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Participatory policy review: "Supportive Tourism" concept for hand-in-hand rural and mountain development

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ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to provide an exhaustive review of governmental policy documents for rural and mountain development in Georgia in the context of the local tourism supply chain (LTSC). Mainly, we examine to what extent policy-makers recognize the importance of the interconnectedness between tourism and other economic sectors. The study employs a systematic literature review and participatory workshops with local stakeholders to avoid observing the issue from a single angle. The analysis of strategic documents shows that tourism is considered vital for mountain and rural settlements' economic welfare, in fact, the narrow sense of its capabilities hinder the full effect on allied economic sectors. More precisely, strategies mostly consider tourism's impact on [mountain, rural] communities in terms of its direct consequences such as new constructions in accommodation and catering units, ski trails, etc. This study provides recommendations, which could facilitate improvements in the integration of farming and non-farming activities into the tourism sector. Based on the research, acknowledging the increasing dependency on such a sensitive economic branch as tourism, we suggest the new tourism advancement concept under the title of "supportive tourism". The paper suggests understanding and utilizing tourism as (i) starting point for other local economic actors; (ii) motto to increase demand for local services and products; (iii) supportive platform for the local economy to enter into new markets. Ultimately, supportive tourism could result in weakening dependence of local economic activities on the local tourism supply chain.

Keywords: Supportive tourism, Participatory policy review, Local tourism supply chain, Mountain development, Rural Development, Georgia.

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Introduction

Recent decades have marked mountain and rural tourism as an essential piece of the worldwide tourism economy pie, introducing immense opportunities to highland and peripheral communities [1]. Tourism, due to its multifaceted nature, includes a wide range of economic connections under its umbrella. Such linkages are characterized by tourism's direct (e.g., catering, accommodation, transport) and indirect (e.g., agriculture, manufacturing) effects on other economic sectors. Diversified economic ties position tourism among the economic fields having the distinctive feature of the multiplier effect on local economic areas [2].

Cardinal transformations of the local economy always accompany tourism's introduction into mountain and rural settlements, mainly in the rapid establishment of the previously poorly developed service sector [3]. According to Heng and Low [4],

healthy tourism functioning needs the accompanying development of auxiliary services and manufactures. Thus, a broad array of local supplementary activities can be integrated into the local tourism supply chain (LTSC). As a result, a supportable interrelationship between tourism and the host economy will be a prerequisite for effective mountain and rural development. In particular, sustainable development of tourism throughout the process should ensure the expansion of economic fields that were previously strong, on the one hand, and give the impetus to less-developed branches to move forward, on the other hand [5-7].

A realistic assessment of tourism's benefits and taking the right measures targeted toward local contexts and peculiarities plays a vital role in receiving the anticipated long-term benefits of tourism development. According to the UNWTO [8], tourism in mountain areas should be reinvented in the policy strategies through repositioning the competitive advantages of particular destinations. More precisely, the global campaign should be directed toward encouraging local, traditional, authentic, and innovative production rather than promoting a mass-tourism market with similar product chains in every destination.

Mountainous areas, with their extreme complexity, require more integrated economic development approaches than the lowlands. As suggested by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the International Partnership for Sustainable Development in Mountain Regions [9], it is better to build the mountain economies upon the strengths of their assets, such as traditional knowledge and niche production. Similarly, a Strategic Research Agenda on Mountains for Europe's Future [10] argues that a shift is necessary in the overall understanding of mountains and their capacities: they are unique places with special potential solutions for various pressing challenges, including sustainable mountain tourism. Therefore, as researchers suggest, mountain tourism should be developed based on the local, high-value, competitive products, and services [11,12]. Apparently, such an approach will better ensure the sustainability of tourism development, the diversification of the regional economy, and, importantly, the maintenance of domestic, rooted economic activities.

Based on the assumptions of the UNWTO and the UNDP [13], the power of tourism is crucial for achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Developing tourism with strong linkages to allied economic activities is among the pillars of the Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, tourism policymakers should act together with governmental and non-governmental institutes and other relevant stakeholders to harness tourism's multiplier effect through integrated policies. In particular, they must work together to take advantage of tourism's economic interlinkages with, and impacts on, other sectors and activities.

