Reconstruction of a village in Tusheti

On the role and the goals of the state in the development strategy for the highlands of Georgia

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The village Dartlo, in the Tusheti region of northeast Georgia, is claimed to be a marvel in terms of its cultural landscape. The reconstruction of Dartlo is also an example of the processes of heritagization and cultural tourism-based economic development that are taking place in other regions of Georgia as well. It is no coincidence that the number of international travelers in Georgia between 1995 and 2016 increased from 85,000 to 6,361,000 and continues to rise, according to the World Bank. This number is only one of the indicators of the joint strategy of transnational actors and the Georgian state to promote and establish Georgia as one of the most popular travel destinations worldwide—a strategy that mostly remains unquestioned by the general public.

Using insights from official materials that undergird governmental strategies on developing a tourism-based economy, as well as my fieldwork in Georgia, I will describe how these strategies are connected to the process of heritagization, understood as a transformation of cultural or natural monuments to serve specific purposes, in the specific context of Georgia in recent decades. In agreement with Tim Winter, I claim that heritage “properties” are nowadays more often than not connected to national programs of socio-economic development. However, for heritage experts, “regardless of location, for many organizations, conservation primarily remains a material centered, technical process”; not necessarily embedded or analyzed within a cultural, political or economic context. Thus, my focus is on heritage preservation as a means of reaching implicitly or explicitly formulated political-economic goals. It is helpful to perceive cultural heritage as an instrument, as a tool for neoliberal transnational governmentality. Such a reading allows us to recognize which actors and networks of actors are defining the boundaries between heritage and non-heritage. It also acknowledges the influence of financial flows and societal power relations in defining and managing cultural heritage. My main aim is to demonstrate—using the mountainous region of Tusheti as an example—that the heritagization of the region is intended to considerably influence local ways of life by encouraging the local population to become involved in a tourism-based economy. To do so, I draw on theoretical insights from the field of critical heritage studies. Of particular importance to the development of the theoretical perspective of this paper are several contributions from the edited volume Heritage Regimes and the State. I also draw on contributions to the field of the anthropology of development, especially The Will to Improve. Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics by Tania Murray Li.

“Conduct of conduct”: The concept of governmentality

Scholars from several fields have adapted and pragmatically extended the concept of governmentality, which was first introduced, although not broadly elaborated, by Michel Foucault. Use of this concept allows for an analysis of modern ways of governing which include not only official practices of the state but also internalized practices of individual self-governing, understood as “conduct of conduct”. The analytical framework of governmentality thus eliminates the state as a monolithic and universal source of power. Of central importance is rather how state power is being produced and what guiding principles are observable in this process. Governmentality enables attention to be paid to modern governing techniques, which are generally presented by state actors as purely rationalizing and mostly apolitical. To understand governmentality in a neoliberal context, it is important not to perceive the economy as a separate societal realm with specific rationalities and instruments. The rationalizing market logic—according to the understanding of neoliberal governmentality—permeates the governing practices of the state and the state itself develops as an entrepreneur. Consequently, it is the logic of the market that individuals are expected to internalize and act in accordance with. Society is not forced—or disciplined—to act in one way or another but does so by internalizing the principles of entrepreneurship. Tania Murray Li contrasts this process with the disciplinary actions described by Foucault and explains the “conduct of conduct” as a way in which the government attempts to shape human conduct by calculated means:

“Distinct from discipline, which seeks to reform designated groups through detailed supervision in confined quarters (prisons, asylums, schools), the concern of government is the well-being of populations at large. (...) government operates by educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations and beliefs, so that people, following their own self-interest, will do as they ought”.

Thus, it is important to stress here, as do Lemke, Krasmann and Bröckling, that the strength of the concept of governmentality
is precisely that it does not assume the separation of state, economy and other societal fields in the first place.9 The main practical consequence of classical liberalism is the creation of the market as an entity autonomous from the state, allowing purely reactive politics regarding market control. In contrast to classical liberal political thought, the theoretical perspective of neoliberal governmentality assumes that the analytical separation of economy and state is obsolete because neoliberal conditions are created precisely through the above-mentioned reliance on market principles in the reorganization of the state.10 Thus neoliberal governmentality has little in common with classical liberal thought, since the economic and social mechanisms of competition presuppose constant intervention by the state on the conditions of the possibility of the market. As governmentality, neoliberalism governs by giving the impression that it is not governing.11

Consequently, the concept of governmentality is not applied in order to demonstrate that the sovereignty and capacities of nation-states are shrinking as such. Rather, it is applied in order to address the ways in which they are being reorganized and what new institutions and forms of governing are evolving as a consequence. I choose to speak of transnational governmentality since, as will become evident later, the Dartlo rehabilitation project and the spatial planning of Tusheti in general involve not only the state but also transnational financial actors such as the World Bank and various development aid agents. Anthropologists of the state, Sharma, Gupta and Ferguson12 have stressed the importance of expanding the concept to the transnational level and analyzing the changes in nation-states following the structural adjustment guidelines formed by the globalized aspiration for development.

