








# Prospects of Tourism Development in Zemo Racha and Their Reflection Among the Local Society

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## Abstract

Racha is one of Georgia's stagnant historical-geographic regions, with its socio-economic problems caused by several complex natural and social factors. One of the most significant problems of the region is the critical drop in its population. One potential solution to the trend of depopulation, considering the experience of worldwide depressed mountain rural regions, could be the development of tourism. However, international experience also shows that rapid, campaign-style tourism programmes that are not based on in-depth scientific research of possible consequences might negatively impact the local community's situation – change the local community's socio-cultural system, create or deepen economic inequality, harm historical settlement and material culture, and so on. International experience demonstrates that this happens when tourist facilities are built spontaneously, and investments are implemented without considering the interests of the local community. The purpose of this study was to explore the local community's view on tourism development in the Oni Municipality of Racha. To achieve this goal, the research team used methods of surveying and interviewing the local population. The primary tool of the research was a mixed-format questionnaire containing both closed and open-ended questions. The research covered resorts and resort areas located in the Oni region, as well as settlements in prospective recreational zones. In August 2023, due to the tragedy in the Shovi resort, where a landslide caused the loss of more than 30 people and made the area unsuitable for future recreational and tourism use, it led to a considerable decrease in the number of tourists visiting Racha. However, the research shows that despite this, the locals have high hopes for the development of tourism in the municipality. This is evidenced by the opening of numerous new guesthouses. Until recently, the tourist region of Zemo Racha (resorts: Shovi, Utsera, Sortuani) was primarily focused on healing and wellness. Currently, the development of the Utsera resort is underway. An additional study of the tourist resources has shown that it is possible to establish a mountain skiing complex in Mravaldzali. The recently established national park in the municipality should stimulate the growth of ecological, adventure, and speleotourism. However, it should be noted that the local population we interviewed has limited knowledge of the national park's functions. According to the respondent's opinions, agritourism holds significant potential in the region, with several facilities already operating over the long term in the Oni Municipality.

**Keywords:** Problems of mountain areas, Racha, Oni, Tourism, Resorts of Racha, National Park of Racha.

## Introduction

Racha is one of the most challenging among Georgia's historical-geographical provinces. It is located between the main range of the Caucasus Mountains and its branches, which makes it distant from the central economic zone of the country. A large part of the territory is mountainous and highland, with only a small amount of arable land for cultivation that is relatively scarce. There is a variety of mineral resources, but their reserves are limited, which makes

extraction mostly unprofitable. There is a high unemployment rate among the locals; their incomes are limited. The population is also experiencing a critical decline (Kohler et al., 2017; Jaoshvili, 1961; Stülb & Dzhvarsheishvili, 2023).

One of the realistic ways to stop depopulation in Racha is to enhance tourism activities and improve local community incomes from the tourism sector. Zemo Racha, which is represented by the Oni municipality, holds great potential in terms of both natural and anthropogenic tourism resources. In terms of tourism expansion, it is one of the leading municipalities in the region and is a major tourist attraction centre in the country (Nadareishvili & Dzidzikashvili, 2023; Gogitidze & Nadareishvili, 2022; Gogitidze et al., 2023). Tourism development here began in the thirties of the 20th century, when the Shovi resort began operating here (Tutberidze, 2021). The significance of the Zemo Racha tourist region was determined by the natural beauty of the Central Caucasus, the region's healthy climate, and its hydro-mineral resources, widely distributed across the whole area of the region, but the springs of Shovi and Utsera were distinguished by their healing properties. Shovi, a climate-balneological resort, is located at 1,600 meters above sea level in the valley of the Chanchakhi River and surrounded by coniferous and deciduous forests. Shovi's main therapeutic factor is a healthy climate and the exceptionally long duration of sunshine (2,050 hours per year) (Kobakhidze, 1971). Including 16 mineral springs of various profiles. The catastrophic natural disaster that happened in August 2023 destroyed the resort's infrastructure, making it impossible for the resort to continue operating. The balneological-climatic resort of Utsera began operating relatively later; it's located in the Rioni River valley at 1,150 meters above sea level. Its main resort resource consists of three types of carbonated mineral waters, which are used for baths or for drinking to treat pulmonary, allergies, and gastroenterological diseases. The local population calls these waters by various names, such as "Kalc'i" water, which was bottled during the Soviet era; "Black Water"; "Naperts kala"; and the most popular one, "Gverita". Utsera's resort infrastructure is currently represented by the following facilities: the four-star hotel "Manino", a 25-room hotel in the former boarding house building, and 16 operated guesthouses. The total capacity of the accommodation facilities is up to 300 places. The Radisson chain hotel is being built on the grounds of the old sanatorium.

