

TOURIST RESOURCES OF TETRITSKARO MUNICIPALITY AND THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOCAL POPULATION

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Abstract

Tetrtskaro Municipality, which represents one of the important parts of the Kvemo Kartli region, is rich in natural, historical-cultural, and intangible tourist resources. The municipality's geographic location and diverse landscapes create a space that stands out with unique opportunities for both local and international tourists. Algeti National Park, medieval church-monasteries, archaeological monuments, traditional village environments, and local culture create a complex environment where natural and anthropogenic factors organically blend.

Tourism development in Tetrtskaro not only contributes to economic growth but is also significantly connected to the social development of the local population. This process gains importance not only in terms of creating new sources of income but also in strengthening social ties, preserving cultural heritage, and reinforcing local identity.

Tourism in Tetrtskaro should represent a significant driving force for social development. Local population involvement in tourism activities provides the opportunity to increase employment, reduce rural migration, and strengthen economic stability. Of particular note is the role of women and youth in rural tourism: family guesthouses, traditional cuisine offerings, and handicraft production create opportunities that contribute to the economic and social integration of locals.

From a social perspective, the local population increasingly values their cultural heritage, traditions, and uniqueness, which enhances self-esteem and a sense of identity. At the same time, tourism development in this region promotes integration among various ethnic and social groups, reflecting strengthened social equity and mutual respect. Furthermore, tourist initiatives are directly linked to youth learning foreign languages, developing professional skills, and participating in entrepreneurial activities.

Sustainable tourism development is especially important for Tetrtskaro, which takes into account economic, social, and environmental balance. Ecotourism and agritourism create a model in which the protection of natural resources and the preservation of cultural heritage is prioritized. The development of rural tourism and community-based tourism promotes the direct involvement of the local community and the expansion of social inclusion.

Tetrtskaro Municipality faces certain challenges in tourism development. These include the need to improve infrastructure, standardize the quality of tourist services, and address the lack of informational resources. It is also important to comply with environmental regulations to ensure that natural and cultural heritage is preserved for future generations. Additionally, the education and skill development of the local population plays a decisive role in the sustainability of the tourism industry.

The scientific study covers:

- The classification of tourist resources, including nature, history, culture, and wine tourism;
- Study of the social and economic situation of the local community;
- Assessing the socio-economic impact of tourism
- Sustainable tourism models that ensure the expansion of social inclusion and strengthen regional stability.

In conclusion, the sustainable use of Tetrtskaro Municipality's tourist resources represents a significant factor in the social development of the local population. Its impact is manifested in social integration, preservation of cultural heritage, and strengthening regional identity. Tourism development in this

The example of Tetrtskaro clearly shows that tourism can become a catalyst for social progress when it is based on the proper use of local resources, community involvement, and sustainable development principles. Such an approach provides the opportunity for the municipality to develop its unique potential while simultaneously contributing to the improvement of residents' quality of life, which is one of the main goals of modern tourism strategies.

Introduction

Tetrtskaro Municipality is rich in both natural and cultural tourism resources. Special attention is paid to Algeti National Park,¹ which is recognized as one of the main ecotourism spaces within Georgia's system of protected areas. At the same time, historical monuments, ethnographic traditions, and rural architecture create an important basis for tourism products focused on cultural tourism.²

Research Goals and Objectives. The goal is to analyze how Tetritskaro's tourism resources contribute to the social development of the local community and what challenges exist to ensure sustainable development.

- ✓ Classification of Tetritskaro's tourism resources (natural, historical, cultural, wine-related);
- ✓ Study of the social condition of the local population in the context of tourism;
- ✓ Assessment of tourism's impact on employment, income, and the strengthening of social capital;
- ✓ Identification of the role of women and youth in tourism development;
- ✓ Development of recommendations for sustainable tourism policy.

- Documentary analysis – study of existing literature, statistical data and government/public policy documents;
- Field observation – assessment of tourism resources and existing infrastructure in specific villages of Tetritskaro; ³. As part of data collection, a 16 km marked circular route was hiked in Algeti National Park, where the quality of marking, safety elements and ecotourism attractiveness were recorded.
- The study of the social situation of the local population in the context of tourism was carried out using a mixed method, which included socio-economic surveys (quantitative surveys) to assess

² Local Development Strategy of Tetritskaro Municipality 2018 - 2022. <https://eu4georgia.eu/wp-content/uploads/LDS-ENG-Final-Tetritskaro.pdf> [L. s. 15.10.2025].

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employment and tourism involvement, and interviews and focus groups (qualitative interviews & focus groups) to study needs, attitudes and social impact.

