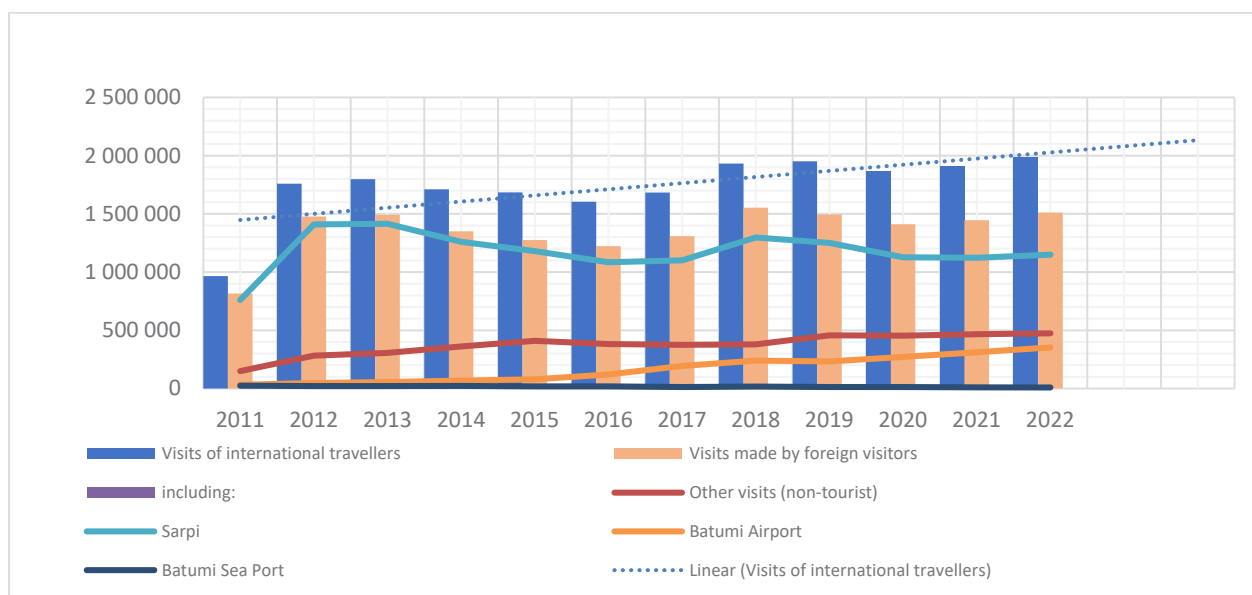


Figure 5. International travellers to Adjara in 2011–2022

Source: Government of Autonomous Republic Adjara Citizen’s Portal (2022)

including through Sarpi, Batumi Airport and Batumi Sea Port.

The Sarpi customs checkpoint is one of the main channels of visitor flows in the graph above, as from a commercial point of view, many people cross the border towards Turkey every day, and vice versa, visits to Georgia from Turkey and other European countries. In all three directions, there is an upward trend, indicating the development of tourism potential in the region.

4. Polyethnic Georgia and Pilgrimage Tourism

According to the main results of the 2014 general population census, Georgia is home to 86.8% Georgians, 6.3% Azerbaijanis, 4.5% Armenians and 2.4% representatives of other nationalities. 83.4% of them profess Christianity, 10.7% Muslim, 2.9% Gregorian and 3.0% other religions. By religion, the situation in the capital and regions is as follows: City of Tbilisi – Christians 92.4%, Muslims 1.5%, Gregorians 2.6%, representatives of other religions 3.5%; Autonomous Republic of Adjara – Christians 54.5%, Muslims 39.8%, representatives of other religions 5.7%; Guria – Christians 86.71%, Muslims 11.4%, representatives of other religions 1.9%; Imereti – Christians 98.8%; Kakheti – Christians 85.7%, Muslims 12.1%, representatives of other religions 2.2%; Mtskheta-Mtianeti – Christians 99.4%; Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti – Christians 99.2%; Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti – Christians 98.6%; Samtskhe-Javakheti – Orthodox 45.2%, Gregorians 40.0%, followers of other religions 14.8%; Kvemo Kartli – Orthodox 51.4%, Muslims 43.0% (National Statistics, 2022).

Several important aspects of material and spiritual culture are characteristic of the national minorities living in Georgia, and pilgrimage

tourism is interesting from a tourist point of view due to religious diversity. The main source of the atlas is literary, archival and museum data and visual materials collected during scientific expeditions.

5. Conclusions

An interesting method of fieldwork is video monitoring of ethno-cultural values. This method allows you to record such elements of traditional culture that are conventional, using the same technical means: livelihood (farming, viticulture, farming, beekeeping, folk crafts) and material culture (storage and farm buildings, clothing, inventory, samples of decorative crafts), social and family life, spiritual culture (public holidays, customs, arts and crafts, folklore, folk medicine). Several scientific expeditions on the Greeks of Pontus were conducted and video monitoring of ethno-cultural values was carried out (the Feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Dagva; the Church of St. George in Kvirik, the Church of Saints Constantine and Helen in Kvirik, Giorgoba in the Church of St. George in Kvirik, Mariamba visiting guests from Greece in Dagva; preparations for Easter in a Pontic Greek family; the rite of sheep sacrifice; furouni in a Pontic Greek family; funeral culture; traditional dishes; musical sketches).

In parallel with the video materials, it is necessary to work on written sources and use them competently in connection with the video materials.

Thus, based on the materials reviewed, we have identified the interests of the ethno-spiritual culture of a multiethnic society in terms of sustainable tourism development and economic prospects with the help of a video atlas, and created an innovative tourist product in the form of an ethno-tourism video atlas.

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