Close to Oni is the climate-balneological resort Sortuani, whose carbonated mineral water is used to treat arthrological, neurological, and gynaecological diseases (Legislative Herald of Georgia, 2005). There is no resort infrastructure here, but it does have some small recreational facilities that locals make use of, just like mineral water. Potential centres for health and wellness tourism include the resort areas of Bari, Skhephuri, Kvedi Lake, and Dzeglebi.

There are plenty of resources in the municipality for the development of different tourism directions: for hiking and adventure tourism – lakes (Udziro, Sakhazo), waterfalls (Tskhmori, Kvagakhetkila), caves (Usholta), and mountains (Tsonara, Katitsvera); for cultural and educational tourism – churches (Mravaldzali, St. Gabriel Archangel, the Saviour, Upper Bari Archangel, St. George of Sori), the Oni synagogue, the regional studies museum, as well as villages with historical buildings and unique defensive structures (Ghebi, Chiora). Regarding ecological tourism – the newly established Racha National Park (Chichinadze, 2021; Khakhubia et al., 2024) – for gastronomic and ethnographic tourism – traditional Rachian cuisine and festivals.

Furthermore, over the last several decades, Zemo Racha has undergone a considerable population decline (Khomeriki et al., 2022). In this regard, it is exceptional among the regions of the country. In recent decades, one of the most real ways to retain the local population is tourism development, job creation in the tourism and hospitality industry and providing employment for local people. On-site research and surveys of the local population have shown that despite the decrease in the number of visitors during the 2024 season due to the August 2023 disaster in Shovi, both the local administration and the community have great hope about tourism development in the municipality. This is also confirmed by the recent opening of many new guesthouses.

The aim of the presented research is to explore the opinions, attitudes, and interests of the local community regarding the development of tourism in the Oni municipality, as well as the local population's stance regarding tourism development.



Figure1. Shovi resort after the landslide

### *Research area*

Racha, a historical-geographical province, is located in the northeastern part of western Georgia. Administratively, it belongs to the Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti region, also known as the northern border of Georgia (Socio-Economic Geography of Georgia, 2003). To the east, it borders with the Tskhinvali region; to the west, it borders with the municipality of Ambrolauri and the municipality of Lentekhi and the Russian Federation (Kabardino-Balkarian and North Ossetia-Alania Republics); and to the south, it borders with Imereti. Racha includes the municipalities of Oni and Ambrolauri. Currently, the area of the research is Mountainous Racha - Oni Municipality. Due to its economic-geographical location, natural and socio-economic conditions, it was an isolated region for many centuries (Neidze, 2007; Jaoshvili, 1996; Mghvdeladze, 2007). For centuries, the region has been considered a powerful centre of Bronze and Iron Age culture. It was well known for its mining and metal production. The extraction and processing of iron were so important in the daily lives of the inhabitants of Tsedisi and neighbouring villages that the region came to be known as the "Sarkineti - Iron region", and those who practised this craft were known as "iron men". Administratively, it belongs to the Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti region, also known as the northern wall of Georgia (Socio-Economic Geography of Georgia, 2003). To the east, it borders with Tskhinvali region, to the west, it borders with municipality of Ambrolauri and municipality of Lentekhi and Russian Federation (Kabardino-Balkarian and North Ossetia - Alania Republics) and to the south it borders with Imereti. Racha includes the municipalities of Oni and Ambrolauri. Currently, the area of the research is Mountainous Racha - Oni Municipality. Due to its economic-geographical location, natural and socio-economic conditions, it was an isolated region for many centuries (Neidze, 2007; Jaoshvili, 1996; Mghvdeladze, 2007). For centuries, the region has been considered as a powerful center of Bronze and Iron Age culture.

