

## **TOURISM AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES USAGE PERSPECTIVES THROUGH ACCORDING TO MOUNTAINOUS ADJARIA`S EXAMPLE**

**Merab Putkaradze<sup>1</sup>, Tomasz Michalski<sup>2</sup> and George Abuselidze<sup>3</sup>**

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### ***Abstract***

*Application of resources existing in mountainous regions and its involvement in business turnover is one of the urgent issues of modern reality. The problem was more shaped since the world faced the serious challenges during of COVID-19 pandemic period. One of the densely populated mountainous regions of Adjara in Georgia is no exception, which had a quite intense development in tourism business before the pandemic. The tourism development dynamics in mountainous Adjara before the pandemic and after the pandemic is studied and there are shaped a serious problems existing in tourism development as a result of pandemic. The study used social and case studies, balanced theory, statistical, comparative, space-time analysis methods and other methods. The region`s tourism and recreational resources potential is evaluated, some particular type of originalities of tourism developed on its basis and there are set its further development perspectives through post-pandemic period. By foreseeing the environmental sustainability, it is grounded an increase of some particular type of tourism and new touristic routes` development ways. Therefore, the regional economic development trends are set on the basis of tourism development.*

**Keywords:** Resource; Potential; Recreation; Resort; Tourist; Economic development.  
**JEL Codes:** L83, O18, Z32

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### **Introduction**

The problems caused by COVID-19 pandemics have covered all the world`s business fields, but especially tourism has faced the special challenges. The condition turned more complex in Georgia, especially in mountainous regions, where the newly established tourism business was found in front of destruction. A numerous researches were

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<sup>1</sup> Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Doctor of Geography, Professor;  
[merab.putkaradze@bsu.edu.ge](mailto:merab.putkaradze@bsu.edu.ge), ORCID ID: 0000-0003-3644-4626

<sup>2</sup> University of Gdansk, Professor; [tomasz.michalski@ug.edu.pl](mailto:tomasz.michalski@ug.edu.pl), ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7916-9620

<sup>3</sup> Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Doctor of Economics, Professor;  
E-mail: [george.abuselidze@bsu.edu.ge](mailto:george.abuselidze@bsu.edu.ge), ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5834-1233

dedicated to solve the problems caused by world-scale pandemic, including those in line with tourism, which needs a complex study and setting a way to solve an existing issue via foreseeing the world experience. The main aim of the study is to reveal the current problems existing in the tourism development in mountainous Adjara and setting the tourism's further development perspectives on the tourism and recreational resources' base at post-pandemic period. The following tasks should be resolved to reach the study aim:

- Evaluate the tourism and recreational resources' potential of mountainous Adjara and its place in tourism business development;
- Analyze the tourism development dynamics of mountainous Adjara and originalities of problems in field development occurred during the pandemic period;
- Establish the tourism types, its geography, potential of tourism business and its further development originalities;
- Evaluate the application level of existing tourism and recreational resources' potential and set its further usage perspectives by foreseeing an environmental sustainability;

The study object is Georgia's one of mountainous regions located in Autonomous Republic of Adjara (in Keda, Shuakhevi and Khulo municipalities) the area of which is 1750 km<sup>2</sup>, where 58,1 thousand population was observed in 2020.

The scales of the tourism development (as one of the dynamic field of world business) play quite big part in social and economic development of stagnant regions (Huber et al., 2005; Messerli, 2012; Wehrli, 2014; Koulov & Zhelezov, 2016; Abuselidze & Devadze, 2021), but because of COVID-19 pandemic its development has revealed a serious problems and some particular country has faced a significant challenges (Abuselidze & Mamaladze, 2020; Abuselidze & Slobodanyk, 2021; Galvani et al., 2020; Kizielewicz, 2020; Mulder, 2020; Diakonidze, 2021; Stępień et al., 2021). Accordingly, in order to solve the problem there should be foreseen the approved theoretical researches of tourism development from one side (Bell & Morse, 2004; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Dodds, 2007; Dwyer & Kim, 2003; Wahab & Pigram, 1998) and new approaches to reach the desirable outcome in line with field's marketing, management, planning and development on the other side and on the background of modern challenges (Galvani et al., 2020; Kizielewicz, 2020; Mulder, 2020). The researches held in Georgia within the mentioned scope, foresee the field's development potential and the ways to overcome an existing issues (Gugushvili et al, 2017; Diakonidze, 2019; 2021; Putkaradze & Abuselidze, 2019; Salukvadze et al, 2019). We suppose that by identification and analyzing of problems revealed in the tourism development at mountainous Adjara during the COVID-19 pandemic period and with new approaches, the tourism's sustainable development perspectives of post-pandemic period will be set.