TO UNDERSTAND THE rationalizing practices and instruments of transnational governmentality in a Georgian context, it is important to look at the paradigm of general global developmental discourse. Indeed, the focus on development is one of the guiding principles in the evaluation of the world and essential in the choice of local interventions, which are framed as desirable by global and local policymakers. Development policies are formulated by experts who are guided by rational, technical and supposedly apolitical knowledge. This ostensible neutrality opens up possibilities for experts from different areas to define “improvement schemes”13 for societies. It is important to ask how the developmental programs are being formed by political-economic conditions and, in turn, prevent the change of conditions given.14 The improvement schemes consolidate who — NGOs, experts or state institutions specifically created for the formulation of upgrading measures — is authorized to define the local capacities that must be developed — and how. As a result, it is precisely these stakeholders who promote and facilitate the strengthening of specific local structures and capacities while at the same time structuring the field of possible actions that can be taken by the local population. Needless to say, the offering of expertise on how to optimize local contexts is surely a claim to power, even if it is a subtle and not necessarily conscious or “evil” one.15
Governmentality and heritage regimes

It is also relevant to analyze the extent to which the status of cultural heritage and the related process of upgrading heritage sites can be seen as an instrument of governmentality. I am building on the conceptualization of governmentality in a transnational framework that includes transnational, state and local actors. Critical heritage scholars have contributed to the field by asking what discourses and value systems are dissembled behind the sites and practices perceived as cultural heritage, and what these discourses tell us about the present rather than the past. As Tim Winter notes, “critical heritage studies should primarily be about addressing the critical issues that face the world today, the larger issues that bear upon and extend outwards from heritage”. At the very core of the critical study of heritage is the task of retracing how the social, ethnic, cultural and political-economic dividing lines are constructed through cultural heritage. One of the key questions is how heritage is defined and modified by transnational capital movements. The latter focus is evident since transnational financial institutions such as the World Bank – a transnational actor that significantly influences the direction of global economic developments – perceive cultural heritage as an effective and powerful resource for global economic and social development. Winter claims that cultural heritage can be used as “a positive enabler for, the complex, multi-vector challenges that face us today, such as cultural and environmental sustainability, economic inequalities, conflict resolution.” However, it is important to investigate how and by whom cultural heritage is actually made. Cultural heritage is not an asset in itself. Heritagization understood as a process describes the transformation of a monument, a landscape or a cultural practice in order to achieve political, social or economic goals behind which various stakeholders with different interests can be observed.

IT IS HELPFUL TO SPEAK of “heritage regimes” at this point. This term expands the understanding of cultural heritage by recognizing specific power constellations in society. Thus, the principal task of ethnography in the field of heritage is to trace the intentions of the actors involved in steering the process of making heritage. Rosemary J. Coombe suggests heritage regimes should be analyzed as “new regimes of power based on socially generative forms of neoliberal governmentality”. Assigning cultural heritage status to a site may legitimize policymakers’ interventions in the daily lives of local populations and therefore influence social changes, as Adelheid Pichler demonstrates with the example from Old Havana. Heritagization processes could result in the resettlement of local residents or major renovation measures, to name just a few possible consequences. Political stakeholders are therefore not simply passive actors fulfilling the requirements of UNESCO, for example, in order to protect cultural heritage but are very much involved in the heritagization process themselves. At the same time, it is important to note that neoliberal heritage regimes are not monolithic but are a formation of “new agencies and coalitions of agencies, joint partnerships, public-private alliances, global-local or multi-scalar assemblages of NGOs, international authorities and transnational agencies”.

To summarize, neoliberal governmentality as it can be observed in heritage regimes is mainly characterized by two aspects: Firstly, heritage experts within a neoliberal framework formulate and implement the political and economic priorities of policymakers, while at the same time giving the impression of being purely technical and apolitical: “Authority of voice stems from a knowledge practice primarily informed by material-centric disciplines that privilege scientific and/or positivist methodologies. Such approaches are rooted in a discourse of scientific knowledge as apolitical, objective and value neutral”. Secondly, the local population becomes integrated as participants of the construction and preservation of heritage sites, although this is expected to take place in a clearly defined political framework. Most often the goal is to stimulate the entrepreneurship of local populations and encourage their involvement in heritage-based tourism. Chiara de Cesari indicates the paradox dynamics of focusing on the empowerment of local populations by policymakers through heritage-based tourism: “What is the meaning of participation? Does it entail empowerment or governmentality? If, indeed, we take a Foucauldian approach – grounded in an active notion of power as something that controls precisely by empowering – the two must not exclude each other”. This will become evident by analyzing governmentality in Tusheti.