- Interviews and surveys – to collect opinions of the local population, small business owners and tourists.
- I had interviews with:
- Head of the Small Business and Tourism Development Department of the Tetrtskaro Municipality City Hall - the purpose of the interview was to assess the effectiveness of implemented projects, dynamics of the number of tourists, unimplemented infrastructure projects and other challenges,
- Advisor to the Mayor of Tetrtskaro Municipality, in the direction of agriculture - on wine tourism resources and their inclusion in tourism,
- Employees of the Manglisi Tourism Information Center (tourist dynamics, customer satisfaction survey)
- Rangers (on the safe movement of tourists on marked trails)
- Local population - employment, involvement in tourism, challenges of the municipality.
- Tourists - the purpose of the interviews was to assess the level of satisfaction of visitors, basic needs and perception of ecotourism potential,
- Comparative analysis - taking into account the experience of other regions In relation to the reality of Tetrtskaro.

1. Classification of Tourism Resources in Tetrtskaro (Natural, Historical, Cultural, Wine-related)

Tetrtskaro is one of the most distinctive municipalities in terms of the abundance of natural resources and the diversity of landscapes. Its geographical location combines both lowland and mountainous zones, creating unique conditions for the development of ecotourism and adventure tourism.

Among the natural monuments, the following are noteworthy: Samshvilde and Birtvisi Canyons, Algeti National Park, Khorkhebi Cave, Algeti Reservoir, and Khrami Valley.

Diversity of mountainous and steppe natural zones: In Tetrtskaro's territory, lowland areas and mountain regions coexist side by side, which determines the variety of microclimates. Such an environment is particularly attractive for both recreational and scientific-cognitive tourism. The mountainous zones provide opportunities for mountaineering, hiking, and picnics, while the lowlands promote the development of rural and agro-tourism.

Rivers and valleys: The region is rich in numerous rivers and valleys, including the Tetrtskaro River, the Algeti Valley, and their smaller tributaries. These natural sites encourage the development of tourist activities such as hiking, fishing, camping, and recreational leisure. The valleys are especially appealing for photographers and naturalists.

Biodiversity and protected areas: The nature of Tetrtskaro is rich in unique flora and fauna. Particularly noteworthy is Algeti National Park, where many endemic and rare species can be found. The park represents an important ecosystem zone, essential both for nature conservation and for scientific research. It offers opportunities for organizing both eco-tourism and educational tours.

Historical Resources. Tetrtskaro is historically one of the most important regions in Kvemo Kartli, where material heritage from various epochs has been abundantly preserved. There are about 400 historical monuments ⁴in the municipality. It includes ancient fortresses and towers, architectural monuments, archaeological findings, and the layout of historical villages, all of which create great potential for the development of cultural and educational tourism.

Ancient fortresses and stone-built structures – In the municipality, medieval defensive structures have been preserved, which served as centers of political and military significance in the region. Among them are:

- Samshvilde – one of the oldest historical fortress-cities in Georgia;

⁴ Tetrtskaro Local History Museum, <https://georgia.travel/tetrtskaro-local-history-museum/> [L. s. 16.11.2025].

- Khorkhebi Cave, a natural ice cave located in the village of Kldeisi, referred to in historical sources as the “Ice Cellar of Queen Tamar”;⁵
- Sagharasheni Fortress;
- Asureti Fortress;
- Alevi Fortress;
- Farkisi Fortress;
- Khuluti Fortress;
- Kldekari Fortress;
- Birtvisi Fortress, and others.⁶

Monasteries and churches – On the territory of Tetrtskaro, there are numerous early and medieval Christian temples that have exceptional architectural and spiritual value. Among them, the following are important:

- The Church and Tower of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, dating back to the 16th–17th centuries;
- Manglisi Sioni (built in the 330s of the 4th century) – one of the first churches built in Manglisi, where the holiest relic of Christianity, fragments of the True Cross, were once kept;
- The Phitareti Monastery of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, a brilliant example of the 13th-century period and a center of ancient Georgian culture;
- The Gudarekhi Monastery of the 13th century;
- The Asureti Armenian Church – an example of cultural and confessional diversity;
- The Sioni Church in the village of Gudarekhi;
- Other small churches and monasteries located in the mountainous zones.

Archaeological monuments – The region is rich in ancient settlements and archaeological sites, confirming that people lived on the territory of Tetrtskaro as early as the Bronze Age. Burial sites, stone formations, and stone tombs have been discovered, which have great research importance for science.

Historical settlements and village layouts - In Tetrtskaro Municipality, the planning of old Georgian and German colonial villages has been preserved, which is considered an important part of the region’s heritage. Especially noteworthy are:

- Asureti - a village founded in the 19th century by German colonists, distinguished by its unique architecture and historical atmosphere;
- Toneti, where medieval fortresses and temples have been preserved.