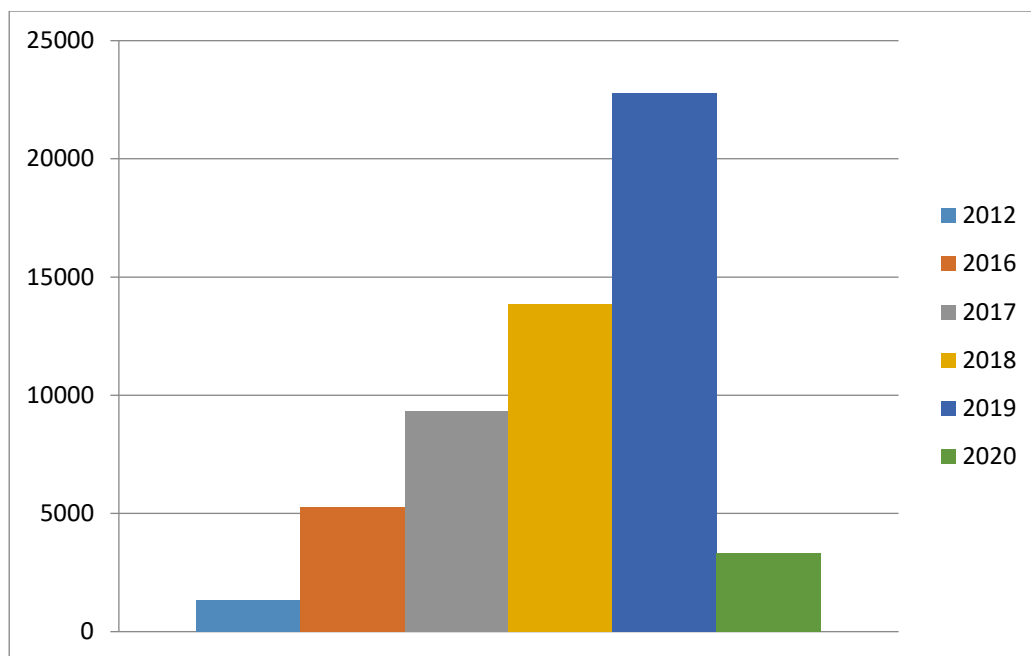
## **Research Methodology**

The problems in tourism field's development revealed as a result of COVID-19 pandemic are especially sharp in mountainous regions, the settlement of which needs new approaches and offering a scientifically grounded outcomes for fulfilment of local municipality programs. Coming out of this, together with qualitative and quantitative methods in line with tourism's sustainable development in mountainous Adjara during of post-pandemic period - more and more popular becomes social researches and case studies. For analytical study, it is important to use the observation, in-depth interview and data modelling, gradation testing, multidimensional modeling, Geoinformation systems and computer simulation methods (Lu & Nepal, 2009). By application of study area's tourism and recreational resources' evaluation method and tourists' flow potential methods (Birjakhov, 2008; Metrevel, 2008) and by foreseeing the rational natural management principles, the tourism's further development perspectives were established. According the balanced theory method (Cooper, 2008), the business development of study area is discussed not according the relation to particular field, but according the all fields' relations between each other as a result of that the existing fields' development perspectives were established. By using the theory of coordination failure (Cooper, 2008), the particular fields' development perspectives were found out and social-economic development ways of study region were set with tourism business development priorities. Besides, statistical, comparative, space-time analysis and other methods were used during the study.