The context of modern Georgia: Tourism development

Since Mikheil Saakashvili’s presidency between 2003 and 2013, the perceived importance and prioritization of developing tourism has been embraced by the Georgian government and continues to be a dominant narrative in the economic development of the country to this day. Indeed, tourism in Georgia is booming and this can be illustrated by the significant growth in the numbers of international travelers to Georgia. In 2017, Georgia received 7.5 million international visitors. This is one million more than the previous year, as noted in the article Country’s tourist boom in the Georgian Journal April 2, 2018. Given such figures, it could be assumed that the strategy of tourism development by the Georgian government has been successful. However, what does “successful” actually mean?

Since 2004, Georgia has rapidly liberalized its economy and become a poster child of the free market economy, guided by Mikheil Saakashvili, the modernizer and traditionalist, as described by Gotfredsen and Frederiksen. Economic liberalization primarily entailed a wave of intense privatization of state-owned enterprises and land. Besides this, it encouraged foreign direct investments, flexibilization of the labor market and a series of tax reforms – including the abolition of taxation for small businesses and other measures – thus partially legalizing the shadow economy, making Georgia a country with one of the lowest tax rates in the world. Since the 2000s, Georgia has been praised by international financial organizations for its business climate. With regard to its welfare state, the govern-
In the government strategy plan, there was a commitment to take minimal responsibility. It promised equal opportunities for all citizens and that corruption would cease, while at the same time, each citizen should take responsibility for their own well-being. Liberalization policies were guided by the principles stipulated in the Document on Poverty Reduction by the World Bank in 2005, stating that radical free market reforms and combating poverty would not contradict each other. On the contrary, communities defined as poor would be encouraged to assume responsibility for their own improvement by engaging with markets and learning how to conduct themselves in competitive arenas.

Radical economic reforms were intended to create small and medium-sized businesses and promote self-employment thereby establishing a strong middle-class in Georgia. As noted in the government strategy plan Georgia 2020 (launched in 2014), around 70% of the Georgian population is either unemployed or self-employed in small businesses. The 2000s opened up the possibility for many Georgians to become self-employed in the tourism sector since the general policy of market liberalization strongly encouraged entrepreneurial initiatives in the service sector. Indeed, as Frederiksen and Godfredsen observe, many Georgians – and especially young Georgians – can be regarded as entrepreneurs for whom internalized self-reliance and hard work are desirable values, needless to say, in some cases out of necessity. Radical free market policies led to poor, unregulated self-employment in most Georgian households and were particularly profitable for private investors in the field of tourism infrastructure, among others.

**THE STRATEGY FOR THE** socio-economic development of Georgia outlined in *Georgia 2020* supports the view that radical reforms have been necessary, even if the entire population has not benefited from them thus far. The strategy plan shares the same focus as the previous government, led by former President Saakashvili’s *United National Movement*. This focus on liberalization and the free market economy has not been challenged in recent years, despite changes in the government and the new leading political figure in Georgian politics, billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. The Georgian government still focuses on creating the best conditions for a competitive private sector and on developing public-private partnerships (PPPs). The latest strategy plans of the Georgian government are particularly oriented towards regional development and infrastructure using PPPs. The *Four Point Reform Agenda*, introduced by the government of Georgia in 2016, extensively addresses regional development. This strategy plan focuses concretely on spatial planning and major infrastructure projects such as road construction in the countryside, especially in mountainous areas – including Tusheti. Through extensive spatial planning, Georgia should become a “four-season state for tourists.”

This is consistent with the guidelines of the World Bank as outlined in the *Country Partnership Framework* of 2018. The document confirms the partnership conditions between the World Bank and Georgia from 2019–2022 and repeatedly stresses the meaning of tourism: “The World Bank is broadening its ongoing work to implement an integrated approach to tourism development in lagging regions with a focus on infrastructure, cultural heritage restoration, skills development and the attraction of private sector investments”. As previously mentioned, the creation of tourism infrastructure around historic centers and the rehabilitation of the cultural heritage of Georgia was one of Saakashvili’s domestic political priorities. It is still a priority of the current government, demonstrating that policies related to a tourism-based economy and heritagization cannot be reduced to differences between administrations, but are rather part of an overarching development path in Georgia which has not been seriously questioned thus far.

**Cultural heritage in modern Georgia**

The 2000s and the 2010s have been a time of value enhancement of cultural and natural heritage in Georgia. The emphasis has been on achieving UNESCO World Heritage status for various sites. While three cultural heritage sites have had the status of World Cultural Heritage since 1994 and 1996, respectively, fifteen further objects were placed on the National Tentative List for UNESCO by the government of Georgia in 2007. The latter includes Tusheti, as a unique cultural landscape. Quite rapid renovations or reconstructions of historic buildings, for example, the historic centers of Tbilisi, Mestia and Sighnaghi, as well as the Bagrati Cathedral, have characterized cultural heritage policies. The process of such renovations and reconstructions has been broadly criticized by heritage experts, since the government’s priority was clearly the quantity and not the quality of the renovation work. Indeed, Bagrati Cathedral even lost its UNESCO World Heritage status because of flawed renovation work. Frederiksen and Godfredsen have summarized the goal of reconstruction work over the last decade: “reconstructions represented a desire not so much to renovate as to be seen renovating”. These examples demonstrate that, to some extent, cultural heritage sites in Georgia in recent decades have been places of conflict between heritage experts and the socio-economic goals of policymakers. Socio-economic aims clearly took precedence over the “academic and international aims of monument preservation”. This leads us to the necessity of posing the question of the dominant heritage regime, in which the preservation and management of Georgian cultural heritage has been taking place in recent decades.