Historical Memorials and Commemorative Sites. The municipality has numerous memorials dedicated to wars and battles, which are an important part of national history and collective memory.

Cultural Resources. Tetrtskaro Municipality stands out for its ethnic and cultural diversity, which makes the region a unique tourist attraction. For centuries, Georgians, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Germans lived here together, resulting in the formation of a unique cultural heritage. These resources provide a strong foundation for the development of both cultural tourism and ethnographic tourism.⁷

Ethnic and confessional diversity - The cultural identity of Tetrtskaro’s villages clearly reflects the coexistence of different ethnic and religious groups. The following villages are worth mentioning as settlements attractive for tourism:

- Asureti - From the 1820s, during the period of the Russian Empire, German colonists began to settle in Georgia. Many of the settled Swabian Germans moved to the outskirts of Tbilisi, and in 1819, a German settlement was established in Tetrtskaro Municipality - the village of Asureti. To this day,

⁵ Georgian Travel Guide, khorkhebis cave. <https://georgiantravelguide.com/ka/khorkhebis-mghvime> [L. s. 16.11.2025].

⁶ Tetrtskaro Local History Museum, <https://georgia.travel/tetrtskaro-local-history-museum/> [L. s. 16.11.2025].

⁷ Kvemo Kartli region, <https://mbg.ge/en/region/16/> [L. s. 18.11.2025].

German architecture, narrow streets, a Lutheran church, and elements of German culture remain, creating a unique atmosphere in the region.⁸

- Armenian communities - In Asureti and nearby villages, Armenian churches and family traditions form an excellent example of cultural diversity.
- Azerbaijani villages - Preserve Muslim cultural traditions, folk rituals, and folklore, providing tourists with an authentic experience.

In terms of cultural events and traditions, the following are considered tourist resources:

Folklore and traditional arts - In Tetrtskaro's villages, Georgian polyphony, local folk songs, and dances remain active. Simultaneously, Armenian and Azerbaijani folklore elements are preserved, highlighting the region's musical and stage diversity.

Festivals and rituals - Various traditional celebrations are held in the municipality, which shape the rhythm of village life and create special experiences for tourists:

- Christian holidays (Giorgoba, Easter, Christmas);
- Muslim holidays in Azerbaijani communities;
- Armenian church and family rituals;
- Local market days and folklore festivals.

Culinary and agrarian culture – Local cuisine represents one of the main areas of tourist interest:

- Traditional Georgian qvevri wine production;
- Baking bread in a tone (traditional oven);
- Remnants of German cuisine in Asureti culinary traditions;
- Armenian and Azerbaijani dishes, rich in spices and traditional recipes.

Museums and Cultural Centers

The municipality operates cultural houses, small ethnographic corners, and local art associations, where the historical and ethnographic heritage of the region is preserved.

Contemporary Cultural Processes

In recent years, Tetrtskaro has hosted cultural festivals, exhibitions, and theatrical performances initiated by youth, which foster integration between the local community and tourists.

The palaces of the Orbeliani and Baratashvili families in the Tetrtskaro Municipality represent significant cultural and historical heritage; however, a comprehensive assessment of their current condition and potential for use is not yet grounded in existing research. Therefore, an in-depth preliminary study - both historical and architectural-scientific - is required to determine the real identification, condition, and development prospects of these sites.

- It is important to note that the reintegration and functional development of the palaces require:
- A historically and architecturally grounded assessment based on reliable sources;
- The selection of an appropriate conservation–restoration model, determined by the research findings;
- The definition of possible cultural, educational, or tourism functions only after the research is completed;
- The identification of local and international funding sources (grants, state/municipal programs);
- Collaboration between the municipality and relevant professional institutions.

Such an approach can lay the foundation for transforming the presumed residential or ancestral properties of the Orbeliani and Baratashvili families - should their authenticity be confirmed through

⁸ Elisabethtal - Asureti, <https://gnta.ge/en/library/elisabethtal-asureti> [L. s. 18.11.2025].

research - into cultural, creative, or tourism spaces, in line with principles of heritage protection and sustainable development.

Wine Tourism Resources. Tetrtskaro Municipality has exceptional potential in wine tourism. Viticulture and winemaking are integral parts of the local economy and culture, offering new opportunities for tourism development in the region.

Historical tradition of viticulture - Tetrtskaro's lands are distinguished by soil and climatic conditions suitable for vine cultivation. For centuries, the tradition of qvevri wine production has been established here, which has been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage. Additionally, old winery architecture has been preserved in the region, providing tourists with an authentic environment.

Modern wineries and family farms - The municipality hosts numerous small family wineries offering tourists wine tastings, participation in viticulture processes, and exposure to the traditional supra (feast) atmosphere. These family-business-based spaces contribute not only to tourism but also to strengthening the local rural economy.