### **Methods and Materials**

The research was conducted to study the opinions of individuals employed in the tourism sector on the continued development of tourism in Oni municipality. A meeting took place with Oni City Hall representatives, staff from the tourism information centre and approximately 20 respondents engaged in tourism activities were interviewed. The main method for this research selected was personal

interviewing. The study covered resorts, resort areas, and settlements within prospective recreational areas. During the field research, essential photo and video records were collected, and illustrative materials were created in the form of diagrams and maps, which are presented in the article.

The involvement of people from various villages and the range of collected materials significantly boosted the trustworthiness of the research. A more or less realistic picture of operating a tourism business has been formed. The analysis of this research provides possibilities for developing tourism in the region. In the context of the research, interviews were conducted with residents from different villages of Oni Municipality who are actively involved in the tourism business. The survey included participants in the tourism business from the villages of Utsera, Ghari, Zudali, Mravaldzali, Ghebi, Chiora, Glola and the city of Oni.

## Results

The data analysis from the field research shows that 77 percent of the respondents were women, indicating that tourism-related activities in the region, especially in the family guesthouse and hospitality sector, are mainly driven by women. This trend can be explained by social and cultural factors, as women have traditionally significant role in managing family businesses and hospitality. At the same time, Men's comparatively low participation may suggest that they are more involved in agriculture or other economic activities that require more physical effort and significant time investment. The observed dynamics suggest that gender distribution within the tourism sector reflects both the structure of the regional labor market and the traditional division of roles.

The respondents' ages range from 30 to 71, which allows for the identification of several age groups: 30.8 percent of respondents are aged 30-40, 46.2 percent are in the 41-60 age group and just 23.1 percent respondents are aged between 61 and 71 (Fig. 2). The data analysis from the field research shows that 77 percent of the respondents were women, indicating that tourism-related activities in the region, especially in the family guesthouse and hospitality sector, are mainly driven by women. This trend can be explained by social and cultural factors, as women have traditionally had a significant role in managing family businesses and hospitality. At the same time, men's comparatively low participation may suggest that they are more involved in agriculture or other economic activities that require more physical effort and significant time investment. The observed dynamics suggest that gender distribution within the tourism sector reflects both the structure of the regional labour market and the traditional division of roles.

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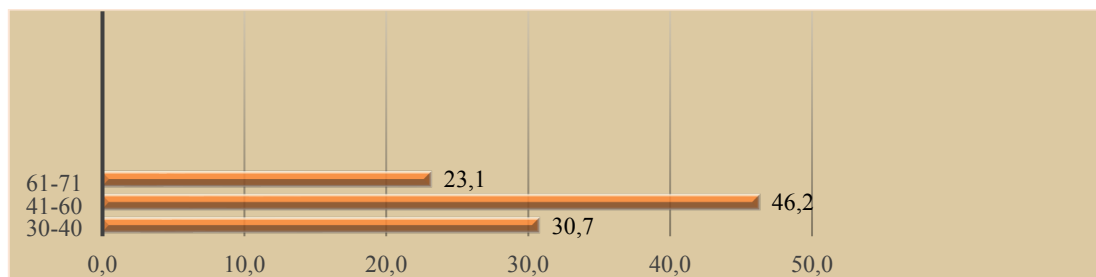


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by age groups in percentage

Analysing the age distribution of respondents indicates that a significant majority of the respondents (46.2 percent) are in the middle-aged range (41-60 years), who are actively involved in both economic and social spheres. This age group represents one of the most important segments for tourism development, as they have the required experience, resources and motivation which contributes to the sustainable growth of the sector.

The second significant group includes respondents between the ages of 30 and 40 (30.8 percent), who, due to their younger age, might bring more initiative, innovative mindset and energy. Increasing involvement and investment within this age group, both in terms of resources and knowledge, could become a vital aspect of a long-term growth strategy.

The older age group (61-71 years) represents 23.1 percent of the respondents. Despite their small numbers, this group is vital in maintaining the region's cultural heritage and transferring their



experience and knowledge. Their participation in the tourism sector forms a stable platform, which is of crucial importance for the preservation of traditional forms of local subculture.

In the tourism research process, both permanent and temporary residents' views are considered, providing an opportunity for a comprehensive and deep analysis of the community. Their varied experiences are diverse, which provides an opportunity for revealing a more complex picture of a deeper understanding of the field of tourism.

According to the research data, 85 percent of the respondents are permanent residents, which suggests that their views directly reflect both the ongoing and future challenges faced by the region. The opinions of this group significantly define the main aspects of tourism development.