The Association Agreement between the European Union and Georgia 2014–2020 also addresses tourism: Article 9 indicates Georgia's development path in relation to tourism progress. The Georgian government is responsible for increasing tourism's potential and the number of international visitors, as tourism is among the leading sectors of the economy, creating several direct and indirect benefits for host communities. The same article in the Association Agreement states [14] that Georgia should maintain "partnership between public, private, and community interests in the field of tourism, to strengthen the development of competitive and sustainable tourism industry as a generator of economic growth and empowerment, employment, and international exchange."

There is currently high international emphasis on developing tourism with strong linkages to allied economic activities. However, recent research projects carried out in mountainous Georgia have revealed weak interrelations between tourism and other economic sectors. According to Gugushvili et al. [15], the Greater Caucasus experiences weak and non-resilient economic linkages between tourism and agriculture. This significantly hinders the possible benefits and hand-in-hand progress for the local community. It also reduces the stability and sustainability of local tourist markets. Khelashvili [16] observed the lowest emphasis on the consumption of local products. Furthermore, his findings revealed the low multiplier effect from tourism-generated income and high import dependency. Papava [17], in his policy paper, also highlights that only up to 20% of Georgia's consumer basket is produced within the country, whereas the remaining 80% is imported. Such a character of tourism—not consuming local products—contributes instead to the economies of the exporting countries and leads to the leakage of tourism's economic benefits.

Several research projects have apparently been conducted on linkages between tourism and other economic activities. However, few, if any, attempts were made to translate existing scientific evidence into practical solutions and integrate them into the

strategic documents. Based on this gap, the following questions were raised and are answered in this paper: (i) do the strategic documents address issues related to the LTSC? (ii) what kinds of evidence/suggestions do scientific articles offer for tourism development strategies in the mountain and rural areas? and (iii) how do the local people imagine using the immense opportunity of the tourism multiplier effect?

Methodology

The presented study combines a systematic literature review of articles (Georgia's context) and policy documents, as well as applying a participatory workshop. The analysis of the scientific sources and the integration of local perspectives played a decisive role in identifying the current gaps and formulating recommendations for policy documents, which express the needs of the locals.

Systematic Literature Review

The initial phase of the study was conducted based on the principles of the systematic literature review [18]. First, peer-reviewed publications were collected on the study topic using keyword ("tourism" and "Georgia") searches in electronic databases, such as Web of Science, Scopus, ResearchGate, and Google Scholar. Given the scarcity of available literature in the context of tourism in Georgia, the search was not limited to a particular topic. After collection of the relevant articles, pre-defined inclusion criteria, including geographical peculiarities (rural and mountain areas) and the particular topic of tourism study (linkages between the tourism industry and other economic sectors) were used during the systematic analysis of the literature. More precisely, certain parts of the paper, such as the abstract and conclusion, were assessed in compliance with the determined inclusion criteria. The comprehensive literature search resulted in ten articles (Table 1), including conference proceedings and unpublished articles. Our approach allowed synthesis of the research findings to reveal how the LTSC functions in rural and mountainous Georgia and creation of the strategic recommendations.