## **Results and Discussion**

During of recent years, tourism is been rapidly developed in mountainous Adjara's business structure, which is based on various tourism and recreation resources and there is a big perspectives for its further usage. As it is known, COVID-19 pandemic has created a world-scale serious problem in many of business fields, especially for tourism. Mountainous Adjara is not an exception in this scope, where the pandemic has created a serious issue for tourism business development. In order to evaluate the existing condition and to define its further perspectives, it is necessary to establish quantitative and qualitative properties of tourism development in the region. Nowadays 3 resorts (Gomarduli, Beshumi and Goderdzi) and some tourism objects (tourist houses) are active in mountainous Adjara. Before the pandemic, a number of tourists in the region were increasing with rapid temp (see the figure 1 below).

Figure no. 1 Tourists` dynamics in mountainous Adjara (2012-2020 years)



Source: Compiled on the basis of the results of the Authors' research and data from the statistical office of Georgia

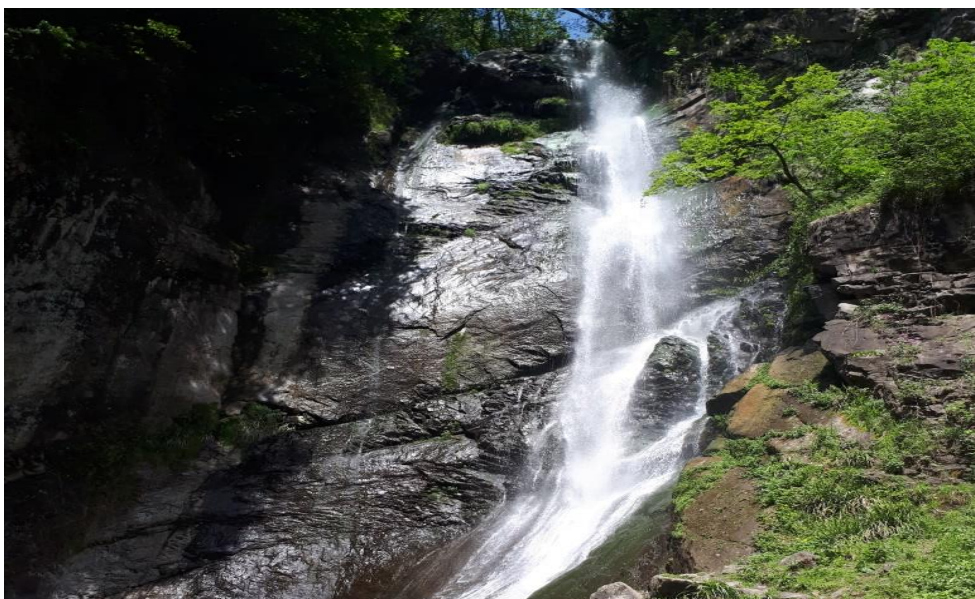
The given data (see figure 1) makes obvious that a number of tourists in mountainous Adjara was 17-times (from 1339 up to 22780) increased in 2012-2019 years, whilst the mentioned field`s increase indicator for the country in average is 5-7%. As of 2020, during the pandemic period - the number of tourists were decreased to 3340, which has forced the field`s development to face a serious challenge. It is generally known that tourism`s development temp is mostly defined by tourism and recreational potential and with tourism industry`s development properties. In case of usage of full potential of all 3 resorts in mountainous Adjara (Gomarduli, Beshumi and Goderdzi), the number of tourists might be up to 80 thousand, and field`s weighed share in the regional economy might be increased from currently existing 3% to 15% (Putkaradze & Abuselidze, 2019).

Tourism business has faced the hardest problem during the COVID-19 pandemic period. Many of the companies and sole proprietor had serious financial problems in improving of the works commenced regarding the tourism service for the increasing tourism industry and the field development is actually endangered. Coming out of this, the ways to solve existing problems lays in the right application of tourism and recreational resources existing in the region itself.

Mountainous Adjara is known for its various tourism and recreation resources, with its beautiful natural landscapes, fresh air, historical and cultural sightseeing, local traditions

and cuisine, resources for development of mountainous climatological, mountain ski, extreme tourism and other. There should be noted that study area is quite close from city Batumi (20-115 km away), where annually over 370 thousand tourists arrive. The most of Batumi tourists visits the sights of mountainous Adjara, but they are not counted as the tourists of mountainous Adjara. The region has a huge potential to increase its tourism potential on the basis of arranging 1-2 day tours for the mentioned tourist. Actually, Batumi`s sea tourists should be taken into the mountainous Adjara during the period, while there is no good weather (climate conditions) for sea tourism. For this purpose, in order to develop the tourism business on the study area, the tourism and recreational resources of Makhuntseti waterfall (20-30 km away), “Adjarian Wine House” and Riv. Adjaristskali should be applied.