As well, the views of temporary residents (15 percent) are equally significant. Although this group are less involved in the daily life of the region, they are comparatively more mobile and have international experience. Their viewpoint is equally important throughout the research process. Due to their different viewpoints, they may focus on aspects that are less visible from the permanent residents; for example, temporary residents with international experience focus on the need for multilingual staff, the development of modern tourist routes and activities, and the accessibility of internet and digital services. Which would provide the region with the opportunity to integrate more successfully into the international tourism market. This kind of approach will assist the region in better adapting to the demands of the international tourism market and integrating more effectively into global trends.

Every participant in the survey (100 percent) expressed a positive view regarding the development of tourism in Racha, which is highly important for the region's economic growth. This collective support demonstrates the local community's willingness and interest in becoming actively involved in tourism activities. Furthermore, they express a willingness to take advantage of support provided by both public and private organisations, highlighting the importance of local initiatives and investments. This kind of attitude creates a strong basis for the sustainable and successful development of tourism in the region, which could become a key factor of long-term socio-economic progress.

Based on the conducted survey, a few main trends and priority issues concerning tourism development were identified by the respondents. 76.9 percent of them highlighted the lack of financial resources, and the same percentage of respondents noted the need for staff training/retraining, while 92.3 percent identified infrastructure improvement as a key priority. All respondents (100 percent) consider it necessary that it is vital to guarantee the prevention of dangerous natural occurrences. 69.2 percent of them consider the establishment of a unified information database about Racha's tourism offers to be an important step. Only 7.7 percent indicated the need for stronger state support, and incentive actions from the state are necessary, and the same percentage (7.7 percent) emphasised the importance of increasing public awareness. (Fig. 3).

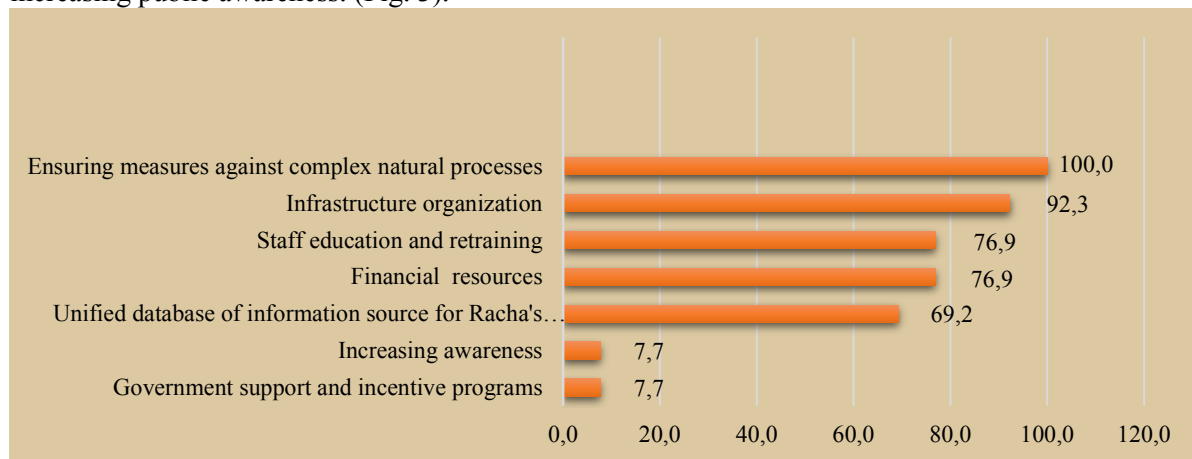


Figure 3. Priorities of respondents for measures in tourism development in Zemo Racha (percentage)

Based on the survey, 76.9 percent of respondents think that one of the main challenges for tourism development in Racha is the lack of financial resources. This indicates that capital investment is crucial not only for infrastructure projects but also for the development of tourism services. This factor indicates that it is necessary to attract either local or foreign investments. 76.9 percent of respondents indicated that professional training/retraining of staff is a key requirement for tourism development in Racha. This fact underlines the need to raise the professional standards of employees in the region's

service sector. The improvement in tourist service quality is closely linked to the competence of personnel, which will strongly affect the region's image and the increase in tourist flows.

It should be noted that there is a labour deficit in the villages, caused by the outmigration of the younger generation. This issue is especially significant during the winter period. Without keeping the youth in the region, stable economic development and the complete realisation of tourism potential cannot happen.