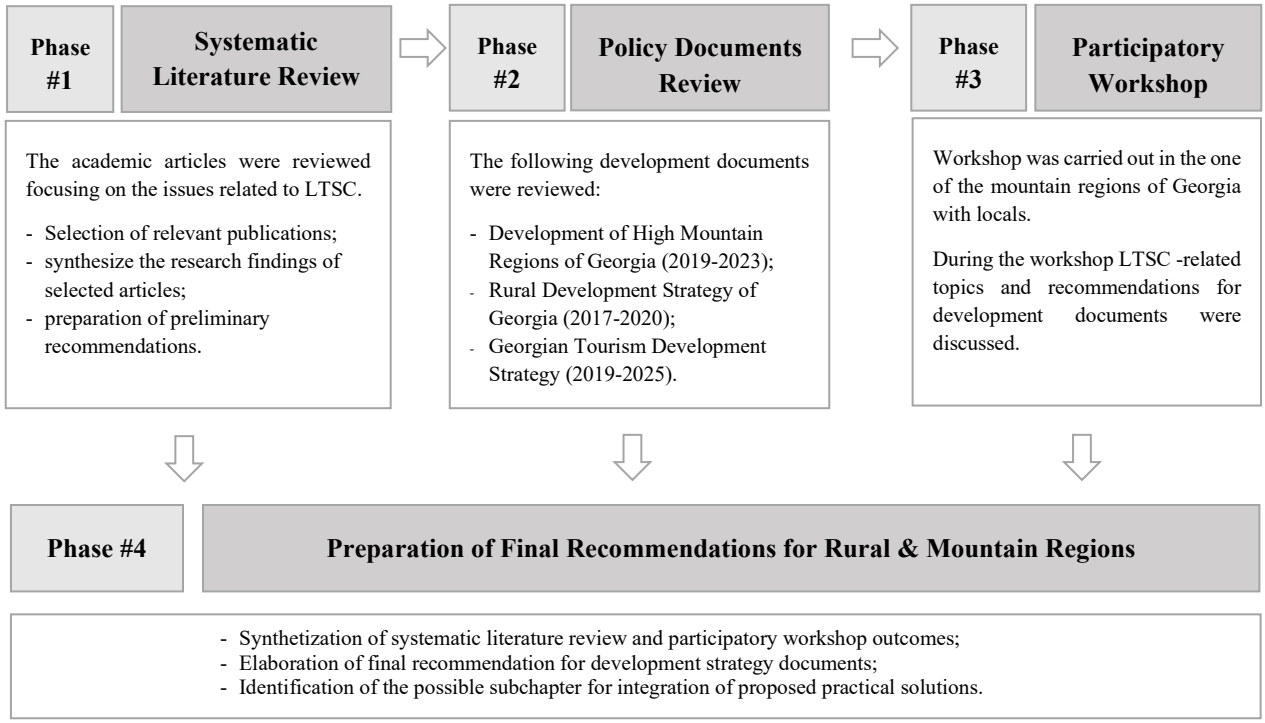

Fig 1. *Phases for Participatory Policy Review*
Source: Figure - Phases for Participatory Policy Review was developed by the authors

Table 1. *Publication collected for Systematic Literature Review*

Publication Title	Author/s	Publication Status	Publication Date
Is Tourism the Beginning or the End? Livelihoods of Georgian Mountain People at Stake	Salukvadze, Gvantsa Backhaus, Norman	published	2020
Spatial Peculiarities of Local Tourism Supply-Chains in High Mountainous Georgia: Challenges and Perspectives.	Salukvadze, Gvantsa Gugushvili, Temur Salukvadze, Joseph	Published	2020
Rural Tourism in Georgia in Transition: Challenges for Regional Sustainability	Khartishvili, Lela Muhar, Andreas Dax, Thomas Khelashvili, Ioseb	Published	2019
Analyzing Tourism Influence on Agricultural Products' Market: A Case Study of the Mestia Municipality, Georgia	Sharia, Mariam	Published	2019
Clustering the Problems of Sustainable Tourism Development in a Destination: Tsaghveri Resort as A Case	Khelashvili, Ioseb Khartishvili, Lela Khokhobaia, Merab	Published	2019
The Role of Tourism in Economic Development of Georgia	Arghutashvili, Valeri	Published	2018
Social and Economic Challenges of Sustainable Tourism Development in Georgia	Khelashvili, Ioseb	Published	2018
Fragmented Development: Tourism-driven Economic Changes in Kazbegi, Georgia	Gugushvili, Temur Salukvadze, Gvantsa Salukvadze, Joseph	Published	2017
Rural tourism as a promising trend of small business in Georgia: Topicality, capabilities, peculiarities	Paresishvili, Otar Kvaratskhelia, Laura Mirzaeva, Valentina	Published	2017
Linking agricultural food production and rural tourism in the Kazbegi district – A qualitative study	Hüller, S. Heiny, J. Leonhäuser, I.-U.	Published	2017

Policy Document Review

The second phase of the study was focused on reviewing policy documents aiming to assess the national perspective on tourism development, particularly regarding the supply side of tourism and its role in mountain and rural advancement. For this reason, we selected and reviewed the following policy documents: (i) Rural Development Strategy of Georgia (2017–2020); (ii) Georgian Tourism Development Strategy (2019–2025); and (iii) Development of High Mountain Regions of Georgia (2019–2023). We applied computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software to analyze the collected materials. The analysis process was focused on reviewing whether the selected strategic documents integrate the findings of recently implemented scientific studies. Furthermore, measures were taken to support scaling up the locally initiated economic activities and their integration in the LTSCs. As a result of the open coding, the primary thematic categories, such as Importance of Tourism, Ecotourism Development, Importance of LTSC, and Data on Tourism Development, were formulated.

