

Chapter 7

The Politics of Urban Recovery in a Soviet-era Spa Resort Town: Heritage Tourism and Displaced Communities in Tskaltubo, Georgia

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Introduction

In February 2018, the Georgian Ministry of Culture proposed placing fourteen spa resort buildings in the small town of Tskaltubo on a national heritage protection list (Department of Cultural Heritage, 2018). Spanning the early decades of the 20th century Stalinist era (1928-1953), the buildings reflect a unique moment in the history of the town and are indicative of the spread of vacation culture around restorative health in the Soviet Union more broadly. After decades of physical deterioration and partial closure, the town's historic bathhouses and hotels (called *sanatoria*¹, as shown in figures 1, 2, and 3), were again being positioned for tourism, recalling the town's zenith as one of the most sought-after balneological² destinations in the Soviet Union. Throughout the Soviet era, the landscape of the Caucasus mountains around the eastern Black Sea had been a particularly lively destination for restorative health (in Russian: *otdykh*). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the tourist industry faltered, leaving behind thousands of unused guest rooms and resort facilities.

In the Fall of 1992—less than a year and a half after the Soviet Union's collapse—the sanatoria of Tskaltubo were again being filled with new inhabitants. This time, it was thousands

¹ A *Sanatorium* (*sanatoria*, pl.) is a rest house for patients receiving treatment in bathhouses.

² *Balneology* is bathing in natural spring water to ameliorate or treat physical ailments. The degree of its efficacy remains scientifically contested.

of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) seeking refuge from conflict in the nearby secessionist region of Abkhazia. Almost three decades after their arrival, Tskaltubo's resort facilities remain the protracted de-facto homes of many who were displaced, taking on adapted uses as residential buildings and places for community interaction (figure 4). Built in the mid-20th century, these buildings have now equally spent their lives as resort complexes and spaces of humanitarian shelter. As sites of dual memory, they embody the divergent histories of tourists and IDPs, while further reflecting the politico-economic upheavals that caused this transition in history.

Considering current government efforts toward Tskaltubo's urban recovery, this chapter discusses the complex dynamics of promoting heritage tourism in areas occupied by vulnerable populations. As has been demonstrated in other geographic contexts, a market-based approach to heritage that operates by selectively framing the past for tourism risks doing so at the expense of present-day inhabitants (Timothy, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). In the specific case of Tskaltubo, marketing for heritage tourism has omitted decades of IDP inhabitation, framing their presence instead as an aberration. Tskaltubo thus mirrors other global examples of development-induced evictions and displacement brought about by heritage tourism. Despite claims by the Georgian government to be effectively managing the re-settlement of IDPs, there has yet to be proper community engagement or public consultations. This stands in contrast to extensive state tourism feasibility studies and heritage assessments. By recounting the specifics of the government initiatives to manage urban renewal and re-settlement in Tskaltubo, we demonstrate how the welfare of the displaced has been compromised in favor of other state political and economic priorities.

Using data gathered through eight focus groups, in this work we further aim to give voice to the often-overlooked local resident and IDP populations. We show how government aspirations

for a revival of the town's Soviet era prosperity are generating complacency toward IDP eviction and re-settlement. For IDPs that have continued to face social stigmatization and poor living conditions, the state's promises of new purpose-built housing and employment are additionally driving eviction complacency. As the testimonies of IDPs who have already been re-settled demonstrate, however, these promises have been overstated: IDPs continue to suffer from physical isolation and a lack of social integration. Likewise, Tskaltubo continues to experience poor employment prospects. The three sanatoria vacated in 2012 as part of initial urban renewal efforts have also fallen short on their promises, remaining vacant and un-renovated. The likelihood that heritage tourism will improve IDP livelihoods in Tskaltubo thus remains questionable.

This chapter begins with a brief case description, providing an overview of Tskaltubo's changing history since its establishment as a Soviet resort town in the 1920s. We look at the growth of resort tourism during the Soviet era (1953-1990), a period when many bathhouses and sanatoria were constructed and when the town reached its zenith as a destination for restorative health activities. The demise of Soviet tourism and the arrival of IDPs in the early 1990s is then contextualized relative to the production of almost thirty years of alternative local history. We situate the concept of alternative local histories relative to literature examining heritage as the select framing of the past and discuss how heritage promotion has increasingly come together with displacement in recent decades. How Tskaltubo's history is now being selectively reframed through tourism promotion—and how IDPs are being faced with evictions in order to realize this vision—is then covered. Looking at community reactions to this process, we draw specific attention to how members of both Tskaltubo's local and IDP community hope to find prosperity through a return of the town's resort identity. Overall, we argue that the government's use of heritage tourism as a catalyst for urban recovery is erasing the town's unique past as a place of

humanitarian shelter for Georgian IDPs. With the commodification of local heritage, Tskaltubo's complex layers of history are at risk of erasure.