*Picture no. 1 Makhuntseti waterfall*



*Source: Compiled by the authors*

Makhuntseti waterfall is situated in Keda municipality, 30km away from Batumi city. The main quality of mentioned tourism and recreational resource is its beauty (see the picture 1), where the mentioned area has a convenient thermal condition during the big heat. Besides, the originality of landscape and the plants` green cover creates exotic landscape, which attracts the tourists. The mentioned object during the summer season, in average is visited by more than 130 thousand foreigner tourists. Adjacent to the waterfall (250 m) extreme tourism of rafting is active since 2015, gradually establishing as one of

the active tourism products of Riv. Adjaristskali base. In 2018, 8070 tourists have used rafting service and in 2019 - 14700 tourists. Actually, existing resources give the opportunity for extreme tourism's further development. Not less tourism attraction perspectives possess "Adjarian Wine House", which is one of the types of ecotourism - a wine tourism. "Adjarian Wine House" is located 20 km away from Batumi and 10km away from Makhuntseti waterfall, near to Batumi-Akhhaltsikhe international highway. Because of its convenient location, being near to Makhuntseti waterfall, the average of its visitors is about 45 thousand. Actually, there is a huge perspective for forming as one summer resort in Makhuntseti area on the basis of three tourism and recreational resources (Adjarian Wine House, Makhuntseti waterfall and Riv. Adjaristskali), that should be linked with sea tourism, on the basis of which the tourists will be given with opportunity to acquire a various tourism product. The mentioned tour should be added with adventure and hiking, also cycling at the Adjaria-Guria northern slopes, that is under the establishment process.

Goderdzi mountain ski resort has the big potential for increase the tourist flow in mountainous Adjaria. The exploitation of resort was commenced at 2012 and during of short period of time it has turned into dynamically increasing tourist object, the amount of which's visitors before the pandemic was increased in average. In particular - 4850 tourists in 2012 and 12790 tourists in 2019. The resort has all the conditions for its further development. The basic properties of the resort are as follows: 1. comfortable geographical location - is situated along the Batumi-Akhhaltsikhe international highway, 105 km away from Batumi city, whilst the country's main mountain ski resort - Gudauri is located 370km away distance; 2. It has a special resource for development of mountain ski tourism. In particular, nominal snow cover, best characteristics of slope inclinations and extensions, comfort thermal conditions and open horizon (from where the landscapes of mountainous Adjaria are seen); 3. The resort has a huge perspective to attract international tourists because of Batumi city, where during of New Year period lots of visitors arrive and during of that period many of them visit the resort. 4. Thanks to resort's geographical location, the number of internal tourists annually increases. The given data makes obvious that newly formed resort has a big perspectives. Coming out of this, the enhance of resort's functionality and increase of international tourists is mostly depended on tourism industry's further development, also on performance of proper marketing and management.

Quite good tourism and recreational potential has Gomarduli mountain ski resort, which is situated 75km away from Batumi city. According to our evaluation, in case of Gomarduli resort's full tourism service, its potential is determined by 12 thousand tourists (Putkaradze & Abuselidze, 2019). During of recent years, we have a serious defects in the mentioned resort's management, which became more complicated during the pandemic period, thus seriously endangering of its existence. Resort's further operation and application of its resource potential should be performed on the basis of internal tourists'

attraction, in particular on account of days off of Batumi population. For this purpose, firstly there should be established 1-2 day tours, where all the tourism production services will be prescribed.

The study makes obvious that by foreseeing the resources existing among the tourism development priorities, the big perspectives possess the mountain ski tourism, which will promote the employment of seasonally released labor resources during the winter period in the region with scarce land resources, thus it will play a simulative part for increase the mountain region`s social and economic growth.