Participatory Workshop

The core concept of the presented methodology is to promote active engagement of the local community, who represent final beneficiaries of the analyzed policy documents, in the study. More precisely, the workshop—as an effective participatory

technique—was applied to ensure the integration of the local voices in the process of developing recommendations. The meeting organized for the local stakeholder with cooperation with Local Action Group (LAG) in one of the mountain settlements in Georgia - Mestia Municipality. Around 20 attendees represented different genders, generations and economic fields.

The first part of the workshop was dedicated to the researchers' presentation of the main findings of the systematic literature review regarding the LTSC in the mountain and rural areas of Georgia. The second part consisted of a follow-up teamwork discussion: in small groups, one to three particular topics were selected from the provided issues for further debate. The following topics were discussed: (i) alternative integration strategies in the LTSC; (ii) barriers and possible ways to integrate agriculture in the LTSC; and (iii) challenges with scaling up the economic activities, mainly agriculture. Hence, such an approach revealed the topics that are of primary importance to the local population.

Results

Results of the systematic literature review

The reviewed articles cover a wide range of issues from general questions (the role of tourism in economic development on the national or regional level) to narrower topics (rural tourism and the LTSC). Most of the publications employ qualitative methods, using in-depth interviews, focus groups, and workshops with various stakeholders, such as local community members, representatives of the tourism industry, associations, experts, and practitioners in the study field. A broad representation of different voices is an essential prerequisite for the co-creation of knowledge and the development of inclusive, practical, reliable, and justified solutions.

In the literature discussing tourism broadly, in the context of regional development, scholars outline the multiplier effect of the sector, which is not fully embraced [16]. It has the potential to catalyze, stimulating satellite economic branches in the region and beyond [19].

Some scholars are focused on the challenges and perspectives of the LTSC. The latest studies implemented in the Kazbegi Municipality [15, 20] show that while the advancement of tourism is rapid, the indicators of agricultural activities are significantly decreasing in the region. Based on such a finding, the scholars highlight the crucial importance of integrating local agricultural product supplies into the tourism industry chain [15]. Furthermore, scholars note that the local farmers can improve their livelihoods by supplying the products to tourist facilities (e.g., guesthouses, catering services) [20]; the destination may even create an authentic niche by providing and promoting local, natural agri-food products to tourists [21], which itself is a pillar of sustainable rural tourism development [22,23]. Salukvadze and Backhaus [24] argue that tourism-led fragmentation in the local livelihood system may prevent diversification of economic activities and even increase tourism-dependence of the host community.

Most importantly, the outcomes of several studies (Table 2) mentioned above also include the reasons for the existing weak linkages between agri-food producers and tourism industry representatives. The distinguished triggers cover a wide range of topics that should be addressed in the policy for sustainable rural tourism and healthy LTSC development, as well as in the strategies for rural, mountain, and tourism development.

Table 2. *Triggers and recommendations for developing effective LTSC in terms of agriculture*

Topics	Triggers and recommendations	Authors
Absence of food processing infrastructure Agricultural products' integration in tourism Agricultural extension service for local farmers	The article indicates that in the research region, the absence of professional food processing infrastructure (slaughterhouses and milk collection centers) makes it challenging for local small-scale farmers to deliver agri-food products that fit safety standards. Along with infrastructural shortcomings, an agricultural extension service, especially training in agri-marketing for local farmers, would play a vital role in the process of reaching the tourism market. The authors propose marketization of agri-products, such as honey, herbal tea, potatoes [25], and cheese, which may have the potential to be integrated into the LTSC.	[20]