The History of Georgia's Largest Balneological Resort Town

As the etymology of Tskaltubo suggests (*cqali*= water, *tubo*=warm)³, the town has deep ties to its geographic location above natural radon-carbonated springs. While records dating back to the 12th century describe the town's unique mineral water legacy, it was only after comprehensive scientific analyses by Russian chemist Genrykh Vasilyevich Struve in 1889 that the water's medical qualities were verified (Shavianidze, Shavianidze, & Shavianidze, 1990). As a result of Struve's findings, bathing in Tskaltubo's spring water grew into an established form of medical self-treatment. Reports in late-19th century Georgian newspapers describe local travelers making their way to the area to relieve their arthritic pains, bathing in the natural hot springs (as mentioned in: Citlanadze, 1950).

In the first decade of the 20th century, these practices expanded and Tskaltubo came to enjoy mild popularity among local holidaymakers. Purpose-built bath facilities, including the area's first four historic bathhouses were then developed in the 1910s (Shavianidze et al., 1990). In 1920, the government of the Georgian Democratic Republic (GDR)⁴ declared Tskaltubo an officially-designated resort location for hosting and treating wounded military servicemen (Lort'kip'anize, 1920). Development of the resort sector was then accelerated by a 1931 decree of

³ The meaning of *Tskaltubo* as the place for warm water has its origins in Mingrelian, a Kartvelian language which has been spoken in the area for centuries.

⁴ The Georgian Democratic Republic was a short-lived state entity which emerged as the result of Russian Empire's retreat from the Caucasus region after World War I. In 1921, GDR was then annexed by Soviet Russia and in 1922 it was incorporated into the Soviet Union as the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (GSSR).

the Supreme Council of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (GSSR) on establishing balneological resorts across Georgia (Babunashvili, 2018). Tskaltubo's 1936 development plan envisioned a centrally located, lush park space housing ten mineral water baths. Other medical facilities, including 22 sanatoria, were planned for the nearby hills (figure 5).⁵ In 1953, the status of Tskaltubo was elevated from 'agricultural village' to 'urban settlement' and it was awarded the title of an all-Union resort town⁶ (National agency for cultural heritage preservation of Georgia, 2017).

The legacy of Tskaltubo as a spa resort town continued to expand throughout the second half of the 20th century. Between 1950-1977, eleven new sanatoria were constructed, completing the town's master plan. In the 1980s, the town reached peak operations, welcoming some 125,000 guests annually (Shavianidze et al., 1990). There were 5,800 available guest beds and it was common to reach more than 80% occupancy (ibid.) The sanatoria's natural settings provided respite from work in factories, mines, or service in the military (figure 6). Some of Tskaltubo's primary sanatoria were designed exclusively to serve Soviet ministries, trade unions, and members of the KGB (*Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti*, or Committee for State Security). These sanatoria were administered through the all-Union institutions that coordinated employment in the USSR, with employees being assigned subsidized vacation passes (*putevki*) for access.

⁵ Tskaltubo's radial urban development was the brainchild of Tbilisi-based architect, Nikolay Pavlovich Severov. Severov's ideas were then influential to Tskaltubo's first comprehensive masterplan by Ioseb Zaalishvili and Vakhtang Kedia in 1950-1951. This later plan established new land use rules and divided the territory into balneological, sanatoria, and residential zones (Shavianidze, Shavianidze, & Shavianidze, 1990). The impact of these divisions can still be felt today, with the sanatoria being largely isolated from the other spaces of the community.

⁶ The term all-Union resort (*Vsesoyuznaya Zdravnica*) denoted a resort complex which hosted guests from all over the Soviet Union, and had sanatoriums allocated to the Union's central government entities, for instance, ministries or trade unions in Moscow.

The local population also tremendously benefited from Tskaltubo's era of spa resort prosperity. Beyond employment opportunities and access to the town's lush parks, locals enjoyed the honor and prestige that came with their town being recognized across the Soviet Union.⁷ According to the last Soviet census of 1989, Tskaltubo's population had reached 21,000—a fivefold increase in half a century—overwhelmingly linked to the booming spa resort industry. For residents, this period in the town's history is recalled with great fondness as one of economic prosperity and international notoriety⁸.

The Collapse of Tourism and Arrival of Internally Displaced Persons

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought tremendous shocks to the political and economic functioning of Georgia, in turn greatly transforming Tskaltubo's resort industry. Seemingly overnight, guests stopped arriving and those in-residence went home. State employees of the resorts were no longer paid and ceased to come to work; the many bathhouse and sanatoria were closed and locked-up (Local focus group, Women, 45+; Babunashvili, 2018). The political, economic and social instability of Georgia in the 1990s ensured that tourism did not return in the same magnitude the town had seen previously. With all nine of the official bathhouses closed and all 22 of the sanatoria out of operation in the 1990s, it was no longer possible to receive professional balneological treatment. The minimal remaining tourist activity shifted toward small-scale guest houses, which were managed by residents who rented out spare rooms, generally to the few guests continuing to visit from within Georgia and neighboring Azerbaijan. By 2002, the population of the town had shrunk by 20% relative to 1989 (Bespiatov, 2018). Twelve years later,

⁷ As mentioned in two focus groups with local residents: Men 45+ and Women 45+.