In 2008, the *National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation of Georgia* (NACHPG) was established through a presidential
decree by Saakashvili. A significant number of responsibilities, particularly regarding the monitoring and management of World Heritage Sites, have since been delegated to the NACP. Many of the tasks were previously the responsibility of the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection. The areas of responsibilities between the NACP and the Ministry of Culture and Monuments Protection (MoCMP) have yet to be clearly defined. Despite the change of government in 2013, it remains unclear whether the NACP is practically – not only legally – subordinate to the Ministry or whether it mainly acts independently of the elected government. The tasks of the NACP include the protection, maintenance, research, conservation and rehabilitation of cultural heritage, as well as advising the MoCMP on heritage policy issues. The NACP is also responsible for granting permits for conservation and rehabilitation projects related to these monuments.5 A no less important task of the NACP is the creation of the “brand of Georgia across the world”.54 The NACP’s rather managerial and efficiency-driven approach is apparent.

**NOTEWORTHY IN THE CONTEXT** of cultural heritage in Georgia, as well as for my research aims regarding Tusheti, is the development of the comparable mountainous region of Svaneti in Western Georgia. It was recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1996. The region is supposed to be an extraordinary example due to its combination of mountainous natural landscapes and traditional settlements characterized by historic architecture. To use a concept introduced by UNESCO just a few decades ago, Svaneti and Tusheti could be regarded as examples of a cultural landscape.5 A cultural landscape is intended to capture not only sites of natural and cultural importance, but also everyday ways of life.56 The combination of natural and cultural, tangible and intangible heritage in Svaneti became fruitful for the development of tourism in the region:57 “After the stabilization of the region in 2003, initiatives from outside Svaneti were instrumental in using the cultural and natural heritage of the region as attraction for the development of tourism and the protection of cultural heritage”.58

In 2010, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia introduced a concept for the development of a tourism infrastructure in Svaneti. It included the construction of a new road to Mestia, an airport and new ski slopes in the region.59 At the time, Saakashvili had been accused of pushing this plan through on his own. Nonetheless, what has happened and what is still happening in Svaneti is far more complex and cannot simply be reduced to the decisions of the former president. Major infrastructure plans for Svaneti were preceded by a community-based tourism project. Voll and Mosedale refer to WWF, USAID, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation regarding the planning and implementation of the project. The project was originally supposed to involve the local population in the development of tourism in Svaneti, rather than major investors, as well as create a general framework for attracting tourists to the region. Thus, while the tourism development plan partly relied on a community-based tourism approach, it was clearly not a bottom-up process in the classical sense. The notion of individual entrepreneurship was regarded as being important to the successful implementation of the community-based project.60 This could be perceived as a successful example of neoliberal governmentality: “With the influx of (particularly Western) tourists locals gained new opportunities to engage in tourism entrepreneurship and thus commodify hospitality”.61 It is not possible to elaborate on the ambivalence of the “commodification of hospitality” in detail here although it should be briefly mentioned that the commercialization of hospitality could lead to tensions in the local community, given that hospitality is in fact a highly valued quality in the self-perception of many Georgians.

However, in recent years, the tourism infrastructure has expanded, as envisioned in the plan of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development. Extensive external investments in hotel infrastructure and ski resorts, rather than in the conservation of cultural heritage, which has considerably changed the face of Svaneti, has been criticized by the local population. As Voll and Mosedale put it: “The example of Svaneti is not the only one in Georgia where the initial success of regional tourism initiatives is assumed as a development strategy by the government, yet transformed into public-private developments driven by external investors”.62 I claim that a similar fate could await Tusheti, although this would require further research.