Variety of grape types - Tetrtskaro's vineyards include both traditional Georgian varieties (Rkatsiteli, Saperavi, Mtsvane) and international grape varieties, creating a diversity of wines. Each village has its own microclimate and unique wine taste characteristics.

Wine Tourism Routes. The region has potential for thematic wine tours and routes, where visitors can learn about the wine-making process, taste wines produced in different village wineries, and participate in village life. Such routes not only increase tourist interest but also promote the social engagement of the local rural population.

Culinary Experience and Agritourism. Wine tourism is closely linked to local cuisine: tourists have the opportunity to taste traditional dishes (chakapuli, mtsvadi, bread baked in a tone), observe the preparation of churchkhela or other sweets, and participate in a family supra (traditional feast).

Wine Festivals and Cultural Events. In Tetrtskaro, festivals based on wine and local traditions are held, where local wineries showcase their products. These festivals help promote wine while also preserving local culture and traditions.

2. Study of the Social Conditions of the Local Population in the Context of Tourism

According to the preliminary results of the 2024 population census, Tetrtskaro Municipality comprises a total of 90 villages. The population amounts to 22,485 people, of whom 5,658 live in urban settlements (the town of Tetrtskaro and the settlement of Manglisi). As of today, there are 13 deserted villages within the municipality, where no one resides. The same number of villages have fewer than 15 inhabitants. These include: Abeliani, Didi Namtvriani, Patara Namtvriani, Chivchavi, Kvemo Darbaziskhevi, Zemo Darbaziskhevi, and Khunevi. Unfortunately, as of today, eight villages fall under the category of “abandoned or sparsely populated.”⁹

The impact of tourism on the social condition of the local population in Tetrtskaro Municipality is still in the process of being studied; therefore, specific statistical data remain limited. However, general data and research indicate several key areas where tourism brings about positive changes:¹⁰

Employment and income. The development of tourism in Tetrtskaro creates new jobs, especially in the fields of rural tourism, agritourism, wine tourism, and handicrafts. Nevertheless, part of the population remains economically vulnerable, as most jobs are seasonal. This situation implies income instability — tourism activity is higher during the summer season and declines significantly in winter.¹¹

⁹ Tetrtsqaro Municipality, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tetrtsqaro_Municipality?utm_ [L. s. 26. 11.2025].

¹⁰ Rural Development for Future Georgia (RDFG), <https://www.developmentaid.org/organizations/awards/view/446916/baseline-study-for-the-project-rural-development-for-sustainable-growth-of-tetrtskaro-municipality?> [L. s. 26. 11.2025].

¹¹ Successful Rural Development Projects Launched and Equipment Delivered in Tetrtskaro, <https://cbw.ge/economy/successful-rural-development-projects-launched-and-equipment-delivered-in-tetrtskaro?> [L. s. 26. 11.2025].

Social infrastructure and services. The municipality's social infrastructure is only partially adequate to meet the population's needs. The condition of local schools, medical centers, cultural houses, and roads directly affects both the quality of life of residents and the potential for tourism infrastructure development. Not only in Tetrtskaro, but throughout the Kvemo Kartli region, information about cultural and natural routes is often inaccessible or lacks professionalism.¹²

Many cultural and natural monuments in the municipality are located in inaccessible areas – often accessible by unpaved roads, and sometimes only by off-road vehicles. This circumstance was confirmed during our 16 km marked circular route hike in Algeti National Park, where on-site observations, conversations with local residents, and road visits clearly demonstrated the infrastructural challenges and the real condition of inaccessible roads.

According to the 2022 study conducted by the Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA),¹³ 42% of tourist sites in the region lack standard access roads. This hinders not only the growth in the number of visitors but also the development of local businesses. The lack of accessibility particularly affects balanced and inclusive tourism.

A sustainable development approach does not imply the construction of massive roads, but rather low-impact access to the natural environment – such as eco-trails, internal transport networks or so-called “last mile access” infrastructure. “Last mile access infrastructure” – this term is used to indicate that the last remaining section of the route from the main transport arteries (e.g., from the central road, station or airport) for a tourist is easy and comfortable.¹⁴

Field observations conducted in the territory of the Tetrtskaro Municipality, including Manglisi and Did Namtvriani, revealed that standard road signs and informational boards in Georgian and English are significantly underrepresented. These findings highlight the lack of informational infrastructure for tourism and underscore the need for a multilingual information system, which is essential for ensuring comfortable routes for both local and international visitors. Furthermore, updated and structured information on online resources (such as Google Maps, TripAdvisor, and tourist blogs) is scarcely available, while multilingual audio guides, brochures, and mobile applications about the Tetrtskaro Municipality are very limited.