The main charm of another regional mountain ski resort Beshumi`s tourism and recreational resource is that it is located 3 km away from Batumi-Akhaltzikhe international highway. Thus it has an easy accessibility by transport not only for international but for internal tourists as well. Besides, the resort is located at 1920-198 altitude from the sea level and it has best thermal conditions during the summer time. The ionized and fresh air of local pine forest, beautiful landscapes with open horizon and other properties typical to it make the best condition to rest (see pic. 2). Before the pandemic, an average amount of tourists at the resort was 6700-7200 recreants, whilst tourists` receipt potential is evaluated by 40 thousand tourists (Putkaradze & Abuselidze, 2019). Coming out of tourism and recreational potential, the number of tourists in case of industry`s development will be further increased. Accordingly, the tourism industry should be created at modern standards level. Nowadays, just one hotel and up to 480 hostel houses are active on the resort. Most of resort`s visitors consist of population from Adjarian sea coast and the number of international tourists are minimal. Coming out of resort`s geographical location and natural potential, its development tendencies should be directed to international tourists. For this purpose, the tourists visiting the Adjarian sea coast should be interested to visit the mountainous landscapes and tourism package should cover 2-3 day tours in mountainous Adjaria together with its sea coast as well. This will use the region`s climate resources at its maximum. In particular, in case of bad weather for sea tourism, the tourist should be able to visit the mountainous Adjaria by considering the fact that many times, when in Adjarian sea coast rains - mountainous Adjaria has a sunny weather without precipitation. Besides, by visiting Beshumi resort, the tourist will be able to visit also another wonders of nature situated adjacent to it - "Alpine garden" and the green lake, it will be able to taste ecologically pure, delicious dishes made of local milk products (Matsoni, Cream, Adjarian cheese, Borano, etc.), collect mushrooms and wild fruit (strawberry, blackberry, blueberry), walk through fresh and ionized air of pine forest and other. We consider that mentioned tourism production will be acceptable for the tourists, those who are interested in non-urbanized environment. Actually, a different tourism product acquired by connecting the sea and mountainous resorts might become as one of the priority trends of tourism. For this purpose, first of all the special place in tourism industry should be taken by information



service. In particular, the mentioned tour and area should be prescribed in details in the World Travel Guide. Besides, the above mentioned tour`s placement objects should be activated in world global information systems and tourism booking automatized systems (Amadeus, Sabre, Booking, etc.).

*Picture no. 2 Beshumi resort*



*Source: Compiled by the authors*

One of the priority trends of tourism development in mountainous Adjara is sustainable tourism, in particular - the village tourism a.k.a. the tourism at village (Putkaradze & Abuselidze, 2019). The region has various tourism and recreational resources for the tourism at village, the following should be noted among them: exotic natural landscapes (mountains, green cover, pure and cold springs, mineral springs, waterfalls and other), historical monuments and cultural heritages, delicious dishes made of ecologically pure agricultural products, folk and ethnographical places, introduction with local population`s activities (knitting, weaving, spinning, making the cradle, making the godori (cylindrical basket), making musical instruments, chopping the tobacco, etc.), visiting the picnic and camping places, fishing on mountain trout, tasting the local wine and other. Currently, the tourism at village is marked in all the region`s municipalities. The following tours should be noted among them: in Keda municipality - Batumi-Merisi,



Batumi-Gobroneti, Batumi - Adjaraian Wine House and in Shuakhevi municipality - Batumi-Nigazeuli.

One of tourism trends in mountainous Adjara is wine tourism, which is based on “Adjarian Wine House”, ancient winepresses cut in stone and family wine cellars in Keda municipality. It should be noted that in mountainous Adjara there are some local grape species, the best quality wine is being produced out of which. White and pink “Chkhaveri” are recognized amongst them and they constitute the main degustation drink of “Adjarian Wine House”. Besides, here one is possible to taste different types of wines made of local grape species. Before pandemic, “Adjarian Wine House” was visited by local and foreign tourists as well. Most of local visitors are newly married couples, which visit the place at their wedding day and take some wedding photos. It should be noted that tourism and recreational resources existing for wine tourism development are not fully involved in tourism industry. Under the existing resources` reasonable usage terms, we can turn the visitors involved in wine tourism into regional tourists. In this scope the most beneficial is establishment of Makhuntseti resort perspectives and priorities as we have mentioned above.

