

## ECONOMY

# GEORGIAN SUPRA-TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO TOURISM SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

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## ABSTRACT

The traditional culture Georgian Supra (feasting) is considered to be the cornerstone of Georgian society. The National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia has given the Georgian tradition of feasting, known as a Supra, the status of non-material cultural heritage. Traditional Georgian Supra consists of four basic elements: gastronomy / cuisine, wine, toasts /toast-master, music (folklore). Supra - the feasting is dedicated to the specific guest arrival. Furthermore, it is a special event that is a one-off happening designed to meet specific needs at any given time/moment.

Supra in Georgia is a traditional event based tourist product attracting tourists as spectators and also as participants. Supra, as a community based event, has become a regional destination sustainable development tool which helps in fetching revenue for the destination and gives priority to community participation and poverty alleviation.

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**Introduction.** Developing tourism is a top government priority of Georgia. By 2025 the government expects Georgia to be well known as a premier, year-round, high quality tourism destination centered on its cultural and natural heritage, high class customer service, and tradition of hospitality.

In the light of the above mentioned priorities community tourism can hold a special share of tourist market in case the emphasis will be made on cultural heritage and traditions.

Georgian Supra accompanies all key events of Georgian life and stands at the heart of Georgia's famous hospitality following the footsteps of Jason and Argonauts. One feels a vital crossroad between Europe and Asia experiencing superb cuisine, numerous delicious wines, polyphonic songs, wild mountain dances and a whole world of hospitality.

### **Wine is a Basics of Georgian Supra.**

Wine is the most important component of Supra. Wine-growing has a long tradition in Georgia. Legends of Georgian wine emerge from the distant annals of history. There are over 500 original varieties of grape in Georgia, more than in any other country. The living culture of wine production extends into

virtually every Georgian family. For thousands of years grapes have been placed in large, earthenware vessels called “Qvevri”, buried in the ground and kept in wine vaults called “Marani”, these are then sealed and left for three to four months. This technique has a long tradition and is still in use today. This is how the tannin and vitamin-rich wine is produced. In 2013 Georgian traditional Qvevri wine-making technology was granted UNESCO's intangible cultural heritage status.

#### **Tamada –A conductor of a ritual submitted to the common rules.**

It is crucial that every supra has a toast-master, called a Tamada, who leads the toasts. At the beginning of the Supra a toast-master is appointed either by a host or by guests and almost in a few minutes he becomes a leader of the revelry. A toast-master should undoubtedly be an eloquent and intelligent person. He conducts the table according to the order set by the ancestors. First of all, he is to toast the hosts and wish them happiness, longevity, success and reproduction.

At the Georgian table a toast-master bridges the gap between past, present and the future. When drinking some toasts all men have to stand up and drink wine in silence. A toast can be proposed only by a toast-master and the rest are to develop the idea. Everybody tries to say something more original and emotional than the previous speaker. The whole process grows into a sort of oratory contest, the lessons of love and humanism.

A toast-master arranges breaks from time to time. The thing is that there are special toasts which according to the ritual should be accompanied by a song or a verse. The Georgian folk dances are rather common for the Georgian Supra. The toast-master has to propose a toast to every person at the Georgian table and so have the others. Every speaker tries to distinguish the most interesting and original features of a person toasted.

Love, life, friendship and other abstract notions are subjects of eloquent toasts at the Georgian Supra. Every speaker tries to express his personal understanding of these notions. When a person is toasting, the rest are listening to him with great attention and respect.

At the end a toast-master proposes a toast to the Saints patronizing the Georgian people. Finally, one of the men proposes a toast to a toast-master and thanks him on behalf of all guests.

#### **An abundance of delicious food, wine and folklore.**

As a rule the table is full of dishes as the Georgian cuisine is diverse and delicious. Born of a landscape rich in minerals washed down from snow-capped mountains vegetables, fruits, meats, cheeses have made a very individual culture of food. Numerous aromatic wild herbs give dishes their special and unique aroma.

The most interesting for visitors is the charm of Georgian traditional music is its polyphony – an enchanting combination of archaic and modern harmony. In 2001 UNESCO acknowledged Georgian traditional music as a masterpiece of world's intangible cultural heritage. Georgian dance, like its polyphonic songs, remains a major cultural export.

Any tour in Georgia involves traditional wine degustation in Marani (wine cellar), accompanied by Georgian traditional supra with Tamada.

Therefore, Supra in Georgia is a traditional community based event attracting visitors as spectators and also as participants.

#### **Literature review and Conceptual analysis.**

Culture consists of values, attitudes, habits and customs, acquired by learning which starts with the earliest experiences of childhood, much of which is not deliberately taught by anyone and which so thoroughly internalized that it is unconscious but ‘goes deep’[6].