**The spatial development of Tusheti and the rehabilitation project in Dartlo**

The Tusheti region is located 1,650–4,490 meters above sea level, has an area of 900 km² and borders the autonomous republics of Chechnya and Dagestan of the Russian Federation. Around 12,000 people identify themselves as Tushetian although only a few of them remain in the mountains throughout the year. Most Tushetians live in the lowlands of Kakheti, in the villages of Upper and Lower Alvani, or in the capital Tbilisi. A number of Tushetians have been working in the North Caucasus for decades. Thus, the region is characterized by circular migration – or transmigration – and is mainly populated during the summer. However, this has not always been the case. The region has an impressive history of the state coming and going, as Florian Mühlfried63 describes it. This requires looking into the history of Tusheti in previous centuries. Georgia had been part of the Soviet Union since the beginning of the 1920s and during that time the region of Tusheti experienced several failed attempts by the government to either integrate Tusheti into the Soviet Union – be it politically or economically – or create favorable condi-
tions, or even force the population of Tusheti to move from the highlands to the lowlands and become part of the large-scale agricultural collectivization and industrialization that was taking place at the time. In the 1920s and the 1930s, the state became very visible in Tusheti through a “policy of simultaneous affirmation and restriction”. The Soviet state developed a basic infrastructure in the region, such as the first hospital and school, in order to establish a locally-based solidarity and loyalty towards the Soviet regime. This radically changed in the 1950s when the resettlement policy of the Soviet regime became more repressive and local characteristics and realities played no role or had to be sacrificed in order to achieve the so-called high-modern industrialization goals of the Soviet Union. The provisioning of Tusheti clearly fell behind the level of previous decades and Tushetians were no longer permitted to live between the Kakhetian lowlands and Tusheti, i.e. to own land in both regions. Instead, incentives and repressions were introduced to permanently move the largest part of the local Tushetian population to the Kakhetian lowlands. Only in the late 1970s and 1980s did this policy change. For the first time, a paved street was built, schools and a kindergarten re-opened and people were encouraged to permanently resettle in the mountains. However, on this occasion, not many Tushetians were attracted by the incentives, even though transmigration between the lowlands and the highlands and the related agricultural activities prevailed over the decades. In the 1990s, due to challenges in the (meanwhile) independent Georgian government regarding the regions of Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) and Abkhazia, a civil war and major economic problems, provisioning of the region almost disappeared. It could be claimed that, since the 2000s, the “state” has returned to Tusheti; the question is only how.

I VISITED THE MOUNTAINOUS region in 2015 and 2016 for several weeks at a time. The first visit was purely coincidental and made me consider Tusheti as an interesting research site because of current developments. The second visit focused upon exploratory fieldwork. I conducted five interviews and several informal conversations with guest house owners in the villages of Omalo and Dartlo during this fieldwork. However, since my focus was on governmental steering mechanisms regarding heritagization and tourism development in Dartlo, I decided to concentrate on interviewing governmental and transnational representatives during my final round of field research in late 2017. In order to fully grasp the true impact of current developments on the daily lives of the local Tushetian population, long-term fieldwork is necessary. Nevertheless, the weeks I spent in Tusheti enabled me to observe many interesting developments. While the whole infrastructure, as well as the power supply, collapsed in Tusheti in the 1990s, the Electrification of Remote Areas in the Tusheti Region project run by the Czech Development Agency from 2011 to 2013 has provided more than 200 households in the Tusheti region with solar panels. Admittedly, solar panels are not the first thing one expect to see in the villages of Tusheti, which have virtually no
residents during the winter. Signs for the German development agency (GIZ) referencing landscape protection and spatial planning activities were scattered around the villages as well. These are just a couple of examples that made me aware that there are indeed processes taking place in Tusheti that could be perceived as signs of infrastructure upgrading.

“I know that Tusheti is a very important region for the government now. They will do a lot of things for them,” said a representative of the Ministry for Regional Development and Infrastructure during an interview in 2017. Indeed, the current development of Tusheti started in 2003 with the creation of the Tusheti Protected Areas with the help of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the World Bank. The creation of protected areas in Georgia was one of the stated goals of the World Bank, as described in the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Program from 2005: “The project envisages creating infrastructure for setting borders of protected territories, constructing centers for visitors and the administration, shelters for guards, check up points and facilities for managing visitors”. The Tusheti Protected Areas are managed by the Agency of Protected Areas of Georgia and are expected to cooperate closely with stakeholders involved in the preservation and management of cultural heritage. As previously mentioned, Tusheti was placed on the UNESCO National Tentative List in 2007 by the Ministry of Culture, Monuments Protection and Sports. As distinct features of Tusheti, its “vernacular architecture (...) and fortress-like residential buildings in particular alpine landscapes” have been named.

AMONG VARIOUS PROJECTS and strategies related to the development of the administrative region of Kakheti, in which Tusheti is located, the Regional Development Project (RDP) for the Kakheti region is of main importance for this paper. The project is of interest because it has been broadly presented by Georgia and the World Bank as being one of the most successful regional development projects in Georgia. The Dartlo rehabilitation project in Tusheti was one of the costliest and most coordination-intensive subprojects of the overarching Kakheti RDP. The RDP was funded by the World Bank (USD 60 million) and the government of Georgia (USD 15 million). It was implemented by the Municipal Development Fund of Georgia (MDF) and mainly supervised by the above-mentioned NACHPG.