⁸ As mentioned in two focus groups with local residents: Men 45+ and Women 45+.

in 2014, the town's population was even lower at roughly 11,000 people, or only 46% of what it had been in 1989 (ibid.). Once a booming epicenter of Soviet tourism, Tskaltubo fell into decline, mirroring economic hardships in other former Soviet mono-towns.

Exacerbating the politico-economic struggles of the collapse of the Soviet Union were Georgia's geopolitical issues, experienced most acutely in its two secessionist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which unilaterally declared independence in 1991 and 1992 respectively. Ethnic conflict in Abkhazia between 1992-1993 produced some 251,000 IDPs, mainly ethnic Georgians (Kurshitashvili, 2012), roughly 8,000 of which arrived in Tskaltubo in search of temporary refuge in the now-vacant sanatoria. In the Fall of 1993, all but the highly securitized Georgian Ministry of Defense sanatorium had been allocated by the government to house IDPs: a total of 21 resort facilities.⁹ The arrival of IDPs altered Tskaltubo's socio-economic composition and introduced new social hardships in the faltering post-independence economy. Although IDPs are culturally, ethnically, and linguistically identical to other Georgians, their loss of personal assets and resultant poverty, as well as their origins from a different geographic region, meant that they often faced discrimination (Brun, 2015, 2017; Kabachnik, Grabowska, Regulska, Mitchneck, & Mayorova, 2013; Mitchneck, Mayorova, & Regulska, 2009). IDPs were also physically isolated in the hillside sanatoria, originally designed to offer remoteness away from the town's central spaces. The IDPs' physical isolation ensured lower levels of daily contact with local residents and turned them into a distinct, socially-isolated community (Gogishvili & Harris-Brandts, 2019).¹⁰

⁹ The remaining Georgian Ministry of Defense sanatorium was prevented from IDP use due to its state security affiliations.

¹⁰ Over the decades, this changed gradually and IDPs became more integrated with the local community. As of 1994, IDP children were transferred into the same schools and kindergartens as local children. IDPs also came to participate more in local employment and commercial activities, which ensured their further societal mixing. According to a survey conducted by Tbilisi State University

Because the sanatoria housed IDPs, they were not privatized by the state during the widespread neoliberal market reforms that took place in the 1990s and 2000s.¹¹ Instead, they were converted into government owned and administered IDP Collective Centers.¹² In efforts to establish some semblance of a local life, IDPs began augmenting the sanatoria to support their needs—sometimes to dramatic degrees—including the addition or removal of walls, the enclosure of balconies, and the installation of utilities. Tremendous effort was required on behalf of the IDPs to render the sanatoria suitable for long-term residential habitation. Absent state resources in the first decade of Georgia’s independence meant that IDPs were overwhelmingly left to rely on intermittent support from aid agencies, local residences, and their own community ingenuity. Many IDPs survived by taking up sustenance farming, a practice that transformed the once-formal sanatoria gardens into domestic agricultural spaces (figure 7). Chickens and small livestock began roaming the parks formerly frequented by vacationing KGB servicemen.

Over the course of three decades (1992-present), Tskaltubo’s IDPs constructed a new identity for the sanatoria, shaping them to meet their daily needs. While some humanitarian aid was available, it rarely addressed deteriorating building conditions, placing this burden on IDPs. Although officially the state claimed to be doing everything within its capacity to address the IDP

in 2013, IDPs housed in sanatoria considered themselves as “integrated” and “adapted” with the locals, underscoring the change in their local place attachments over the last quarter century (see also: Salukvadze, Sichinava, & Gogishvili, 2013).

¹¹ Unlike the sanatoria, the bathhouses in the center of Tskaltubo were privatized by the state following independence. From 1996, the majority of these facilities have been owned by the Georgian company, JSC Balneoservisi (National Public Registry of Georgia, 2016), although only bathhouses #1, 2, 3, and 6 are in operation. Bathhouse 6 was rehabilitated and re-opened in 1999, whereas Bathhouse 3 was re-opened in 2001 (Babunashvili, 2018).