Number of international tourists involved in ecotourism was up to 750, which fell to 70 in 2020, during the pandemic. In post-pandemic period, actually there is various tourism and recreational resources to enhance tourism in ecotourism direction and its further application perspectives should be based on maintenance of rational natural management principles, in a manner that economic result should be achieved, at the same time natural complexes and local population interests should be observed. For these purposes, the following events should be performed: 1. Work out eco-tours by foreseeing the environmental sustainability and main principles of rational natural management; 2. In order to arrange new eco-tours, it is necessary to establish an international standard level tourism industry; 3. The priorities of some trends of tourism at village (visit and study the folk craft methods, taste ecologically pure dishes - gourmand or food tourism) should be shaped on the basis of existing resources, where the focus should be made on international tourists` attraction; 4. Attraction of eco-tourists should be mainly done on the basis of Adjarian sea coast tourists, according to that and coming out of the weather condition, the time should be rationally used and thus different tourism production might be acquired; 5. The development of ecotourism should be based on proper marketing and management research on the basis of that the economic activity`s usefulness and environmental protection events should be grounded in business plans of new tours.

In order to determine the tourism development perspectives in mountainous Adjara, it is necessary to evaluate the potential of study area`s tourism and recreational resources, which implies the unity of natural and social-economic Geosystems, which might be used for tourism activity (Birzhakov, 2008; Metrevel, 2008; Ukleba, 2009). According the

research it is confirmed that mountainous Adjara is known for its various tourism and recreational resources, which sets the tourism's further development perspectives. Besides, the study conducted by us before pandemic makes obvious that by full usage of resources existed on 3 resort base at this time and creation of tourism infrastructure in the region, the number of tourists might be increased up to 80 thousand tourists (Putkaradze & Abuselidze, 2019). The opportunity of tourists' increase is given by fact, that notwithstanding the mountain region's lesser environmental sustainability, tourists' ecological flow potential, some tourism object is able to handle without serious damages, negative impact and rise of social-economic issues in population (Birjshakov, 2008; Metrevel, 2008) does not exceed the maximum norm, or there are much less tourists comparing to existing ecological flow potential. In order to issue's complex study, the sociological research was arranged, in particular - by conducting one of the tourists ecological flow ability methods - "Local social flow ability potential" (Birjshakov, 2008) - we found out local population's attitude in line with sustainable tourism development. In particular, according to 247 persons (from local population) questioning whether they wished to increase a number of tourists or not - the positive answer was 239 and negative - 8. Besides, the population has a good attitude towards the foreign tourists that sets the perspectives for international tourism's development.

Balancing theory method might be used for mountainous Adjara's tourism and recreational potential's further usage and determination of region's post-pandemic economy (Cooper, 2008). According the mentioned theory and as a result of research conducted by us (Putkaradze & Abuselidze, 2019; Putkaradze & Gorgiladze, 2016), there was found out, that for development of the leading business field - agriculture, there are no further perspectives on the background of scarce land resources and worsened ecological condition. Besides, other business fields (hydropower engineering, food industry) are separately developed from each other and they are unable to significantly increase the economy. Coming out of this, the region's business development has no big perspectives by applying the balancing theory. By foreseeing the fact that mountainous Adjara has a big opportunities for tourism development, by theory of coordination failure (Cooper, 2008) there were analyzed some particular business fields of the region, on the basis of that and by above mentioned research there was determined, that tourism business should be granted with priority trends in regional economy's further development. Therefore, by realization of ways set for development of some particular types of tourism, it will be possible to reach the sustainable development of mountain regions' social and economic fields.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The analysis of tourism and recreational resources of mountainous Adjara gives the possibility to tourism industry to play the special part for region`s economic development during the post-pandemic period. Tourism and recreational resources` evaluation analysis (necessary for development of tourism`s particular fields) gives the possibility to operate summer and winter resorts as well during the whole year period. By foreseeing the results acquired out of resource usage perspectives in this scope of view, would highly encourage region`s social-economic development. Besides, tourism industry formation should be promoted by state via different types of marketing, management, financial and municipal projects.

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