Multilingual audio guides are of particular importance for such a small municipality, as they enable tourists to receive information about sites, routes, or exhibitions in various languages. This enhances accessibility for foreign visitors and reduces dependence on local guides.

According to the Georgian National Tourism Administration's 2023 data, Kvemo Kartli ranked 10th out of 11 regions in terms of the quality of online representation of tourist sites.¹⁵

As a result of field observations and qualitative research, it was found that Tetrtskaro does not exist in most municipalities:

Food services – in many parts of the municipality, there are neither cafés nor standard dining options available.

- Limited services – this restricts the development of the local economy.
- In Tetrtskaro Municipality, there are almost no small hotels, hostels, ethno-homestays, or local guides. Tourists are often limited to one-day visits, which eliminates the broader economic effect of tourism.

¹² Baseline Study of existing social services in Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kvemo Kartli, 2022.

https://www.cenn.org/app/uploads/2024/02/ENG_CENN-Baseline-Study-of-Services.pdf? [L. s. 26. 11.2025].

¹³ Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA), Annual Tourism Report 2022–2023, GNTA, 2023. <https://geostat.ge> [L. s. 26.11.2025].

¹⁴ Last-Mile - Sustainable mobility for the last mile in tourism regions. <https://forschung.boku.ac.at/en/projects/11719?> [L. s. 26.11.2025].

¹⁵ Georgian National Tourism Administration (GNTA), Annual Tourism Report 2022–2023. GNTA, 2023. <https://geostat.ge> [L. s. 26.11.2025].

- As of today, only 19 accommodation facilities are registered across the Kvemo Kartli region, of which only 6 meet international standards. The number of qualified guides is almost nonexistent.
- There is a systemic absence of theme-based tourism products such as handicrafts, masterclasses, and agrotours.

A sustainable tourism model implies the involvement of local communities and the strengthening of the entrepreneurial environment — approaches that are almost unused in the region.

The lack of services hinders local employment, which contradicts the principles of sustainable tourism — where community participation and income distribution are among the main priorities.

Based on field observations and analyses of administrative structures, strategies, and regional tourism management practices, several key issues have been identified: local governments plan activities independently and without coordination, which are often ad hoc and inconsistent; there is no unified regional tourism development strategy; coordination between the private and public sectors is minimal; and local communities (ethnic or rural populations) are rarely involved in the decision-making process.

As a result of my comparative desk research and analysis of municipal documents, it was determined that approximately 68% of Kvemo Kartli municipalities do not have a published local tourism development plan, and 85% do not have a functioning tourist information center.

Inconsistent management hinders the targeted development of regional resources and slows down unified support from the government and donor organizations.

The infrastructural landscape of the municipality shows that it still requires:

- Improvement of physical accessibility (roads, transport)
- Development of services (guides, hotels, dining)
- Strengthening of information platforms (marketing, visual materials, digital platforms)
- Strengthening of institutional coordination (local government – state – business – community)¹⁶

The solution to these problems is possible only through a sustainable, consistent, and community-based approach. That is why the tourism strategy of the municipality should be based on inclusiveness, environmental protection, and the strengthening of the local economy.

Kvemo Kartli lacks a unified tourist positioning and branding.¹⁷ Existing informational resources are fragmented, often outdated or monolingual. There are no:

- Tourist maps and visual guides for sites
- Multilingual audio guides or QR codes
- Digital links to thematic tourist routes¹⁸

According to the 2025 data, only 21% of tourist sites are represented on international online platforms (Google Maps, Booking, TripAdvisor).¹⁹

The lack of information not only reduces the region's attractiveness but also does not contribute to responsible tourism, where the visitor is familiar in advance with the location, its rules, and its values.

¹⁶ The research is based on an analysis of official municipal websites, available strategic documents, local government reports, online tourist reviews, and informal consultations with experts.

¹⁷ The research is based on an analysis of official municipal websites, available strategic documents, local government reports, online tourist reviews, and informal consultations with experts.

¹⁸ Statistical overview of Georgian tourism.2025 I quarter, <https://api.gnta.ge/storage/files/doc/statistical-data-overview-2025-i-q.pdf> [L. s. 26.11.2025].

¹⁹ Hospitality Sector in Georgia. November 2024, <https://pmcg-i.com/app/uploads/2024/11/Hospitality-Sector-Snapshot-new.pdf> [L. s. 26.11.2025];

Tetriwyaro,

https://www.booking.com/searchresults.en-gb.html?ss=Tetriwyaro&ssne=Tetriwyaro&ssne_untouched=Tetriwyaro&label=en-ge-booking [L. s. 27.11.2025].

Education and professional training. The professional training of the local population is an important factor for employment in the field of tourism. The majority of Tetrtskaro's residents are mainly specialized in agriculture and viticulture, which contributes to the development of agro-tourism. However, obtaining additional education in the field of tourist services and culinary arts remains a significant challenge.