For tourism development, 92.3 percent of respondents identified the necessity of improving infrastructure. For the development of tourism in the region, it is critically important to improve the basic infrastructure: roads that are currently only partially organised, such as the Sachkhere-Shkmeri highway, which have made access to Oni easier; however, internal village roads are disorganised, and public transportation is limited (in the villages, transportation operates only once a week, which reduces tourists' mobility and makes it essential for them to use their vehicles). Improvements in living conditions are necessary (many villages are still without gas, which creates a major barrier to winter tourism), and communication access (connectivity problems in highland villages reduce the region's attractiveness to tourists, since modern travellers need access to both the internet and mobile communication). It is evident that there are insufficient shops and medical centres. Racha cannot become competitive without the development of the service sector as well as the tourism services.

The municipality is located in a zone characterised by complex exogenous processes, which poses a real threat (Gongadze et al., 2024). All of the respondents (100 percent) highlighted the importance of protecting the population from complex natural processes (such as landslides, floods, etc.). In order to prevent different natural challenges, relevant steps should be taken in the region and provide it with preventive equipment.

69.2 percent of respondents noted the need to establish a centralised information database regarding tourism offers in Racha. This will improve the availability of information about the region for tourists and make it easier for them to plan their trips. There was already such a precedent in Racha several years ago when, under a USAID program, an information database called the 'Tourism Cluster' was established, which encompassed accommodation facilities, and the 'Food Cluster,' which united restaurant owners, honey and ham producers and others. But with the end of the programme, these websites stopped functioning.

Based on the survey data, just one respondent highlighted the necessity of state support and the need for incentive programmes. This answer could be interpreted as showing that the majority of respondents pay relatively lower attention to state involvement. Additionally, it should be noted that the other respondents mainly consider the role of the state in the context of financial assistance and infrastructure development. This indicates that, in the respondents' view, the government's involvement should be primarily centred around these specific aspects. Only one respondent highlighted the importance of raising awareness of tourism in Zemo Racha. However, its importance is clear, as recognition directly impacts tourist flows, regional promotion and marketing, all of which are essential for the long-term growth of tourism in the region.

It is important to note that all surveyed respondents (100 percent) are actively involved in the tourism service sector. They can offer tourists guesthouses, involvement in agricultural activities, sightseeing of natural and cultural monuments and other activities. Based on the analysis of the collected data, we described the types of tourism presented in Zemo Racha and analysed the level of service diversification.

Among the respondents were those who returned from the capital city to Racha during the COVID-19 pandemic. They are now considered permanent residents and plan to get involved in tourism activities, which reflect a slight positive influence of the pandemic on migratory processes and the diversification of the region's economy (Gogsadze et al., 2022; Tsitsagi et al., 2023; Bokeria & Tutberidze, 2023).

As evidence from Fig.4 all respondents, without exception, offer to tourists guesthouse services. This indicates that guesthouses represent the central segment of tourism in the region. Guesthouses play a vital socio-economic role in Racha's tourism, promoting both tourism infrastructure development and employment. The existence of a variety of natural and cultural monuments in the region strengthens tourists' attractiveness and underscores the value of its cultural heritage.

84.6 percent of the respondents offer tourists to explore natural and cultural attractions. This shows that cultural and ecological tourism is one of the primary directions in Zemo Racha, which will help attract visitors to the region.

Among the respondents, 69.2 percent offer tourists local cuisine, while 53.8 percent provide them with the opportunity to taste homemade wine. This shows that both gastronomic tourism and wine culture also play a significant role in attracting tourists. Tasting wine is closely linked to the region's winemaking traditions, which strengthen uniqueness of Racha's cultural heritage.

61.5 percent of respondents offer tourists the introduction of local traditions. This indicates that the region is paying attention to the development of ethnic tourism, which, in turn, helps promote local heritage, traditions, and lifestyle.

46 percent of respondents offer to tourists horseback riding. As part of adventure tourism, horseback riding services help strengthening the possibilities for active tourism in the Racha region.

46 percent of respondents offer to tourists to participate in agricultural activities. This reflects the potential for developing agritourism, allowing tourists to understand agricultural processes, enjoy local produce, and participate in farming directly.