Food and food habits as a basic part of culture serve as a focus of emotional association, a channel of love, discrimination and disapproval and usually have symbolic references.

The sharing of food symbolizes a high degree of social intimacy and acceptance.

In many cultures food has a social or ceremonial role. Certain foods are highly prized; others are reserved for special holidays or religious feasts; still others are a mark of social position [14].

Sustainable tourism can be defined as “Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities” [22].

Some scholars [9]; [18] believe that the development of tourism must provide economic benefits to all partners/stakeholders, provided they do not adversely affect resources available for future generations.

It has long been recognized that it is incumbent on those responsible for the planning of tourism to seek to optimize the well-being of local residents whilst minimizing the costs of tourism development.[15].

Undoubtedly, a tourism activity, just like a business today, also runs for its ultimate objective-sustainability. It gives greater priority to community participation and poverty alleviation [11]. However, an excellent tourism performance should not be merely attributed to the non-monetary benefits (e.g., *visitors' repurchase behavior/intention*) or the momentary benefits (e.g., *profitability/return of investment*) without concerning with environmental/socio-cultural impacts surrounding [17].

Nature, history, culture, agriculture and cuisine, landscapes and geology, hotels and restaurants all are represented at the same table, along with tour operators, government agencies, retail suppliers, and civic organizations. All initially oversee the mapping project [17].

It is not to only assess a visitor centre's sustainability by its popularity with visitors. More importantly, it is also more important to consider the needs of managers, operators, and local and cultural communities [5].

Tourism product is the prime reason for tourist to choose a destination. Tourism product helps in fetching revenue for the destination. So, it should be properly marketed and preserved.

Event marketing process [20] begins with development/designing the event product, those products which can be sold in tourism market. It can be anything: an action, event or experience in some tourist activities which utilizes the natural and cultural resources of the country and which provides satisfaction during the course of visit of the particular tourist. Event Marketing process includes:

- Design/ develop the event product (Cultural traditional event)
- Identify customers (segmentation);

Almost every tour to Georgia (e.g. Gastronomy, Wine, Event) comprises Supra (hotels, wine cellars etc.)

- Plan to meet audience's needs and wants with food, wine, folklore/traditions.
- Analyze consumers decision-making process (information is available to consumers)

Supra can be defined as a local community based event which consists of four authentic cultural elements: gastronomy (food & wine), folklore and appointed Toast Master (conductor of the event), specially designed for visitors who can be not only spectators but also participants of the event.

**Methodology.** The current study is based on a research project which investigated attitudes to a specific form of tourism- Supra event (community based) tourism.

Personal interviews have been conducted with 30 foreign visitors alongside with short questionnaires distributed to 45 small and medium hotels in three different regions of Georgia.

On the other hand in the above regions local communities have been interviewed.

In accordance with research project plan two groups of analysts have been approved. The first group was involved in designing, assistance and analyzing the questionnaires and the second one – on preparation and analyzing the interviews.

The study reveals that [1] mastering event design becomes an art form and it becomes an important factor for regional tourism sustainable development.

A simple policy recipe for ensuring a sustainable form of tourism development can be followed by remembering six steps: • Promote sustainable development • Create products for specific visitor market segments • Gain and maintain competitiveness • Enhance visitor experience • Preserve local resources • Improve residents' quality of life [17].

**Results.** Data analyzed revealed that in recent years for foreign visitors Supra (feasting) has become an increasingly popular social trend.

The results show that welcoming /farewell parties with Supra feasting are carried out in most hotels of the country oriented on group arrivals.

Tourists prefer eating out in order to taste national food, though they prefer feel traditional atmosphere of the region they chose by taking participating in Supra feasting event.

Unique events are designed in various regions of Georgia getting together authentic food, wine and folklore of local heritage.

The research has revealed that the events designed in various regions of Georgia are quite different, community based events specially designed for tourists. In most cases Supra is associated to welcoming or farewell parties and are carried out without sequence order or foreign language interpreter, accordingly, the tourist product does not have a competed design and it is understood as a cultural traditional event.

**Conclusions.** Traditions and culture forms the identification of a particular society. The culture defines the attributes of a particular society at a particular time and place. There are many ways to establish a brand as well as ways to continually reinforce the country's image or its products to consumers. The above mentioned product cross branding is now in place and moving to the front. The concept of designed product/event can be linked together with country to cross promote its image with a community based event – Supra, as a regional destination sustainable development tool. On one hand it helps in fetching revenue for the destination [20] and on the other one it gives greater priority to community participation and poverty alleviation [11 p.1, 15].

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