Cultural and socio-communicative involvement. The population actively participates in the organization of cultural events and festivals, which promotes their involvement in the process of cultural tourism development. The preservation of local folklore, traditional celebrations, art, and culinary samples thus becomes not only a cultural interest but also an additional source of income.

3. Challenges to Ensuring Sustainable Tourism Development in Tetrtskaro

Our desk-research was multi-source. We systematically monitored the region's official websites and local government strategic documentation; analyzed the annual reports of local governments; studied online reviews of tourists (Booking.com, TripAdvisor) by qualitative criteria (presence/absence, service feedback);

Informal consultations were also held with the local population (Tetrtskaro, Manglisi, Didi Namtvrani) and experts in the field. In order to properly substantiate additional and counter-data, we used reports and statistical materials published by the National Tourism Administration, which we used as an important source for verifying sectoral trends and official statistical data. Based on which, we can note that there are many challenges in developing sustainable tourism and ensuring local development in Tetrtskaro, which stem from social, economic, cultural and ecological aspects. Below I will list the main directions:

1. Economic Challenges

- **Seasonality:** Employment opportunities in the tourism sector are predominantly seasonal, resulting in income instability and economic vulnerability.
- **Limited Investment:** Access to financial resources for local businesses and small family-run accommodations remains highly constrained.
- **Restricted Employment Opportunities:** Particularly for women and young people, as many available positions require prior experience or involve demanding working conditions.

2. Social Challenges

- **Lack of Education and Professional Training:** There is a significant shortage of qualified professionals with specialized knowledge and skills in tourism services.
- **Inadequate Infrastructure:** The poor condition of roads, insufficient medical facilities, and underdeveloped social centers hinder both the quality of life for residents and the satisfaction of tourists' needs.
- **Unequal Employment Distribution:** Women and youth are not fully benefiting from the economic and social opportunities created by tourism.

3. Cultural and Communicative Challenges

Protection of traditions: The demands of modern tourism can harm local folklore, traditional celebrations, and cultural heritage.

Lack of local involvement: Part of the population is not actively involved in tourism projects and decision-making. lkllore, traditional festivities, and cultural heritage.

4. Environmental Challenges

- **Protection of Natural Resources:** Regulatory mechanisms and monitoring systems for natural landscapes, water bodies, forests, and biodiversity remain inadequate.
- **Increasing Tourist Flows:** Rising visitor numbers place excessive pressure on ecosystems, eco-trails, rivers, and landscapes.

- **Lack of Environmentally Sensitive Infrastructure:** Ineffective waste management, insufficient maintenance of recreational areas, and the limited use of renewable energy continue to pose significant challenges.

5. Legislative and Managerial Challenges

Weak coordination and management mechanisms within the municipality, combined with low regional-level collaboration, significantly hinder the development of tourism. Local self-governments, cultural institutions, and tourism operators often operate independently, without effective communication or cooperation.

Independent assessments indicate that 68% of municipalities lack tourism development strategies, and no unified regional action plan exists, leading to fragmented resource allocation and reduced effectiveness. Strengthening coordination is essential through the establishment of structures such as Regional Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) - a model successfully practiced internationally.

- **Absence of a Comprehensive Sustainable Tourism Policy:** There is a lack of coherent regulations, monitoring frameworks, and long-term strategic planning that integrates economic, social, and environmental goals.
- **Institutional Coordination Deficit:** Municipal authorities, government agencies, and the private sector often fail to align under a common strategic vision for sustainable tourism development.

4. Sustainable Tourism Models for Expanding Social Inclusion and Strengthening Regional Stability

In the context of Tetrtskaro, the development of sustainable tourism should be designed to enhance social inclusion (engagement of all stakeholders) and strengthen regional harmony. The models discussed below, as demonstrated by international experience, have proven effective in similar regions:

In 2023, eco-adventure tourism in Georgia grew by 17%, with approximately 6.5%²⁰ of total visits occurring in the Kvemo Kartli region. However, in the Khramis Khevi area, the organized number of visitors amounted to only about 2,000 annually, mostly domestic tourists. According to 2024 data, Algeti National Park received 10,193 visitors,²¹ while the town of Manglisi²² hosted nearly 10,000 visitors; data for other locations are not available.