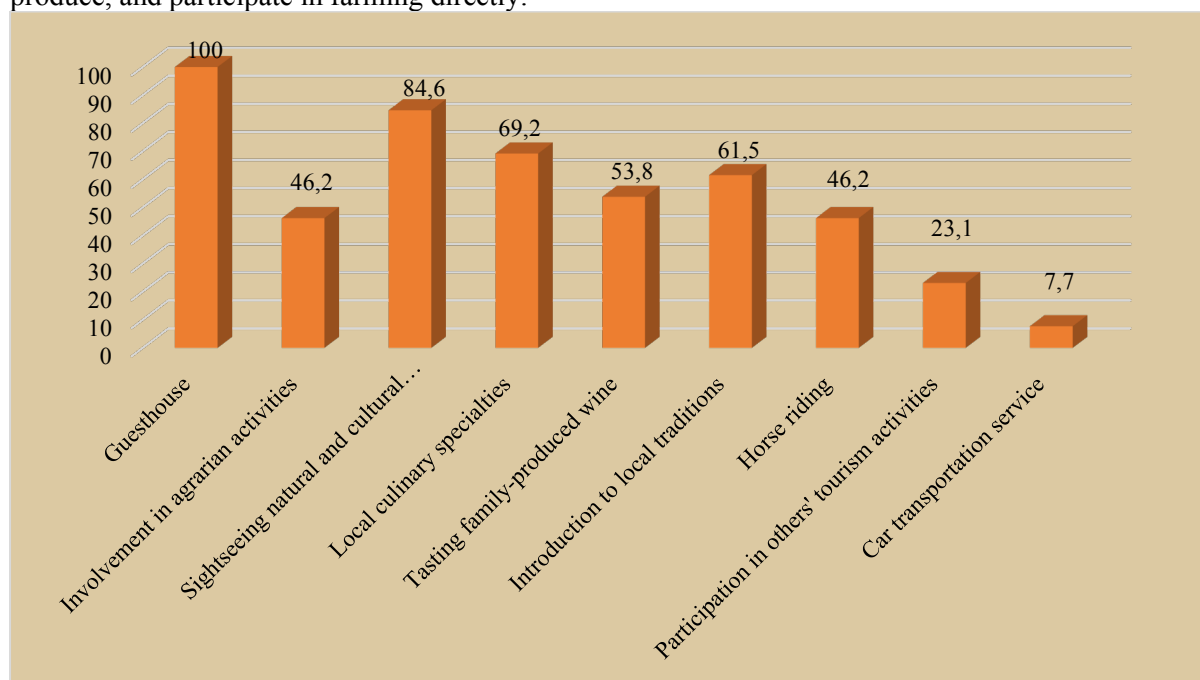


Figure 4. Suggestions of respondents engaged in various tourism activities in Zemo Racha (percentage)

23 percent of respondents indicate that they are involved in the activities of other people's tourism businesses. This illustrates the trend of creating collaborative networks in tourism, which helps local tourist destinations expand their range of services and increase their tourism potential.

8 percent of respondents noted the offering of car services, indicating that the transportation infrastructure and its development are still represented at a low level, which in turn is caused by imperfect infrastructural conditions.

This information shows that the region is not only focused on traditional hospitality, but also includes elements of wellness, eco-tourism, agritourism, gastronomic, cultural, and adventure tourism, fostering the multifaceted development of the region and fully realizing its tourism potential.

The analysis of respondents' answers, regarding their economic dependence on tourism confirms that tourism plays an important role in diversifying the income of the local population.

From the respondents' answers, it becomes clear that tourism, as an additional source of economic activity, increases financial stability, indicating the region's yet to be explored tourism potential.

The research clearly demonstrated significance of tourism and importance of tourism dependence for local population. Specifically, 7.6 percent of respondents indicated that their entire income (100 percent) comes from tourism. 15 percent of respondents noted that over half of their income (70 percent-80 percent) is earned through tourism activities. In the case of 53 percent of respondents, their earnings from tourism were less than one-third of their total income. 7.6 percent of respondents reported that one-third of their income comes from tourism. Moreover, 15 percent of respondents did not respond to this question.

The findings of the study indicate that the Zemo Racha community has different levels of dependence on tourism (Fig.5).