Ineffective communication between LTSC actors Shortcomings in agriculture	The author argues that even though the development of the tourism sector opened the opportunity for local farmers to sell their agricultural products to the local market, they cannot fully embrace the potential. Sharia points to the leading reasons preventing integration of local agricultural products in the LTSC. This fact is triggered, on the one hand, by the weak communication between the actors from tourism and agriculture businesses, and, on the other hand, the existing challenges faced by the agricultural sector in the region.	[21]
Cooperation between the institutions Institutional development	In the article, scholars draw readers' attention to the project Marani Wine Tours, which is an obvious example of how cooperation between associations and government institutions have succeeded in the valorization of Qvevri[1] wine. Such a practice represents an example of how to stimulate adjoined economic activities—in this case, agri-tourism. The article also outlines the initiated network between between organic farmers and tourism actors supported by NGOs via external funding. Based on the evidence, they argue that the absence of governmental organizations in this initiative has resulted in incomplete development and weak sustainability. The authors foresee that institutional development (institutions for rural tourism development and destination management organizations (DMOs)) will ensure the sustainable development of rural tourism, including hand-in-hand development of agriculture and tourism in the destination.	[23]
Cooperation between the institutions Analyzing existing practices Local context	Similarly to the previously discussed article [23], the author stresses the benefits of strengthened interlinkages between the private sector, governmental and educational institutions. Furthermore, the author highlights the importance of analyzing already existing experience in foreign countries as well as considering the local context with its full advantages, resources, and development prospects.	[19]

[1] Qvevri wine-making is practiced throughout Georgia, particularly in village communities where unique varieties of grapes are grown. The Qvevri is an egg-shaped earthenware vessel used for making, ageing and storing the wine. https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/ancient-georgian-traditional-qvevri-wine-making-method-00870

The competitiveness of local agricultural products Shortcomings in agriculture Agricultural extension service for local farmers Unstable supply of agri-products	The article pays attention to local products' lack of competitiveness compared to alternative suppliers' distributed goods from outside the region. The authors reveal the reasons in favor of non-local products. The main advantage is the lower price of the mass-produced, low-quality products delivered to the region, which seems to be acceptable for the tourism recipients, especially catering providers. Furthermore, such 'outside' markets have additional advantages, such as broad spatial coverage of product delivery and barter options (e.g., a natural exchange of cheese to vegetables). Altogether, this significantly weakens the competitiveness of local products. Some findings in this article are in line with the perspectives of other scholars [20] and support the view that local farmers' weak marketing skills and lack of enthusiasm to offer their products to tourism recipients are core shortcomings of weak collaboration between farmers and tourism representatives. The article complements Sharia's [21] findings regarding existing shortcomings in agriculture that significantly hinder its integration into the LTSC. Along with the mentioned weaknesses in agriculture, additional shortcomings are observed, such as unstable supply (e.g., seasonality, volatile number of products), outdated infrastructure, and lack of modern technology.	[11]

Recent publications using data from the research project "Linkages between Tourism and Community-driven Economic Activities: Shaping Sustainability in Mountain Regions" provide a new angle for LTSC study. More specifically, the central settlements (e.g., Townlets) in the mountain districts are identified as the primary consumers (e.g., cafes, hotels, guesthouses) of the agri-products delivered from nearby or distant villages [11]. Such a finding indicates the inevitable need for stable connectivity between rural and urban settlements, including road infrastructure, transport, and information flow to pave the way for small-scale farmers' integration within the LTSC.

A recent article by Salukvadze and Backhaus [24] was dedicated to analyzing the tourism-led transformation in mountain and rural areas of the Greater Caucasus. Based on the findings, scholars determined the following main types of livelihood alteration on the household level: (i) developing agri-tourism; (ii) increasing agricultural activities; (iii) reducing agricultural activities; and (iv) expanding non-agricultural activities. The existence of the latter type outlines that the local community's involvement in the tourism supply chain is possible through types of products and services other than agriculture.

Destinations face several tourism-related challenges at the same time, rather than single problem alone. Scholars introduce various scientific tools for sorting out problems to solve them effectively. Khelashvili, Khartishvili and Khokhobaia [26] proposes a system-based methodology, allowing researchers to identify the interrelation between destination's problems to cluster and determine the leverage factors. Ultimately, such an approach enables practitioners to identify problems, which should be addressed on the initial stage of destination development.

The LTSCs and development strategies

Development strategies of rural (2017–2020) and high mountain regions (2019–2023) recognize tourism's essential role in achieving targeted goals, including economic diversification, local development of small and medium businesses, and reducing regional disparities. In documents from both development strategies, nearly the same amount of mentions (number of codes) and similar text lengths (length of the coded text) are dedicated to the 'importance of tourism,' referring to the necessary resources for tourism development (Table 3, Fig. 2).