The MDF, established in 1997 specifically to mediate between the Georgian government, transnational financial institutions and investment banks, is actually the main implementing institution of the project and is directly responsible to the transnational creditors. Paradoxically, the MDF is quasi-independent from the Ministry for Regional Development and Infrastructure in implementing a number of related infrastructure projects in the regions. During an interview conducted in late 2017, a representative of the Ministry for Regional Development and Infrastructure acknowledged that Tusheti is in the government’s spotlight, although no major infrastructure projects had been planned by the ministry at the time of our conversation. Instead, two Tusheti-related projects, which would normally sound like they belonged to the area of responsibility of the above-mentioned ministry, were implemented by the MDF as subprojects of the joint RDP of Georgia and the World Bank: Enhancing water supply system for village Omalo and arrangement of sewage system for hotel ‘Samzeo’ in Omalo, Akhmeta Municipality, Tusheti (Public-Private Partnership) and Arrangement of storm-water drainage system in Zemo Omalo, Akhmeta Municipality, Tusheti, not to mention the Dartlo rehabilitation subproject. Subsequently, it is possible to observe the shift in responsibility from the conventional state actors to newly formed assemblages, involving transnational as well as local stakeholders, and dominated by public-private partnerships. While the goal of the MDF is to strengthen the development of local infrastructures and services and support a sustainable decentralized regional development through financial investments from transnational loan banks, it is quite unlikely that regional administrations would ever be able to repay the loans. Thus, such responsibility would presumably devolve on taxpayers after project implementation.
The objective of the RDP in Kakheti was to support the development of a tourism-based economy and cultural heritage circuits in the region, as well as develop Kakheti as a high-quality destination throughout the year. The project was started in 2012 and completed in 2017:

“A number of sub-projects in the mountainous parts of Kakheti, for example, in the village of Dartlo, in which the weather conditions are harsh and the construction season lasts for only 3 and a half months from July to Mid-October, made it difficult for MDF to complete all the sub-projects before the project end date of December 31, 2016. For this reason, MDF requested an extension of the end date by one year until December 31, 2017”.20

The project is generally perceived as being particularly relevant to the World Bank Country Partnership Strategy for Georgia.73

The Dartlo village rehabilitation subproject within the RDP provided the funding for renovating or virtually rebuilding 51 houses in Dartlo. These comprise around 70% of all buildings in the historic village. House owners in Dartlo had to clarify their ownership status. Up to this time, ownership of houses had not been recorded in written form. Only after written agreements were made – agreements with house owners and the introduction of Resettlement Action Plans during the construction phase was one of the main tasks of the MDF during the project implementation period – could the rehabilitation project start. If the previous owners of historic houses were willing to receive funding for the renovation of their perspective houses, they were expected to agree with the approved design of the house and, in the best-case-scenario, start operating as a guest house after the renovation work had been completed.

**THUS, GOVERNMENTALITY** was established through particular forms of expert knowledge and guidelines by governmental actors who are not generally perceived as “the state”, i.e. the MDF and the NACHP, as well as the World Bank, in the case of the Dartlo rehabilitation. Even more, it seems to be defined who is legitimized to decide what are the best conditions and “improvement schemes” for the local population. Of course, the people of the Tusheti region are not being forced to act in accordance with governmental and international development plans, although the range of their possible agency is clearly limited. Being involved in tourism appears to be the only appropriate choice for engaging with the market. It is assumed that the community is of key importance but must be improved in specific ways. As Li summarizes in *The Will to Improve*, “communities are said to have the secret to the good life (sustainable, authentic, democratic), yet experts must intervene to secure that goodness and enhance it”.74

Not surprisingly, the success of the RDP in Kakheti is measured by upgrading in the form of the renovation, reconstruction etc. of cultural heritage sites and the creation of conditions for private investments. The World Bank measures the level of satisfaction of local residents regarding the rehabilitation project in Dartlo and other places in Kakheti mainly through the impact on tourism development of the project and its subprojects: “Between 89% and 91% of respondents in each of the hubs agree that the project has had a positive impact on tourism”.75 However, it does not tell us much about the perception of local communities that did not directly profit from the rehabilitation project.

While the Dartlo subproject was completed in 2017, the strategy for the spatial development of Tusheti is ongoing. The main actor in the area at the moment is the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development. Apart from this, the government of Georgia announced plans to modernize the road leading to Tusheti in 2016 and, in 2017, a new airfield was built in Omalo, the main village of Tusheti.76

**Governmentality in Tusheti**

One interview in Dartlo is particularly important for highlighting the contradictions of development policies in Tusheti. A young person working in a guest house – which had been a family home for decades – presented the problems that had evolved out of the different temporalities of development: an ever-growing stream of tourists, plans for a new road to further increase the numbers of visitors, while, for example, there were still problems with the waste management system. The interviewee also criticized the fact that local people chose to focus on running a guest house instead of engaging in self-sufficient agriculture, which had permitted a high level of autonomy for centuries in the Tusheti region. To conclude our conversation, she said: “Look around you, there is no state in Tusheti”, indicating that nobody was taking care of local problems, while, on the other hand, the perceived autonomy of the region was shrinking. I am convinced that the Georgian state is very much present. The notion of the state that my respondent had in mind is simply different to the one that can be observed in Tusheti. The state cannot be reduced to a welfare state anymore – if it ever could – and its role is shifting to a role of a state that is not a provider of services but a shaper of conditions for a free market economy, as shown by the concept of governmentality. In doing so, I believe that Georgia is a very proactive state in Tusheti. The inclusion of Tusheti on the Georgian National Tentative List for UNESCO, the establishment of the status of national park and protected areas, as well as bringing internationally-funded projects into the region, demonstrate the very presence of state actors.