¹² A collective Centre in Georgia can be defined as a formerly-residential or non-residential building where IDPs were settled temporarily (Salukvadze et al., 2013). There were over one thousand Collective Centres (CCs) for IDPs established across Georgia in the 1990s and 2000s (ibid.).

crisis (Saakashvili, 2009b), keeping IDPs in ill-suited shelters had deeper political utility in that it bolstered government arguments for their right-of-return—a process linked to re-establishing Georgia’s territorial integrity (Kabachnik, Mitchneck, & Regulska, 2015). During this time, the state focused more on highlighting the humanitarian crisis of IDPs for geopolitical reasons than on effectively integrating them into local society. Until the late 2000s, the removal of IDPs from collective centers was therefore a slow and unsystematic process (Brun, 2015, 2017; Gogishvili & Harris-Brandts, 2019; Kabachnik et al., 2015; Koch, 2015). Re-settlement or monetary compensation was limited to buildings holding strong real estate value through state privatization. These efforts focused on property investment potential, rather than improving IDP welfare.

In 2007, following much local and international criticism (Amnesty International, 2011; Brooks, 2011; Civil Georgia, 2011; UNHCR, 2009), the Georgian government finally developed an official state strategy for housing IDPs (“The State Strategy for Internally Displaced Persons—IDPs”) (Government of Georgia, 2007). After several amendments (and complications caused by the arrival of new IDPs¹³), it began implementation in May 2010. Among other provisions, the strategy intended to abolish collective centers through privatization to IDPs, or by moving IDPs out of the collective centers “having special significance to the state” into new purpose-built residential buildings (Government of Georgia, 2007). The re-settlement process was not always voluntary and in some instances collective centers were vacated by riot police using excessive force (Human Rights Watch, 2011, 2012).¹⁴

¹³ During the five-day Russo-Georgian War of August 2008, there was a renewal of hostilities in and around the border of South Ossetia and in the Kodori Gorge of Abkhazia, resulting in an increase in the number of IDPs by 26,000 (Amnesty International, 2010).

¹⁴ As of 2019, IDPs continue to be re-settled across the country.

In December 2010, these resettlement efforts arrived in Tskaltubo. A wave of new apartment blocks were constructed in the town itself, as well as in the larger Georgian cities of Batumi and Poti (Gogidze & Ryan, 2011). Upon the completion of these apartments in 2011, 732 IDPs living at the Meshakhte, Tsiskari and Iveria Sanatoria (Civil Registry Agency, 2010) were evicted and resettled (Heinrich Boell Foundation Bureau in the South Caucasus, 2011). The residents largely vacated peacefully; their complacency driven partially by the state's promises of better housing and the town's future economic prosperity.

At the same time, their resettlement caused much social impact on the IDPs community since they were so widely distributed across Georgia during such efforts. This detrimentally dismantled community relations, deteriorated decades of IDP social fabric, and severed existing IDP economic networks. For the town of Tskaltubo, the result was equally unfavorable in that many sanatoria simply stood empty, despite their privatization. Public spaces and schools also sat under-capacity and local shops lost revenues.¹⁵ One local resident said: "if these sanatoria were going to just sit empty, then the government should have simply allowed IDPs to stay."¹⁶

(Re)constructing a "Correct" Heritage Narrative

Various scholars have described the commodification of architectural heritage for tourism purposes, outlining how this process can result in the select re-telling of history (Alsayyad, 2013; G. Ashworth, Graham, and Tunbridge, 2007; G. J. Ashworth and Tunbridge, 2000; G. Ashworth and Larkham, 2013; Page and Mason, 2004; Sack, 1992; Waitt, 2000). AlSayyad (2013) notes that "in today's world, where the global heritage industry reigns supreme, the notion of authenticity has

¹⁵ As mentioned in three focus groups with local residents: Men 18-45 and 45+, and Women 18-45.

¹⁶ As mentioned in the focus group with local residents: Women 18-45

sometimes been cut completely loose from its moorings: the image of the thing may now actually replace the thing itself” (Alsayyad, 2013, p. 25). This is especially the case when there has been a long break in the timeline between when the site established its prominence and when it was acknowledged as heritage. When heritage is identified for its potential as an economic resource and catalyst for urban regeneration, buildings are assigned value not in accordance with their contemporary significance to local society, but on state politico-economic terms. The overwhelming use of heritage to bolster the economy means that rather than a testament of the past, “heritage is a contemporary commodity purposefully created to satisfy contemporary consumption” (G. Ashworth, 2013, p. 16).

Concerns over the impacts of heritage tourism on representations of local history stem not only from the risks of essentializing and fetishizing local cultures, but also from omitting minority narratives. The omission of such narratives becomes especially problematic when heritage is used to support a version of the past which is politicized (Timothy, 2007c). In reality, “[n]ot only does heritage have many uses but it also has multiple producers, both public–private, official–non-official and insider–outsider, each having varied and multiple objectives in the creation and management of heritage” (G. Ashworth et al., 2007, p. 2 See also: Ashworth and Graham, 2005). This dissonance in heritage should be understood as intrinsic to its production and market commodification, since “[e]xpressing one’s heritage invariably means that another, different identification with the past is disinherited, excluded, or degraded” (Dwyer and Alderman, 2008, p. 172).