It is worth mentioning that strategies of high mountain regions and rural development, among

other untapped opportunities, outline issues associated with the LTSC. The particular text segments highlight the regions' potential resources for rural tourism development, increased demand for products alongside tourism development, and weaknesses that prevent such progress. In fact, the Tourism Development Strategy (2019–2025) omitted from its scope these particular fields of tourism. The policy documents obviously lack pragmatic solutions for tackling existing challenges considering existing local resources. The only clear approach for developing sustainable tourism through locally based resources was presented by the Rural Development Strategy through the establishment of thematic villages.

In summary, both strategies fail to sufficiently reflect on existing challenges of the LTSCs. Furthermore, they fall short in showing the local farmers' and entrepreneurs' development path for integrating their products and services within the LTSC and the ways tourism can support the advancement of satellite economic activities.

Table 3. *Number of mentions (codes) in the development strategy documents*

Policy / Codes' Name	Development of High Mountain Regions of Georgia (2019-2023)	Rural Development Strategy of Georgia (2017-2020)	Georgian Tourism Development Strategy (2019-2025)
Development of Eco-tourism	2	0	0
Importance of LTSC	3	6	0
Importance of Tourism (in general)	11	7	Not relevant
Analysis of Tourism Development	7	3	Not relevant

Source: *Table was prepared based on the Policy Documents' Review by the authors*

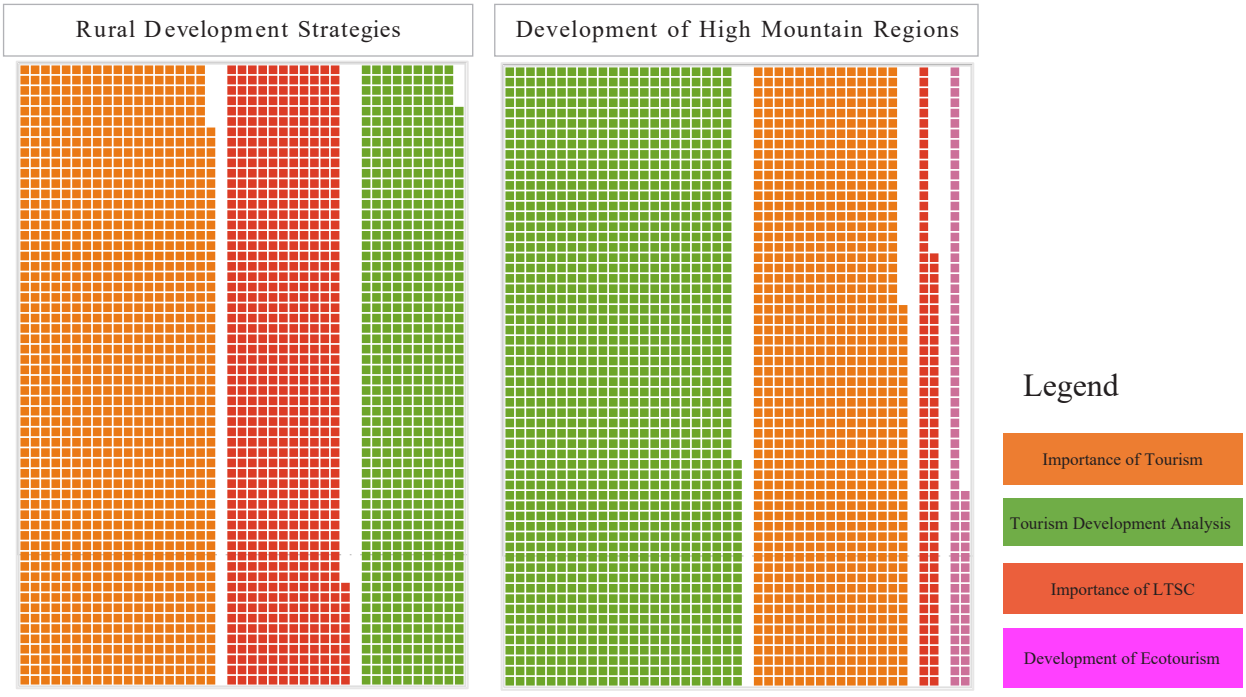

Fig 2. *Document portrait of strategies on high mountain regions and rural development*
Source: *Figure was prepared based on the Policy Documents' Review by the authors*

During the policy documents review several sub-chapters were determined in which the proposed practical solutions should be integrated.