The process of the up-valuation of Tusheti is framed by the stakeholders as a necessity that appears to have no real alternatives and people living or related to the region are “managed” in
order to ensure that they act in accordance with the government strategy regarding heritagization and tourism-based economic development. By creating certain conditions through the restoration and marketization of cultural heritage, individuals are expected to be “empowered” to become active in providing tourism services. Thus, during my exploration phase in Tusheti, I observed many people offering their private houses – normally used as summer houses or dachas – as guest houses or engaging in services such as horse riding or the revival of local handicrafts.

Indeed, recent regional development strategies could be regarded as a consequence of the plans of leading political personalities such as Saakashvili, and later Ivanishvili, to modernize Georgia and ensure its territorial integrity. However, as previously mentioned, it is productive to distance the analysis from the dominant political figures as concentrated power structures. As the actual power structures can initially be found in the rationalizing principles and practices that can be observe in Georgia today. The logic of the free market is the guiding principle in the reorganization of the Georgian state itself. This can be observed in the outsourcing of infrastructure projects, the creation of “public-private alliances, global-local assemblages” or the omnipresent “improvement schemes” by the government of Georgia in cooperation with transnational financial organizations. In the Dartlo rehabilitation project, the Georgian state was mainly represented by the MDF and the NACHPG. Both agencies theoretically work together with the respective ministries, although it is mainly the creditor institutions to which the agencies are accountable. While the task of the MDF is to work specifically with – in this case – the World Bank, the main task of the NACHPG is to manage and promote the cultural heritage of Georgia internationally and create the “brand” of Georgia globally.

Regarding Tusheti, as Mühlfried notes, the developmental strategies could paradoxically result in less flexibility and autonomy of the local population. It is government steering mechanisms that formulate the characteristics and activities of the local population that are profitable and therefore welcomed. Experience in tourism sector is formulated as lacking capacity of the local population which needs to be improved. Accordingly, the Strategy for the Regional Development of Kakheti 2009-2014 describes a “limited experience of the hospitality sector” and a “lack of knowledge of operating tourism as a business” as being weaknesses in the tourism sector. This is astonishing, bearing in mind the popular anecdotes about Georgian hospitality. Nonetheless, it suits the analytical frame of governmentality perfectly, since the capacities of local people must be improved to conform to neoliberal conditions, formulated by so-called experts in development policies. While the population is not actually forced to engage in tourism, it does so, “following only their own self-interest”.

Due to the current developmental framework, self-sufficient agriculture no longer appears to be profitable, even though it used to be the basis of a certain political and economic autonomy of the Tushetians. Several respondents in Tusheti have noted that involvement with agriculture has also become more complex – not only less profitable – as a consequence of the establishment of Tusheti Protected Areas and hence stricter environmental regulations. This has resulted in ongoing problems in supplying the mountainous region with food during the tourist season, since almost everything must be transported from the Kakhetian lowlands. In this context, it seems to be consistent that, even for resolving this problem, an international project has been introduced: “The Czech Caritas, together with the Self-Governing Authority of the city of Achmetsa, will focus on supporting managers, accountants and engineers in two newly established agricultural cooperatives to ensure improved production and coordinated marketing of agricultural products”. The project, financed by the Czech Development Agency, was run between 2015 and 2018 and was mainly focused on Tusheti. Such initiatives confirm that empowerment and neoliberal governmentality are not mutually exclusive. While agriculture has surely become weaker in Tusheti, the project’s goal is not to strengthen the autonomy and self-subsistence of the Tushetians but rather to integrate traditional agricultural activities into the market and serve the needs of an ever-growing numbers of visitors to the mountainous region. The project of Caritas CR suggests once more that expert communities are seemingly legitimized in knowing how local communities can be best helped and improved. “So we prepared a management plan that not only covers nature protection but also other parts of their way of life, for example; how to develop the infrastructure, how to maintain it, what is important in other sectors such as waste treatment; things required for developing the tourist sector (...). Last year we helped them set up their own website so that tourists could receive information. First we had to persuade them to set it up and then we helped them operate it”.

Conclusion

The case of Tusheti has demonstrated that the cultural and natural heritage of Georgia can be analyzed as a form of neoliberal governmentality. The application of the concept of heritage regimes was helpful for disclosing the guiding principles and logic of action of state and transnational actors in the heritagization of Tusheti. As described above, all international development projects in Tusheti – the rehabilitation of the historic village of Dartlo, the installation of solar panels, projects to improve the water infrastructure and support for local agriculture – had the overarching aim of improving the living conditions of the local population. Nonetheless, these were all linked to the ultimate goal of establishing the mountainous region as an attractive tourist destina-
tion. Furthermore, the “improvement schemes” for Tusheti provided the framework for action by the local population. In order to establish a so-called hospitality industry in Tusheti, individuals are expected to strengthen their capacity for entrepreneurialism and self-reliance, as advised by various policy experts in accordance with the principles of the strongly liberalized economy of the country.