More than simply putting the past on display, the refurbishment of historic sites for tourism is therefore a practice which is *place altering*, disrupting daily routines and reconstructing spaces in order to fabricate an historic image of an environment that is constantly changing. While

heritage can provide familiarity with the past and function as a form of validation and belonging for communities feeling overlooked by society, it can also involve a problematic rejection of both the present and more immediate histories (Lowenthal, 1998, 2015). In this process, certain contemporary events are perceived as “flaws” or “anomalies” and their protagonists (such as the displaced) cast out from memory. Attempting to define what constitutes a “correct” heritage is typically the purview of society’s powerful and wealthy, risking skewed accounts of history (Atkinson, 2005; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Timothy, 2007c). As place meanings are manipulated to cater to heritage tourism demands, economic profit dominates over historical accuracy, erasing important layers of collective memory.

The intrinsic subjectivity and normative nature of heritage designations has been well argued and demonstrated in a variety of global contexts (Alsayyad, 2013; G. Ashworth et al., 2007; G. Ashworth and Larkham, 2013; Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge, 2000; Page and Mason, 2004). That heritage should be considered only that which has historic provenience has further been contested, with authors demonstrating the value of other forms of cultural practice and commemoration (Eriksen, 2001; Smith, 2006; Smith and Waterton, 2012; Wiley, 2014). In the face of calls to see the definition of heritage expanded to recognize more intangible, lived, and hybrid cultural expressions, a growing body of critical scholarship has emerged since the 1990s (e.g.: Eriksen, 2001; Graham et al., 2000; Keough, 2011; Lumley, 2004; Smith and Akagawa, 2008). In line with this work, urban scholars Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hilal have coined the term “Refugee Heritage,” arguing for the acknowledgement of the unique forms of culture practiced by displaced communities in their places of humanitarian shelter (Petti and Hilal, 2017). Looking specifically at stateless Palestinian refugees, they raise important questions about whether a life

lived in exile deserves commemoration as its own distinct form of cultural heritage—a question equally relevant for Tskaltubo’s IDPs in the face of urban recovery.

In conditions of protracted displacement, communities may spend years or decades formulating histories in exile—histories that are deeply intertwined with their places of humanitarian shelter. Since much scholarly work has shown how place meanings are linked to the ongoing formation of collective identity (Dreier, Mollenkopf, and Swanstrom, 2001; Dwyer and Alderman, 2008; Giesecking, Mangold, Katz, Low, and Saegert, 2014; Low and Altman, 1992; Manzo and Devine-Wright, 2013; Rodman, 1992), it follows that displaced communities also have profound impacts on the environments of their host communities. In such instances, a recognition of “heritage from below”—a heritage that “can function as cultural resources for counter hegemonic expressions” (Robertson, 2016, p. 1) —can work to counter the social inequality of state-led heritage campaigns, and can draw attention to the alternative histories of displaced communities. In thinking about how to acknowledge and preserve cultural value through heritage tourism, such scholarship raises important questions about whose culture should be preserved and which periods of history carry priority.

Heritage Promotion Meets Displacement

Heritage promotion has also been shown to have an uneasy relationship with displacement (Bloch, 2016; Chirikure, Manyanga, Ndoro, & Pwiti, 2010; Ghaidan, 2008; Herscher & Monk, 2015; Herzfeld, 2006; Shepherd, 2013). Bloch (2016) describes the community hardship that resulted from heritage promotion in Hampi, India, where the government evicted local residents in order to restore sites linked to the Vijayanagara Kingdom (1336–1646) in pursuit of UNESCO World Heritage status and greater tourism. In 2011, mass evictions began in Hampi, with properties being demolished to stage the historic glory of the fortifications, palaces, and places of

worship that were once found at this medieval Hindu capital. Bloch argues that removing residents from their dwellings “was preceded by stigmatizing them in a heritage discourse shared by archaeologists, political authorities, religious leaders, and journalists” (Bloch, 2016, p. 574). The inhabitation of the site by villagers was thus described as “unnatural” and a deviation from India’s “authentic” ancient history, standing in the way of the state’s contemporary legitimacy and economy prosperity.

Along similar lines, Shepherd (2013) tells of how tourism to the sacred Buddhist site of Wutai Shan in China led to community displacement and the select re-telling of history. In efforts to resist eviction, the Taihuai residents of Wutai Shan put forward a petition, arguing for “their own place in this community as both the builders and defenders of religious sites” (Shepherd, 2013, p. 103). The petition asserts that “world heritage actually hurts the interests of common people and thus social development” (ibid.) Likewise, Caftanzoglou (2000, 2001) recounts evictions in Anafiotika below the Greek Acropolis, Arthurs (2013) describes Mussolini’s destruction of the Marforio quarter in Rome, and Herzfeld (2006) shows the forced removal of residents from sites across contemporary Bangkok. Herzfeld argues that such evictions “are representative of an overall pattern whereby theme parks, partially made up of ancient materials but heavily restored and refurbished to suit modern ideas about the past, come to replace densely populated areas and in turn create growing zones of disaffected and displaced people” (Herzfeld, 2006, p. 132).