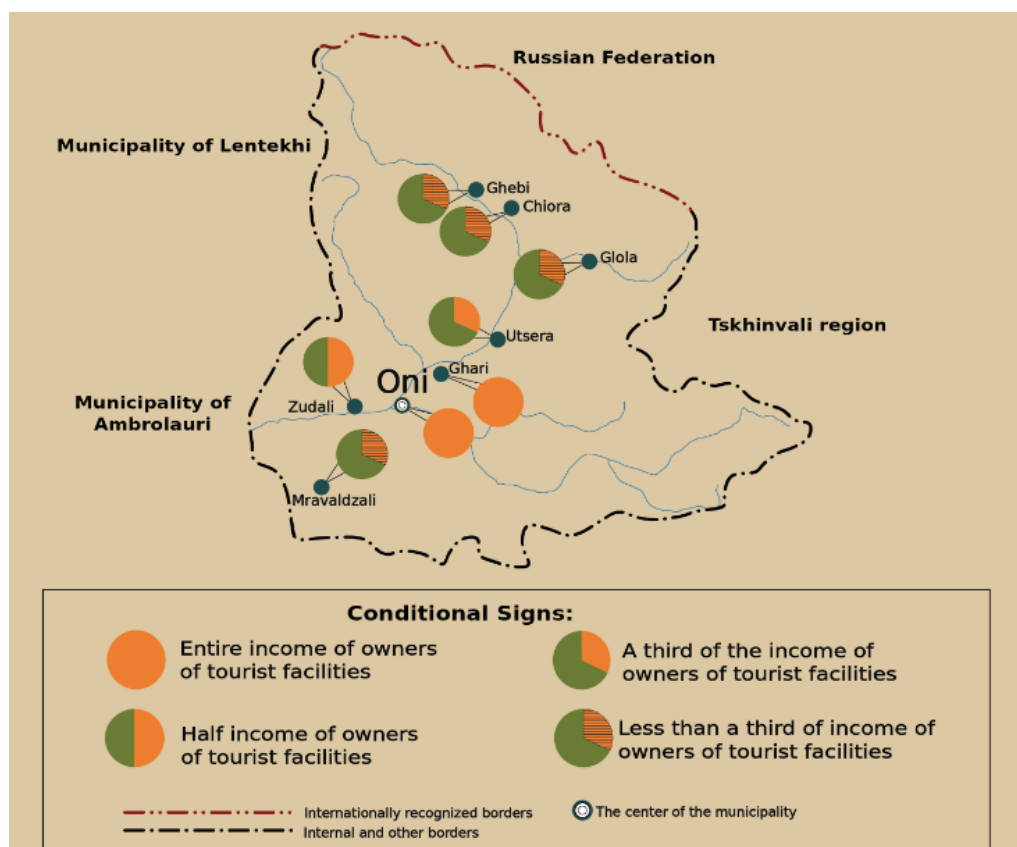


Figure 5. The share of tourism in the total annual income of owners of tourist facilities (The results of the interviewing)

➤ High level of dependency

Only 23 percent of respondents have incomes that are directly dependent on tourism services. Respondents from this group agree that the development of tourism is important for their financial stability and prosperity. Such a stance from this group of respondents is natural, as they gain direct benefits from tourism activities.

➤ Low level of dependency

This group of respondents accounts for 7 percent of the total respondents. They earn one-third of their income from tourism, indicating that they are partially dependent on tourism, while their main source of income is from other activities.

➤ Limited dependency

The results of the study demonstrated that 54 percent of respondents receive less than a third of their income from tourism, meaning that for the majority, tourism is an additional source, not the main one. The members of this group, as an additional activity, are involved in agriculture, and some of them are also employed in publicly funded sectors. As a result, they have relatively low interest in tourism development, however, they recognize the benefits and considerable potential of the tourism sector for the economy of the region.

➤ Unclear attitude

15 per cent of respondents did not answer this question. They preferred not to reveal their own earnings from tourism, which may be due to the low amount of such income or other motivations.

The data above indicates that tourism development in the region is not only a key driver of economic growth but also an alternative source of income for the local population, which could significantly increase with proper infrastructure and service improvements.

It is also notable that 61 percent of respondents reported that they receive financial and organisational support in their tourism activities from the government and/or international or local organisations. This



suggests the accessibility of resources and funding, which play a crucial role in supporting tourism development.