Cultural-ethnographic tours in Kvemo Kartli in 2023 included only 14 organized tours, representing merely 3.8%²³ of total ethnographic tours nationwide in Georgia. Culinary tourism data for the same year indicate that only six organized culinary events took place in Kvemo Kartli, primarily initiated by NGOs, with an estimated 500 participants annually.²⁴

According to 2024 statistics, only 8.7% of all international tourists visited Kvemo Kartli, which has 1,919 available beds.²⁵

²⁰ Statistical Review of Tourism in Georgia, Report, Research and Planning Department of the Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2024. [https://api.gnta.ge/storage/files/doc/saqartvelos-turizmis-statistikuri-mimokhilva 2024.pdf](https://api.gnta.ge/storage/files/doc/saqartvelos-turizmis-statistikuri-mimokhilva%2024.pdf) [L. s. 26.11.2025].

²¹ Statistical Review of Tourism in Georgia, Report, Research and Planning Department of the Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2024. <https://api.gnta.ge/storage/files/doc/saqartvelos-turizmis-statistikuri-mimokhilva2024.pdf> [L. s. 26.11.2025].

²² manglisi <https://manglisihome.com/>, <https://georgia.travel/resorts/manglisi>. [L. s. 26.11.2025].

²³ Domestic tourism statistics in Georgia 2024. <https://www.geostat.ge/media/68706/Domestic-Tourism-Survey---2024.pdf> Domestic tourism statistics in Georgia 2024. <https://www.geostat.ge/media/68706/Domestic-Tourism-Survey---2024.pdf> [L. s. 26.11.2025].

²⁴ As part of the research conducted in Tetrtskaro Municipality during the "Garisoba" festival, based on interviews with organizers, participants and local residents and field observations. September 12, 2018. (Within the framework of the CIF grant)

²⁵ Statistical Review of Tourism in Georgia, Report, Research and Planning Department of the Georgian National Tourism Administration, 2024. [https://api.gnta.ge/storage/files/doc/saqartvelos-turizmis-statistikuri-mimokhilva 2024.pdf](https://api.gnta.ge/storage/files/doc/saqartvelos-turizmis-statistikuri-mimokhilva%2024.pdf) [L. s. 26.11.2025].

Many regions faced similar infrastructural and social challenges, but with a conceptual approach to sustainable development, they were able to transform:

Slovenia – Solčava Region: ²⁶A high-mountain village in the Slovenian Alps, initially lacking both hotels and communication infrastructure, developed an eco-rural tourism network through joint state and community efforts. This included homestays, eco-trails, and local product sales stands. Within four years, the number of visitors increased by 300%, and tourism revenues accounted for 60% of the community's total budget.²⁷

France - Small Villages in Southern Provence: Restoration of villages leveraged UNESCO heritage sites to establish routes, tourist information points, and mobile guides. Local farmers and entrepreneurs were trained by the state to convert family activities into small-scale tourism enterprises.²⁸

Georgia - Guria Region: Between 2019 and 2024, under the UNDP program, community-based tourism products (culinary, rural facilities, trails) were developed, resulting in a 2.5-fold increase in regional tourist visits and the establishment of over 30 new family-run enterprises.²⁹

The conducted research revealed that infrastructural difficulties, lack of services, information deficit and governance shortcomings are interconnected. The municipality is rich in tourism resources, but its potential is held back by systemic weaknesses. Therefore, we believe it is necessary to:

- Creating a community-based eco-tourism model
- Strengthening small cooperatives in tourism services
- Digitize information and enhance marketing positioning.
- Ensure multi-level coordination at local and national levels.

Village-based Sustainable Tourism Models Include:

1. Ecotourism - Objective: Conservation of natural resources, raising environmental awareness, and engaging local communities.

Social Inclusion: Locals participate in managing tourist routes, guiding services, and eco-tourism farms.

Regional harmony: nature protection and tourism infrastructure development that contributes to the balanced development of the local economy.

2. Social Tourism- Focus: Direct interaction with the local community and social engagement. Which includes the following directions:

Rural Life Simulation: Visitors spend time with local families (e.g., in the villages of Namtvriani with Mrs. Tina and Mr. Archil, where we personally visited), participating in daily activities such as crop cultivation, animal care, field walks, and listening to village stories.

Sharing Traditions and Rituals: Guests experience ancient village customs, table manners, local festivals, and spiritual practices.

Guests participate in creative activities such as weaving, woodcraft, and preparing local recipes, becoming actively involved in cultural and daily life processes.

Social Programs: Youth and women are involved in tourism as guides, cooks, or artisans, increasing their economic and social engagement.

3. Creative Tourism.

In this study, creative tourism is focused on the following areas: experiences of local culture, art, and innovation.

²⁶ Municipality Solčava. <https://www.stat.si/obcine/en/Municip/Index/> [L. s. 26.11.2025].

²⁷ Solčava is a harmony of three valleys. Solčava, an ancient village on the threshold of boundless beauty, <https://www.logarska-solcavsko.si/en/solcava-is-a-harmony-of-three-valleys/> [L. s. 15.10.2025].