In a particularly stark example of heritage tourism driving displacement, Herscher and Monk (2015) describe the transformation of the walled citadel of Erbil, Iraq, which began conversion in 2006. This led to the removal of 840 Iraqi refugee and IDP families. Identified by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as “the longest

continuously inhabited site in the world,” the Kurdistan regional government hoped to extract tourism value from the regeneration of the citadel. The authors draw attention to the overwhelming irony of the initiative, in which “the citadel, which historically functioned as a place of refuge, could be institutionalized as historic architecture only by cleansing it of contemporary refugees” (Herscher and Monk, 2015, p. 71). That these individuals were twice-displaced underscores the vulnerability of IDP and refugee communities which frequently lack (or are unaware of) their legal rights, including tenure security, and who are often forced to find temporary shelter in abandoned property. The global rise of conflict-induced displacement has meant that displacement is also becoming more urban and protracted (United Nations, 2018). Because of these trends, deteriorated properties (including vacant heritage sites) are more often coming to provide humanitarian shelter for vulnerable communities for periods of years and even decades. These groups then risk secondary displacement when local economies improve and governments identify untapped heritage value.

The Reframing of Tskaltubo’s History Through Urban Recovery

A crucial component to facilitating urban renewal in Tskaltubo was the state’s establishment of a new dominant heritage narrative. The town was presented not as a place undergoing multiple phases of change—each with equal import—but as long awaiting its return to a former spa resort glory. This nostalgic narrative had precedents elsewhere in Georgia. Prior to the government urban renewal of Tskaltubo, in the mid-2000s re-development projects had begun in Georgia’s two largest cities of Tbilisi and Batumi. In these locations, IDPs had also been evicted as a part of urban renewal, under the banner of fostering Georgia’s burgeoning hospitality sector, improving the country’s international image, and supporting nation building. In Tbilisi, the centrally located Hotel Iveria and Hotel Adjara exemplified this process, where in the mid-2000s,

IDPs were forcibly removed. Following the renovation of the Hotel Iveria in 2009 (becoming the Radisson Blu), then-President Mikheil Saakashvili spoke at the inauguration, highlighting that the transformed property was “a symbol of new Georgia...[and of] fulfilled promises” (Saakashvili, 2009a). He sidestepped the contentiousness that had surrounded the IDP eviction process (Media Diversity Institute, 2004) while implicitly framing the presence of IDPs as unnatural and a hindrance to the country’s prosperity (Manning, 2009).

Such rhetoric then became particularly effective in Tskaltubo, where the government promoted an urban renewal narrative of heritage tourism based on the glory of the town’s past, while also downplaying the impact of IDPs on its more recent history. When mentioning Tskaltubo in speeches and news statements, Saakashvili framed the town as “the most famous tourist destination in the former Soviet Union” (Saakashvili, 2010, 2012a) and an untapped tourist hub for Europe. In a 2012 news interview outside the Meshakhte sanatorium, Saakashvili highlighted how the town’s rehabilitation would bring new prosperity to the local community (Saakashvili, 2012b). Optimistically, he claimed that all Tskaltubo’s sanatoria would soon have new owners and that the town would boast 100% employment (*ibid.*). The site of Meshakhte would be home to Eastern Europe’s best sanatorium (*ibid.*). Television crews focused on unique architectural details and the president’s promises that investors would “build the best hotels in the world,” including an InterContinental (Saakashvili, 2012b). In other speeches, when IDPs were briefly mentioned by the president, they were framed as aberrations in Georgia’s “correct” history (Saakashvili, 2011). Through such rhetoric and selective heritage, both locals and IDPs were persuaded that the town’s history could only be celebrated following the removal of IDPs, and that such a removal would bring back Tskaltubo’s former prosperity and notoriety. IDPs were additionally promised

improved social standing, better living conditions, and/or monetary compensation in their new purpose-built residential buildings.

In government efforts toward Tskaltubo's urban renewal, in 2014 a feasibility study was commissioned which resulted in the "Technical Proposal for the Tskaltubo Resort Development" (JSC Partnership Fund and Kohl & Partner Ltd., 2014), including market and location analyses, competition analyses, and a tourism strategy. In total, the Saakashvili government planned to allocate \$90 million USD (200 million GEL) from the state budget for Tskaltubo's urban renewal (Sukhiashvili, 2015).¹⁷ The decision to frame Tskaltubo as "Eastern Europe's premium spa destination" came out of this marketing research, which demonstrated that the town would have a hard time competing directly with Western Europe's top balneological locations (Danelia, 2018). Instead, it would more successfully garner nostalgia from former Soviet countries already familiar with such facilities (ibid.). The target tourist audience was thus those with fond memories of Tskaltubo during its zenith in the 1960-1980s. For urban renewal to be effective, government officials felt it was important that the town's branding play-up these positive memories while moving away from affiliations with more recent conflict and displacement, topics likely to deter tourists. Particularly for local Georgian tourists, reminders of the country's geopolitical instability and protracted internal displacement stood in contrast to notions of relaxation, restorative health, and wellness.