I agree that not everything that is perceived as an example of neoliberal optimization can be placed in the theoretical framework of governmentality. Nonetheless, the concept allows us to highlight some important contradictions in Tusheti. While the local population claims that the state is not present in the mountainous region, I argued that it surely is. The state, however, is represented by an assemblage of actors who follow their enterprise model. The aim of the state is not to ensure welfare standards but rather to steer the entrepreneurial logic that people operate from and create conditions and incentives for action consistent with this logic. At the same time, the Tushetians’ freedom of action could be reduced, given that it is external actors who are formulating which activities in Tusheti are considered profitable and which are not. However, further research on local perceptions of tourism development in the region is necessary in order to accurately assess the real impact of the government’s political strategy.

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references

1 The most prominent and fairly comparable example of similar processes in another mountainous region of Georgia is Svaneti and its main village of Mestia, as well as the reportedly highest permanently inhabited Georgian village of Ushguli. I will discuss Svaneti later in the paper. For further information on Svaneti, cultural heritage and community-based tourism, see Frieder Voll and Jan Mosedale, “Political-Economic Transition in Georgia and its Implications for Tourism in Svaneti,” *TIMS Acta* 9 (2015), 91-103, accessed January 13, 2019, doi: 10.5937/timsact9-8139. Also see Stefan Apalis, “Perspectives: Tourism sustains, and threatens, Georgia’s highland heritage,” eurasianet, November 2, 2018, accessed December 23, 2018, https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-tourism-sustains-and-threatens-georgias-highland-heritage.


5 Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) 87–104. It has to be noted here that, as described by Lemke, Krasmann and Bröckling, the analytical framework of Foucault’s concept of governmentality is not a strict research guideline but is instead being constantly developed.


8 Li, *The Will to Improve*, 5.


13 Li, *The Will to Improve*.

14 Li, *The Will to Improve*, 4.

15 Li, *The Will to Improve*, 5. The insights of decolonial theorists could also be useful, for example, Arturo Escobar.


18 Winter, “Clarifying the critical in critical heritage studies,” 531.


21 Winter, “Clarifying the critical in critical heritage studies,” 533.


26 Coombe, “Managing cultural heritage as neoliberal governmentality,” 379.

27 Winter, “Clarifying the critical in critical heritage studies,” 539.

28 Coombe, “Managing cultural heritage as neoliberal governmentality,” 381.

29 De Cesari, “Thinking through heritage regimes,” 409.

30 Martin Demant Frederiksen and Katrine Bendtsen Gottfredsen, *Georgian
It is noteworthy that Svaneti was extensively used for tourism purposes during the Soviet era. The main difference between current developments and tourism in the 20th century, however, is that the tourism infrastructure was state-led and not dominated by private initiatives and investments.

34 peer-reviewed article


32 Halbach, Bilanz einer ‘Farbrevolution’, 13-14. One of the protagonists of economic reforms in the early years of Saakashvili’s presidency was Kakha Bendukidze. He became famous for his statement that the top priority of the Georgian government should be ultra-liberalism.


37 Frederiksen and Gotfredsen, Georgian Portraits, 25.

38 Halbach, Bilanz einer ‘Farbrevolution’, 15. For an example related to tourism development, see Voll and Mosedale, “Political-Economic Transition in Georgia”.

39 Georgia 2020, 3.

40 For an explanation of different types of public-private partnerships, see https://ppp.worldbank.org/public-private-partnership/agreements.

41 Georgia 2020, 4.


43 Gabekhadze, agenda.ge.


48 Frederik and Gotfredsen, Georgian Portraits, 63-64.


50 Frederik and Gotfredsen, Georgian Portraits, 65.


55 The term became widely used in 1994 when the Global Strategy for a Representative, Balanced and Credible World Heritage List was introduced.


57 It is noteworthy that Svaneti was extensively used for tourism purposes during the Soviet era. The main difference between current developments and tourism in the 20th century, however, is that the tourism infrastructure was state-led and not dominated by private initiatives and investments.

58 Voll and Mosedale, “Political-Economic Transition in Georgia,” 98.


60 Voll and Mosedale, “Political-Economic Transition in Georgia,” 98.

61 Voll and Mosedale, “Political-Economic Transition in Georgia,” 93.


64 Mühlfried, Being a State, 55.


72 World Bank, Implementation Completion and Results Report on a Loan in the Amount of USD 60 Million to Georgia for a Regional Development Project, 2018, here: 53.

73 World Bank, Implementation Completion and Results, 11.

74 Li, The Will to Improve, 232.

75 World Bank, Implementation Completion and Results, 13.


77 Mühlfried, Being a State, 204.


79 Li, The Will to Improve, 5.