Sub-chapters for Development of High Mountain Regions of Georgia (2019-2023):

- *New subchapter focusing on LTSC (the analysis of current situation);*
- *Internal and external factors (strength, weakness, opportunity, and threats) related to LTSC for SWOT analysis (SWOT analysis of High Mountain Regions);*
- *Strategic goal (strategic goals and objectives).*

Sub-chapters for Rural Development Strategy of Georgia (2017-2020):

- *New subchapter focusing on LTSC (Economic Overview);*
- *Internal and external factors (strength, weakness, opportunity, and threats) related to LTSC for SWOT analysis (SWOT Analysis);*
- *Strategic Objectives (Vision).*

Sub-chapters for Georgian Tourism Development Strategy (2019- 2025):

- *Challenges & Opportunities (Where are we now?);*
- *Our Targets (Where do we want to be in 2025?);*
- *Guiding Principles (How do we get there?).*

Locals' feedback on the recommendations for policy document integration

Proposed topics for discussion with locals during the workshop were broad and flexible enough to allow the participants to choose the particular issues that matter most to them. Such an approach gave a splendid opportunity to observe how they discussed selected crucial subjects for the region with peers and fellow community members (Table 4).

Table 4. *The discussed topics during the workshop with locals*

General Study Topics	Discussed Issues	Proposed Solutions
Challenges of agriculture integration within LTSC	Lack of information between the actors of LTSC	- Digital market, e-platforms for local farmers; - The local, open agi-bazaar, festivals; - Delivery service of the local agri-food; - The open-door market of local agri-food product.
	Non-systematical supply of agri-products triggered by seasonality, poor storage conditions, small amount and limited selection of products, and poor road infrastructure.	- The development of a cold storage facility/fridge (meat, potatoes, etc.); - Greenhouse development (during fieldwork few respondents noted that they actively use greenhouses to produce variety of products, and to store them to overcome seasonality. They noted that the practice of using greenhouses exists in Mestia, Svaneti).
	Lack of price competitiveness of the local agricultural product	Competitiveness rising involves the use of labels by the owners of hotels, cafes, as well as agricultural producers. Through labelling and proper branding, local, ecologically clean products will become distinctive and demanded in the market, which will ensure their recognition by consumers and increase of their competitiveness.

Alternative ways to integrate within LTSC	Lack of economic activities integrated within LTSC	To increase the variety of agri-products
Challenges of scaling-up the agriculture	- Lack of human resources (masculine workforce) in the household - Physically laborious work	- The need to purchase and introduce modern equipment; - Raising awareness about modern equipment.
	- Lack of pastures, remoteness from villages; - Fragmentation of land parcels, scarcity, distance from the residential area;	
	Insufficient knowledge to produce specific agricultural products	
	Lack of information for finding additional funding	

Discussion

A primary concern of this article is to reflect on the current relationship between tourism and allied economic activities through the synthesis of different aspects of the latest studies and local community perspectives. The findings clearly show that knowledge accumulated scientifically and among the locals could tackle existing challenges on the supply side of tourism. Our results are consistent with the position presented in the article published in 2013 [27]. It is evident that nearly a decade later, the lack of marketing skills and labelling of agri-products in compliance with the required standards for rural tourism still need to be addressed. Additionally, another article [28] published in the last ten years highlights the complexity of the tourism industry and, importantly, its reciprocal relationship with the other branches of the economy. The article contains policy recommendations to employ the project management approach [29], namely the Project Integration Management principle for effectively handling a system with various components. The authors [28] suggest considering the stakeholders' expectations and consumers' demands for achieving synergy.