¹⁷ The process of Tskaltubo's rehabilitation was further supplemented by a new World Bank project which was done through its cooperation with Georgia's Municipal Development Fund (MDF). In November 2012, the Municipal Development Fund of Georgia, with funding from the World Bank, started to implement its Second Regional Development Project, which intended to "improve infrastructural services...to support increased contribution of tourism in the local community" (World Bank, 2012).

In fabricating an image of Tskaltubo's heritage tourism offerings, the state, tour operators, and property developers therefore carefully branded the town only in relation to its historic provenance as a Soviet era resort destination, leaving out its IDP history. While it is rare for Georgia to celebrate aspects of its Soviet past, in this instance, the incredible former prominence of the town and the dramatic effect of the sanatoria's neo-classical buildings have led to an exception. Tourism advertising highlighted Tskaltubo's pedigree as a place once designed to house the prominent bathhouses of Joseph Stalin (figure 8), as well as where one can access the best in 21st century balneological treatment (ArtMedia, 2018).

The government's two-decade, multi-phase initiative planned to transform Tskaltubo likewise focused on amplifying its resort identity (JSC Partnership Fund & Kohl & Partner Ltd., 2014). As with the president's speeches, these proposed initiatives left out the history of IDPs and a sense of their formulation of a local community. The technical proposal recognizes that "[t]he problem with the IDPs has to be resolved" and that "[t]here are different possibilities in town or more outside of the resort" (JSC Partnership Fund and Kohl & Partner Ltd., 2014, p. 198). Yet, how specifically this will be accomplished is not divulged. IDPs were also not consulted during the technical proposal process. Framing IDPs as a "problem" further speaks to this selective framing of history.

Hope Drives Complacency: Garnering Community Support for IDP Eviction

The effectiveness of government efforts toward establishing a new dominant heritage narrative for Tskaltubo were captured in the comments of our focus group respondents. Overwhelmingly, respondents from both IDP and resident groups viewed the promotion of

heritage tourism as positive and believed that it would bring about significant prosperity. When asked if there was a risk of negative effects in the town's urban renewal, many respondents dismissed such concerns and called for tourism to begin immediately. In the words of one resident: "I support tourism with pleasure! If [the government] improves the town, it will create jobs, and future generations will live in a beautiful place. Of course, this is great for locals and IDPs. Both will have many job opportunities" (IDP focus group, Men, 18-45). Those in favor of heritage tourism felt that beyond personal gain and improvements to their own livelihood, urban renewal would bring back the town's prestige; "Tskaltubo will be restored" (IDP focus group, Women, age 45+).

For IDP respondents who had yet to be re-settled, many felt that a new apartment would further afford them greater social respect and autonomy (IDP focus group, Women, age 45+). Moving into a new apartment would help them to shed the social stigma of displacement—a stigma to some extent developed by the government through its selective reframing of Tskaltubo's history.

While in general, focus group participants were optimistic towards the resettlement process, there were a number of informants who had already been resettled, and as a result, felt disillusioned. Although newly constructed apartments had provided them with security of tenure, these units still lacked basic utilities. Often IDPs had to do maintenance work in their new apartments before moving in: "They [the government] let us in unfinished buildings." (IDP focus group, Men, age 18-45). "[When we moved] in the newly constructed collective center, we had to take our bedding from the sanatoria" (IDP focus group, Men, 18-45).

The state's claims of new employment opportunities also appeared to be overstated: "[prior to resettlement] they promised us jobs, although these were empty words. They moved us inside

empty walls and we were given nothing in exchange... We agreed [on relocation to the seaside city of Poti] because of the new state project for a seaport. But there is ten times more poverty there. We needed to move to Poti for jobs, not for watching the sea on sunny days” (IDP focus group, Men, 18-45). In Tskaltubo, too, employment prospects have been overstated. Despite purchase clauses requiring buyers of the sanatoria to invest a certain amount of capital (~\$1-6 million) and to employ a certain number of people (~ 60-100) (Agenda.ge, 2016a, 2016b), as of 2019, all three sold properties remain vacant and have yet to offer employment opportunities. The four other partially vacated sanatoria of Savane, Piliali, Megobroba, and Imereti have also not been redeveloped (Channel One News, 2019).