39 percent of the respondents indicated that they did not receive similar assistance. This may be due to a lack of information about various grant and funding opportunities, a general sense of distrust among respondents or an absence of interest in participating in projects. It is also possible to suggest that their applications were not accepted. The majority of respondents who received grants (around 62.5 percent) mentioned that their support came from the government program "Enterprise Georgia". Clearly, this programme plays a crucial role in supporting tourism and developing businesses in the Racha region. The popularity of this programme can be explained by the fact that it is a large-scale government initiative focused on providing support to small and medium-sized enterprises in multiple regions of the country. It is important for the Racha region to be informed about opportunities for grants and financial assistance, as this will promote sustainable tourism development.

92 percent of respondents who reported the negative effects of the Shovi tragedy (see Fig. 5) on tourism indicate that natural disasters have a direct impact on the tourism industry and the economic situation of the local population in the region. The significant drop in tourist numbers, caused by the fear and sense of insecurity stemming from the tragedy, illustrates how natural disasters influence not just tourism dynamics but also the challenges associated with maintaining the region's tourism reputation.

## **Discussions**

Most of the interviewed respondents share the opinion that tourism is the most important part of the development of the economy of Zemo Racha, and its further development is very important for the region. However, its effective development is associated with many challenges. Lack of financial resources, lack of qualified personnel, insufficient infrastructure, and difficult natural conditions were identified as the main barriers to tourism development in the region. This is only a small part of the challenges mentioned by the locals, which require special attention. To fully utilise the tourism potential of Zemo Racha, it is necessary not only to improve the infrastructure but also to raise the awareness of the region, both at the national and global levels. With the help of targeted marketing strategies and information campaigns, it is possible to effectively present the region's unique tourism resources to the public. In addition, considering the specifics of the domestic and international tourism markets will help Racha to strengthen its position on the global tourism map, which will increase the number of tourists and contribute to the development of sustainable tourism in the region.

Until now, the tourism region of Zemo Racha had a pronounced healing and healing direction (resorts: Shovi, Utsera, Sortuan); now, in parallel with the further development of Utsera, the possibility of creating a mountain-ski complex (Mravaldzali) was revealed because of an additional study of tourist resources. In addition, there are settlements and places in Zemo Racha that have significant tourist potential and are already popular among individual tourists (the village of Gona with a special natural beauty; the village of Glola, which was the base of the Shovi resort in terms of providing employees and accommodation facilities). Now it receives tourists).

The recently created national park on the territory of the municipality should give impetus to the development of ecological, adventure and speleotourism. However, it should be noted here that there is a lack of knowledge about the functions of the national park among the population. The agro-tourism direction in the region also has a perspective, several facilities of which have been operating in the municipality of Oni for a long time. An important prerequisite for the development of gastronomic tourism could be the catalogue of Racha dishes prepared by the employees of the Tourism Information Centre.

## **Conclusion**

- ✓ The majority of the population considers the field of tourism to be the main direction of further socio-economic development of Zemo Racha;
- ✓ The tragedy that took place in Shovi affected not only the future of Shovi, but also the tourism development of the entire Racha region; For the prevention of various natural challenges in the region, it is necessary to take appropriate measures and provide it with preventive devices;
- ✓ The incomes of 23 percent of the respondents directly depend on tourist services, a third of the income of 7 percent comes from tourism, i.e. partially depends on tourism, and the income of 54 percent

is less than a third of all incomes from tourism, these data reveal the importance of tourism for the economy of the region.

✓ All research participants offer accommodation to tourists in a family hotel. In addition, various respondents' suggestions are visiting cultural and natural monuments, tasting local dishes and wine, getting to know local traditions, engaging in agricultural activities, horse riding, etc.

✓ The respondents mentioned important issues for the development of tourism: lack of financial resources, the need for personnel training/retraining, infrastructure regulation.

✓ Part of the owners of tourist facilities received financial and organizational support from the state, international or local organizations, but more efforts are needed from the state to utilization the potential of the region.

The research showed that the tourism development of Zemo Racha is not only focused on traditional hospitality, but also includes elements of health and wellness, cultural, ecological, agro, gastronomic and adventure tourism, which will contribute to the multifaceted development of the region and tourism potential.

### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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### Authors' contribution

N.N., M.T. and G.K. conceived of the presented idea. All of the authors performed the analytic calculations. N.N took the lead in writing the manuscript. All authors provided critical feedback and helped shape the research, analysis and manuscript.

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