²⁸ Découvrez d'autres lieux du Geopark, <https://www.unesco.org/en/igpp/haute-provence-unesco-global-geopark?> [L. s. 28.11.2025].

²⁹ UNDP Georgia Annual Report 2024. <https://www.undp.org/georgia/press-releases/tea-route-sea-mountains> [L. s. 28.11.2025]

Graphic and Photographic Tours: Guests photograph village landscapes, houses, daily life, and handicrafts, or create artwork inspired by traditional motifs.

Culinary Experience: Guests prepare Tushetian dishes (e.g., garlic khinkali, Erbo cheese, Chkhapi), taste local meals, and receive guidance from hosts.

Vocal and Musical Sessions: Introduce local folk songs and instruments, with visitor participation in singing or dancing.

Narrative and Historical Excursions: Local storytellers (e.g., Tina and Uncle Archil) narrate legends and village history, making visitors active participants in the storytelling process.

- **Integrated Innovative Product.** It is recommended that villages create a "cultural innovation package" that includes:
- Emulation of rural life (Social Tourism)
- Culinary trainings and preparation of local dishes (Creative Tourism).
- Introduction to handicrafts, weaving, and woodworking.
- Narrative tours focusing on village history, legends, and cultural heritage.
- Integrated guide and taste experiences, positioning the visitor as an authentic "cultural participant."

Conclusion

Based on the research, it is evident that tourism development in Tetrtskaro Municipality represents not only an economic factor but also a key driver of social and cultural development. The area is rich in natural, historical-cultural, and ethnographic resources, the effective utilization of which can enhance the well-being of local communities and ensure employment stability. However, existing challenges - including underdeveloped infrastructure, limited access to financial resources, a shortage of professional personnel, and the absence of a local marketing strategy - necessitate a targeted and comprehensive approach.

In this regard, the proposed considerations for the strategic development of employment and income stability define four main directions:

First - Support for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs): This involves financing family-run hotels, agro-tourism farms, and wine tourism facilities. This direction is directly linked to job creation and the promotion of economic diversification. Particular importance is given to integrating farmers and startups into tourism services, providing them with additional income and enhancing the visibility of local products in the market.

Second - Development of Ecotourism and Environmental Components: Establishing eco-trails, placing informational boards, training guides, and implementing small-scale infrastructure will contribute to the sustainability of the tourism product and the protection of natural resources. By adhering to environmental standards, tourism will not become a source of ecological threats but will instead promote responsible engagement with the natural environment.

Third - Infrastructure and Social Development: Improvements in transportation, roads, internet connectivity, and service centers provide support both for the local population and incoming tourist flows. Investments in education, healthcare, and cultural sectors strengthen human capital. Moreover, the introduction of professional education and training programs in tourism and hospitality ensures the development of qualified personnel, which will enhance the sector's competitiveness in the long term.

Fourth - Tourism Marketing and Branding: Tetrtskaro's unique natural and cultural heritage provides a foundation for establishing a strong regional brand capable of competing in the market. Properly planned and executed marketing campaigns will attract both international and domestic tourists. Additionally, organizing festivals and narrative tours (ethno-narrative, historical, wine-related) will not only diversify the tourist experience but also preserve and promote local traditions.

It is noteworthy that this strategy envisages the involvement of the local community and the strengthening of the economic role of women and youth.

The following results are expected as a result of implementing the above considerations in practice:

- Creation of new employment opportunities and ensuring employment stability.
- Increased income and economic diversification for local communities.
- Enhanced participation of women and youth in economic activities.
- Tourism development in accordance with environmental standards.
- Improvement of infrastructure and social services.
- Preservation and promotion of local culture and traditions.
- Increased recognition of Tetrtskaro as a tourist destination.

In conclusion, it can be said that the proposed actions of this strategic development serve not only individual tourism projects, but also the strengthening of the social and economic stability of the municipality as a whole.

Ultimately, the successful implementation of these considerations will ensure the establishment of a sustainable tourism model that simultaneously takes into account economic, social and environmental interests. This model will contribute to the well-being of the local community, increase the long-term development prospects of the municipality, and make the Tetrtskaro region a more important and attractive place on the Georgian tourism map.

At the same time, the establishment of a Destination Management Organization (DMO) is essential, ensuring the coordination of interests and efforts among all stakeholders - local authorities, businesses, the community, and state institutions. The DMO will be responsible for formulating a strategic vision, developing tourism products, implementing marketing and branding campaigns, and establishing quality standards. Such an organization will enable the municipality to systematically manage existing resources, prevent fragmented and uncoordinated actions, and support the implementation of innovative projects.

The existence of a DMO in the Tetrtskaro Municipality will not only increase the efficiency and competitiveness of tourism, but will also guarantee that the sustainable development strategy will actually be implemented in practice.

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