Another issue was the deterioration of community networks. The government’s resettlement plans did not take into consideration existing community ties, and IDPs that formerly lived together were often assigned to entirely different localities (IDP focus group, Men, 18-45). Those IDPs evicted from Meshakhte sanatoria were allocated housing in the newly built Tamari Settlement near Batumi, 150 kilometers away from Tskaltubo. As a result of their resettlement, they have largely lost ties to the town. Focus group respondents highlighted how preserving their already formed communities would have made their lives easier and could have helped them to better adjust to their new realities. Several IDP households even left their new collective centers, either returning to the sanatoria of Tskaltubo or moving elsewhere in Georgia (IDP focus group, Men, 18-45). As a result of such experiences, some IDPs considered the resettlement process questionable and conducted solely because authorities were in a rush to lure new investors.

Five to six sanatoria were resettled immediately... they (the government) were thinking that IDPs would be an obstacle for tourists...there was no systematic plan [of resettlement and sanatoria renovation], but some investor was interested in quickly taking over these

properties. It is not because of IDPs occupying sanatoria that there is no tourism in Tskaltubo. When we arrived here [as the result of the war in Abkhazia], Tskaltubo was already malfunctioning... It is an illusion that the resettlement of IDPs will help to restore tourism in Tskaltubo (IDP focus group, Women, 45+).

Feeling completely disillusioned with the government's re-settlement process, one IDP stated: "How many times can we become displaced?! Resettlement is always the same [negative] situation for us" (IDP focus group, Women, 18-45).

Some locals, too, acknowledged that the removal of IDPs from the sanatoria had created a void in the town's collective identity: "Before [when IDPs were living in the sanatoria], you could hear them talking, there were lights on in the buildings. Now [the sanatoria] look like dungeons... Prior to resettlement, Tskaltubo's central marketplace was full of people, schools were full of children. Now the town is empty, all empty" (local focus group, Women, 18-45). The stagnation of the town's promised urban renewal projects is therefore increasingly being met with suspicion, resentment, and even nostalgia for the former life lived alongside the previous sanatoria IDPs.

Conclusion

This chapter charted the complexities of heritage tourism development in Tskaltubo where Stalinist era sanatoria are being vacated of IDPs in efforts toward urban recovery. The Georgian government's interest in Tskaltubo's formerly neglected historic buildings comes at a time when heritage preservation in the country is being undertaken in support of post-independence economic goals and nation building. The government's use of heritage for both economic and political purposes therefore has far reaching consequences for Georgia's future development trajectory. As of July 2019, the re-settlement of IDPs from Tskaltubo is still underway. Completed efforts point toward a number of shortcomings. Foremost has been the lack of community consultation and the

high degree of uncertainty regarding how exactly IDPs will benefit from the town's urban renewal efforts. The selection process for resettlement has been driven by market forces, rather than a comprehensive needs-based assessment of IDPs. This is disconcerting given the Georgian government's now three-decades of dealing with IDPs.

Despite these ambitious plans to redevelop Tskaltubo, the government faces challenges in becoming Eastern Europe's premier wellness and spa destination. Aside from investment concerns, the redevelopment may eventually be faced with opposition from residents and IDPs that have yet to see the government's promises materialize into reality. With little concrete evidence of what the full return of tourists to Tskaltubo might look like or mean both culturally and economically, the problem is not tourism re-activation per se, but the way preparatory stages are being managed by the government—particularly with regards to IDP commemoration and resettlement.

As existing research has shown, the use of heritage tourism for urban renewal in areas inhabited by vulnerable populations can have detrimental impacts, from selectively re-narrating history to forced eviction and displacement. With the surge in both critical heritage and critical tourism scholarship since the 1990s, much has been done to advance our understandings of the role of heritage as a market commodity, and to investigate how heritage production may be detrimental to local communities. However, this literature has yet to fully intersect with scholarship showing the increased prevalence and protracted nature of conflict-induced displacement in heritage sites. In areas formerly experiencing (or in close proximity to) conflict, using heritage tourism as a means of urban recovery is showing itself to be uneasily associated with secondary displacement. More than just the exploitation of these communities, urban renewal builds up hopes of economic prosperity and social integration for isolated IDP communities.

In Tskaltubo, displaced individuals inhabiting the abandoned sanatoria were framed as anomalies in the town's formerly prosperous tourist history—a framing which greatly facilitated their eviction. Despite having lived in exile in Tskaltubo for over three decades, IDPs felt that they were perceived as outsiders by fellow Georgians and that the government framed their presence as “unnatural,” even though they are Georgian citizens. They hoped that such perceptions would be ameliorated through Tskaltubo's urban renewal, which promised them greater employment and purpose-built apartments. Re-settlement would then effectively erase their toll on society, returning Tskaltubo to its narrative of resort-era prosperity. The state's propaganda for the re-activation of tourism in Tskaltubo thus not only worked to attract new *outside* tourist audiences, but additionally built up optimism within local IDP and resident communities.

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