The findings of the presented article support the idea of collaboration between actors from civil society, the private sector, and the government. Additionally, the results of this study indicate that hand-in-hand advancement of economic activities requires strong institutional development, including establishing or identifying an independent (private or public) entity with the specific responsibility of facilitating collaboration around the stakeholders' shared interests. Altogether, this will ensure fulfilling the steps of the development strategies. In one of the latest policy documents, Papava [17] argues that the central premise that tourism is the driving force of the real sector of the economy in Georgia is failing. The reason for this is that tourism's functioning is primarily based on imported products, which creates an illusion of development, but in reality, according to the author, constitutes a "tourist trap." Furthermore, the author suggests that tourism should be amended as a priority focusing more on the knowledge-based economy and the real sector of the economy. The presented article supports the core viewpoint of the mentioned paper, particularly the utilization of tourism's full potential. However, in sharp contrast to Papava [17], we do not suggest that missing a chance to prioritize tourism and redirecting the economic focus cardinally is a good idea. On the contrary, providing recommendations on the ways to embrace tourism's multiplier effect for the benefit of the whole spectrum of economic sectors is of vital importance and the key to tourism's sustainability.

Another scholar [16] shares the main concerns that Georgia has been losing the most valuable advantages of tourism, such as the multiplier effect on the related economic activities. From his viewpoint, tourism should have a positive impact on its satellite sectors through replacing imported goods with locally produced products, increasing the competitiveness of local supply chains and local service providers. Nevertheless, the author does not provide the exact steps for achieving the provided suggestion. In this regard, the presented article is bridging the mentioned gap through different approaches, such as a systematic literature review, workshops

with tourism's host communities, and a review of the official policy strategies. Altogether, this has contributed to the formulation of detailed, practical solutions based on which tourism could unfold with a supportive impact on other economic sectors.

Conclusion

A review of the policy documents sheds light on the urgent gaps that should be bridged according to existing evidence. The study reveals that the development strategies do not integrate the scientific findings of recent investigations and, in turn, neglect the academic viewpoints. The strategies do not integrate the clear ways of maximizing the potential of tourism's multiplier effect on other economic activities. More specifically, the following urgent topics remain unanswered: (i) strengthening the cooperation of local suppliers and tourism representatives; (ii) increasing the competitiveness of local products to become more attractive for tourism recipients; (iii) improving the information flow among the local suppliers and tourism recipients; and (iv) supporting locals' adaptations to the requirements of tourism.

A systematic analysis of the articles and a workshop with the local population revealed the following issues that need to be addressed. The results of the study highlight the importance of improving the information flow among the local actors and tourism recipients. Based on the systematic analysis and locals' participation, more realistic and local-context-oriented measures could be the development of special e-platforms, the establishment of local product festivals, and delivery services of local products within the municipalities.

Most of the studied articles were dedicated to several shortcomings in agriculture, tackling of which will be significantly advance the mentioned field. The agriculture-related challenges were among the topics discussed actively during the workshop. The main conclusion is that the regular supply of agri-products should be ensured, in which the local suppliers will also need support to tackle limitations caused by seasonality. Furthermore, the results point to the need to increase the variety of products for more diversified agricultural production. It seems particularly urgent that all agri-products meet the safety standards. Last but not least, the outcomes suggest increasing the 'visibility' of agri-food through green labels, which will, in turn, increase their competitiveness.

Along with the development of agriculture-related activities, there is a great need to diversify non-agricultural economic practices. The emergence of new economic fields opens avenues for widening tourism's positive impacts beyond the main centers, ensuring spillover effects for nearby and distant villages.

Academic activities highlight the importance of institutional development and cooperation between the stakeholders, including research institutions, NGOs, and private and public sectors. Identifying institution(s) (e.g., national agencies, associations, departments, DMOs, local institutions) responsible for development issues related to the LTSCs would be the first step forward. The they should facilitate effective cooperation between stakeholders.

The authors propose the new concept of "supportive tourism" for hand-in-hand rural and mountain development. Supportive tourism refers to tourism as a means of regional economic diversification, somewhat limiting its development as a final outcome. The upheaval of the tourism industry should have spillover effects of creating a preferable ecosystem for starting new economic activities or scaling up the existing prospective branches. Consequently, promoting supportive tourism will contribute to avoiding anticipated endangerment of the growing tourism dependence and fragility of the sector.

Consistently increasing numbers of local and international visitor flows significantly transforms the demand conditions at the host destinations. Emerging tourism-influenced markets comprise a wide range of customers, including those who demand high-quality goods and services. This process contributes to the growth of regional competitive advantages, which, in turn, provides an opportunity for the local entrepreneurs to innovate and enhance quality. In this environment, since local businesses handle the demand of the domestic market, new doors will be open to other supply chains in other regions and across the borders of Georgia.

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